



To: Housing Management Board
Report by: Marella Hoffman
Relevant scrutiny committee: Housing Management Board 5-3-2013
Wards affected: Wards containing Council housing

Progress report on residents' co-regulation, introducing an update from residents' Housing Regulation Panel to the Housing Management Board

Not a key decision

1. Executive summary

In 2010, the Housing Management Board approved the creation, with the help of the Chartered Institute of Housing, of a residents' co-regulation panel in Cambridge. This report introduces (as Appendix 1), a progress report on the positive outcomes achieved by residents' Housing Regulation Panel in their second year of activity, and looks ahead to the next steps.

2. Recommendations

The Executive Councillor is recommended:

- 2.1 To note the positive outcomes achieved by residents' Housing Regulation Panel in their second year of activity
- 2.2 To continue to support residents' co-regulation and the constructive challenge provided by residents' Housing Regulation Panel

3. Background

Co-Regulation under the Localism Act

3.1 The 2011 Localism Act replaced the inspection regime of the Audit Commission with a two-prong system of 'Co-Regulation'. One prong is the requirement that social landlords regulate themselves through Annual Reports to Tenants, transparent publishing of performance information, a robust, well-publicised complaints system and a culture of self-assessment.

3.2 The other prong of Co-Regulation involves trained panels of local service-users inspecting the performance of the landlord-related services they receive. A government paper in 2011 emphasised that local tenant panels are now expected to be at the heart of landlords' regulation arrangements.

3.3 Co-regulation is not about panels of residents working in isolation, but rather about involving residents in the whole cycle of performance monitoring so that:

- a) Resident representatives are involved in setting service-standards and performance-targets
- b) Clear information on performance, benchmarking and complaints is published to all customers regularly, with residents empowered to scrutinise it independently
- c) A trained residents' panel, with clear reporting lines and powers, inspects and challenges standards of service delivery in a way that improves services for all
- d) Service staff and managers understand the authority of this residents' panel, taking action to improve services if the panel shows that they are below agreed standards

Cambridge as a centre for positive practice in co-regulation since 2011

3.4 Cambridge residents' Housing Regulation Panel (HRP) had the advantage of starting in 2009 before others around the country, and evolving a rigorous framework that they co-created with the Chartered Institute of Housing.

3.5 The period 2011-2013 has seen a peak of focus on Cambridge as a centre of positive practice for residents' co-regulation. In February 2012, the national Customer Service Excellence Standard commended HRP's activity as an example of national best practice. Over the past fifteen months, resident representatives, councillors and resident involvement staff from fifteen different local authority landlords have visited to learn from the Cambridge system. What they come to study is:

- a. How residents' Housing Regulation Panel have achieved so many measurable positive outcomes, in terms of helping to improve services
- b. The constitution, code of conduct and set-up framework of HRP, which outline the Panel's role, responsibilities, reporting-lines and powers
- c. The forms and templates created and used by HRP's for inspecting services, reporting on those inspections, and getting signed agreements

from service-managers that the necessary service-improvements will be made

- d. The role of the six elected residents on HMB, which still - eleven years after its creation - remains a national pioneer in having tenants and leaseholders elected by their peers citywide, with equal voting rights on a local authority housing committee
- e. The reporting-lines of residents' Housing Regulation Panel up to HMB (because co-regulation requires a decision-making board like HMB to whom the residents' panel could report if they failed to get a satisfactory response from service-managers)
- f. The active communication and feedback-loops maintained through Open Door magazine between resident representatives and the residents they represent on estates

3.6 As well as the visitors, Cambridge residents too have described as invaluable this chance to exchange tips, challenges and methods directly with residents from other providers. Such links of mutual empowerment and information sharing across the tenants of different landlords were very much an aspiration of the 2011 Localism Act.

Balancing specialised roles and grassroots in resident involvement

3.7 Co-regulation essentially means that the quite specialised volunteer inspectorate described above replaces the professional regulatory apparatus that used to soak up a lot of public sector resources ie the Audit Commission and the intricate process of preparing for Audit Commission inspections.

3.8 So co-regulation's resident panels are a considerable asset to the business in terms of ongoing efficiencies and savings. (HRP residents alone give over 500 volunteer hours to the business each year, or 66 working days, equivalent to three months of work for a full-time employee. This is the type of 'Big Society' activism envisioned by the Localism Act.)

3.9 Nonetheless, it is worth recalling that, for a well-balanced resident involvement service, these specialised, formal volunteer roles that involve a lot of knowledge about housing must, as they are in Cambridge, be balanced with:

- a. Consistent, resident-friendly communications that are published to all tenants and leaseholders, keeping them in touch with, and feeding back into, what resident representatives are doing on their behalf

- b. Strong grassroots outreach to our estates, with diverse and welcoming platforms of involvement for residents from their homes and from estate-level, for those who are not interested in taking up the formal, regulatory roles described in the HRP report appended here.

3.10 Stakeholder feedback confirms that Open Door magazine, which has attracted increasingly positive feedback over the past couple of years, provides the former - a strong communications platform linking resident representatives back to the estates. And in January 2013, HMB unanimously approved proposals from the newly appointed Resident Involvement Facilitator to supply the latter - a revitalised outreach programme for grassroots residents in their homes and on their estates. Appendix 7 illustrates this integrated, joined-up approach, which is recognised nationally as part of the positive practice approach in Cambridge.

4. Implications

- (a) Financial - Nil
- (b) Staffing - This work is part of the routine duties of existing staff.
- (c) Equal Opportunities - Advances Equal Opportunities by actively empowering a diverse range of residents, including Black and Minority Ethnic representatives.
- (d) Environmental - Nil
- (e) Procurement - Nil
- (f) Consultation and communication - Makes a significant contribution to the Council's overall positive practice on consultation and community engagement. The material in this report is published on the Council's website, communicated to customers through Open Door magazine and shared at a broad range of meetings and consultations with residents.
- (g) Community Safety - Nil

5. Appendices

1. Progress report from residents' Housing Regulation Panel (HRP)
2. Inspection forms for caretaking inspection, designed and used by HRP
3. Results of HRP's inspection of the caretaking service
4. HRP's report on their caretaking Inspection

5. HRP's recommendations for improvement, and actions taken by City Homes
6. HRP's article on their caretaking inspection in Open Door magazine for council tenants and leaseholders, winter 2012
7. Main levels of resident involvement in Cambridge

6. Inspection of papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

If you have a query on the report please contact:

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