



To: Housing Management Board
Report by: Marella Hoffman
Relevant scrutiny committee: Housing Management Board 6-3-2012
Wards affected:

Report on residents' co-regulation, introducing a Progress Report from the Housing Regulation Panel to the Housing Management Board

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 a Progress Report from the Housing Regulation Panel on their first year of activity (Appendix 1), reviews the positive practice achieved and looks ahead to potentials for the future.

2. Recommendations

The Executive Councillor is recommended:

- 2.1 To note the progress achieved by residents' Housing Regulation Panel in their first year of activity.
- 2.2 To continue to support residents' co-regulation and the constructive challenge provided by the 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 involves social landlords regulating themselves through self-assessments, Annual Reports to Tenants and publishing of performance information. The other involves trained panels of local service-users inspecting the performance of the landlord-related services they receive. In November 2011, a paper entitled 'Directions to the Housing Regulator' emphasised

that government expects local tenant panels to be at the heart of the new regulation arrangements.

3.2 In Cambridge, the residents' Housing Regulation Panel (HRP) had an early starting-point in the rigorous set-up framework created in 2009/'10 with the Chartered Institute of Housing and the South Area Housing Manager, and approved by HMB. Including a formal constitution, code of conduct and framework for the Panel's reporting-powers and relationship to HMB, it is being studied and adapted by other providers as very useful for the set-up stage.

3.3 The Housing Management Board (HMB) itself also continues to be studied around the country as best practice, because residents' 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. And HMB remains a pioneer by having elected tenants and leaseholders with voting rights on a local authority housing committee.

3.4 Meanwhile at national level, in 2010 the housing regulator chose ten 'Co-Regulation Champions' from among sixty-four social landlords who applied for their emerging residents' panels to be recognised as pilots. Since 2011, these Champions have shared their positive practice nationwide, clarifying that co-regulation is not about panels of residents in isolation but about involving them in the whole cycle of performance monitoring. At most landlords, it is taking two or three years to achieve this full cycle so that:

- a) resident representatives are involved in setting service-standards and performance-targets
- b) clear information on performance and benchmarking is published about all landlord-related services, with residents empowered to examine it in an independent way
- c) a trained residents' panel inspects services constructively, with clear reporting lines and powers
- d) service managers understand the authority of the residents' panel, taking action to improve services if the panel shows that they are below agreed standards

3.5 In 2011/'12, in addition to HRP's inspections, the following co-regulatory steps were also achieved in Cambridge for the first time:

- a) fuller performance information published quarterly in Open Door magazine
- b) creation of Residents' Performance Monitoring Sessions, where resident representatives can study performance information and trends

- c) residents more deeply involved in the production of the Annual Report for Tenants and Leaseholders
- d) at residents' request: plans for resident representatives to be consulted in future as part of the process for setting reasonable performance-targets, and fuller performance and benchmarking information to be published in the Annual Report
- e) Cambridge hosted a resident-led Exchange Day on co-regulation, a 70-person event where residents from six social landlords in the region compared and exchanged co-regulation methods
- f) they formed a mutual support network to support their residents' panels
- g) the Resident Involvement offices of Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire District Council provided shared services by purchasing tenant satisfaction surveys and some tenant trainings together, making significant savings as well as improving the overall products
- h) South Cambridgeshire District Council asked to co-fund next year's Residents' Exchange Day as a shared service, bringing further savings for Cambridge as well as wider empowerment for residents

3.6 Overall, supporting and developing the system of residents' co-regulation has required about a third of the time resource of the Resident Involvement office in 2011/12, which is comparable with the time being invested by other providers around the country. Feedback from external agencies suggests the outcomes in Cambridge are strong both in quality and quantity.

Looking ahead

3.7 Both the Council and residents are committed to keeping co-regulation in Cambridge at the forefront of positive practice. In February 2012, the national Customer Service Excellence Standard formally assessed HRP's first year of activity and commended the Panel's work as an example of national best practice. Ongoing dialogue with national agencies shows that:

- a) Cambridge has achieved the balance of developing a local system that is homegrown and resident-led, while attaining national positive practice standards
- b) the biggest remaining challenges are the same everywhere, namely recruitment of residents into these challenging roles, and avoiding 'burnout' for those residents.

3.8 It is acknowledged by all the national agencies that this high-end volunteer resource is essentially replacing certain professional functions that formerly soaked up a lot of public sector resources (eg. the Audit Commission, the process of preparing for Audit Commission inspections, use of performance consultancies, etc.). As such, co-regulation's resident panels can be a considerable asset to the business. For instance in their

intensive start-up year of 2011/12, HRP residents gave over 500 volunteer hours to the business (or 66 working days, equivalent to three months of work for a full-time employee). As specialised, systemic contributions to the business, these roles are more 'selfless' and demanding than traditional resident participation, where customers often got involved to see specific problems resolved in their own area.

3.9 The potential for burnout among residents' co-regulation panels is recognised nationwide. At present most of these panels receive no allowances or rewards. (This is different from the elected resident role on HMB, which can receive up to £800 a year in time allowance). The question of rewarding residents' panels remains complex as they exist specifically to inspect the landlord's performance, rather than to assist with management decisions and democratic decision-making as elected residents on boards do. In fact, residents on inspection panels tend themselves to reject the idea of monetary allowances, saying that the reward they want is simply to make a difference through visibly improved services. But sustainability of these panels will require that they at least feel valued and incentivised in other ways.

4. Implications

Financial - Nil

Staffing - This work is part of the routine duties of existing staff.

Equal Opportunities - Advances Equal Opportunities by actively empowering a diverse range of residents, including Black and Minority Ethnic representatives.

Environmental - Nil

Consultation - Makes a significant contribution to the Council's overall positive practice on consultation.

Community Safety - Nil

5. Appendices

1. Progress Report from the Housing Regulation Panel (HRP) to HMB
2. Sample Inspection Forms designed and used by HRP
3. HRP's Report on their Inspection of Communal Cleaning
4. HRP's article on their Inspection in Open Door magazine, summer 2011
5. Flow of communication through residents' co-regulation groups

6. Inspection of papers

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact:

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