

## **RESIDENT INFLUENCE AT TOWER HAMLETS HOMES**

### **A Introduction**

- A1 As a responsible manager of public housing, Tower Hamlets Homes has been considering the future direction and purpose of the organisation, and how best to serve its residents and communities. While the forthcoming inspection by the Audit Commission to assess the organisation's performance is important and a key milestone for THH, the organisation is also focused on all that remains to be done beyond that inspection.
- A2 It is important therefore to build real knowledge and insight into residents' needs, and to allow all residents who wish to have it an opportunity to influence the organisation's priorities for action. With those facts in mind, Tower Hamlets Homes commissioned Campbell Tickell in the early summer to produce a short report on what it means to be a "resident-led" organisation. Campbell Tickell is a small social housing consultancy that has advised the Board on matters of governance and supported the Board's development since the organisation came into being. The report was intended to provoke discussion among the THH Board about what needs to change at THH to step up to the challenge of embedding resident influence more fundamentally across the organisation.

### **B Some key findings from the report**

- There are a range of organisations across the housing sector that might be judged to be 'resident led'. Broadly speaking, resident-led organisations understand the needs and priorities of residents, and act on these in their vision, purpose and goals;
- The basics of service delivery need to be in place and working well if residents are to take an organisation seriously when it proposes engaging them more effectively;
- Resident-led organisations don't need to have a resident leading the organisation (e.g. as Chair) – there were no correlations between having a resident Chair and how the Audit Commission judged an (Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO's) performance in resident involvement (THH is an ALMO, which means that it manages homes on behalf of the local Council which owns the homes) – good

performance in resident involvement was part of a pattern of good performance generally. Resident involvement needs to be part of the 'DNA' and ways of working of the organisation, and not a 'bolt-on';

- Capacity building – offering learning and development to involved residents or to uninvolved residents – needs to be thought through, and have a clear sense of what outcomes should arise from it;
- What kind of Board you have in place – e.g. the size and composition, whether anyone on the Board is paid (there is a small trend emerging towards paying Chairs in ALMOs but this isn't something currently being done at THH) – depends on what kind of organisation you want to be. First of all, it's important to clarify what kind of organisation THH wants to develop into and then to think about what kind of governance needs to support that;
- Setting up resident scrutiny groups is an emerging trend in the sector – some organisations emphasise the strategic role of these groups more than others. THH should open a dialogue with whichever group sits at the top of the resident involvement structure at THH to discuss how resident scrutiny might work, and what needs to be done to nurture a strong and capable group that is listened to.

## **C Next steps**

- C1 The Board of Tower Hamlets Homes (THH) met on 12 October to discuss the report on "Being a resident-led organisation" and subsequently decided to establish 3 small working groups to take up some of the challenges posed by the report:
- 1) a scrutiny group looking at how best the Board and Residents' Panel should link together, and how to deliver effective resident scrutiny;
  - 2) customer insight, which will look at how the profile of residents, and their needs and priorities are captured and assessed; and
  - 3) facing outwards, a group focused on how the Board can lead and embed a culture that listens to residents.
- C2 It is proposed that small numbers of Board members and Resident Panel members work collaboratively in these groups and share their

findings together in the spring at a joint Board and Residents' Panel session.

- C3 If you would like to know anything more about this work, or how you can make a positive contribution to our discussions, please contact Head of Engagement Paul Allen on 020 7364 0705.

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