

**Tower
Hamlets
Homes**

Residents' Panel **Strengthening Co-Regulation**



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Chair's foreword



Good service delivery is not sustainable without good governance, with arrangements that are fit for purpose, that reflect and understand the complexities and risk-profile of the organisation.

Co-regulation means that the Board of Tower Hamlets Homes (THH) is responsible for ensuring their organisation is meeting its standards, and for being open and accountable in how their organisation meets its objectives. But it also requires THH to support tenants and residents in shaping and scrutinising service delivery and in the Board to account.

High quality resident involvement can lead to improved services, greater satisfaction from residents and a more effective allocation of resources. It can increase the confidence of those involved and allow the development of new skills as well as fostering social cohesion within communities.

Co-regulation must be honest and robust, and include evidence-based self-assessment, external challenge, and regular reporting to tenants. This requires regular self-reflection, review and a willingness to change, develop and improve structures and practice.

It was with these principles in mind that the Resident Panel resolved to undertake a scrutiny review into strengthening co-regulation.

While the review group recognised that generally the co-regulation arrangements within THH worked well there was, as always, room for improvement.

It is with this positive approach and desire to improve further that this report has been produced and recommendations made to the Board on how we can further improve the ways in which we work and adapt and adopt best practice in the sector.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Weavers". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Chris Weavers
Resident and Leaseholder

Summary of recommendations

✓ Recommendation 1

Develop a process for Service Development Group members and TRAs to feed into the Residents' Panel

✓ Recommendation 3

Develop an Annual Report highlighting the work and key outputs of the Residents' Panel to increase its visibility to the Board and the wider body of residents

✓ Recommendation 2

Organise joint away days between the THH Board and Residents' Panel

✓ Recommendation 4

Identify external partners and scrutiny panels with which the Residents' Panel could engage with in order to share learning and best practice



Introduction

- 1.1 Since 2008, Tower Hamlets Homes (THH) has operated as the Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO) owned by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. It is responsible for delivering housing management services to approximately 22,000 homes across the borough. As part of its functions, it is also responsible for managing and maintaining opportunities for involvement and participation, enabling residents to help shape the services they receive.
- 1.2 In 2019 THH was granted an extension of its management agreement for a further eight years. The decision was made following consultation with residents and recognised THH's outstanding performance which resulted in it being made Landlord of the Year (2019) at the UK Housing Awards.
- 1.3 The extension of THH's Management Agreement coincides with wider changes across the social housing sector. Following the tragic events at Grenfell Tower in 2017, the Government undertook a number of reviews looking at the circumstances surrounding the tragedy and the state of regulation for the Social Housing Sector. In 2018, the Government published its Social Housing Green Paper which outlined proposals for regulatory change. The document included a clear commitment to strengthen the voice of residents and increase landlord accountability.
- 1.4 In light of the extension to THH's management agreement and emerging changes in social housing regulation, Members of the Residents' Panel sought to explore how THH may be able to;
 - Strengthen the voice of residents in the decision making process
 - Improve transparency and accountability and;
 - Embed best practice from other social landlords across the country
- 1.5 The review took place in February 2020 chaired by Chris Weavers (Chair of the Residents' Panel) and supported by panel members Simon Hart and Saleha Jafrin. The review was further supported by the Chair of THH Board Ann Lucas, and Anne McLoughlin from Campbell Tickell Consultancy. Officers in attendance included Gulam Hussain, Scrutiny & Resident Feedback Manager and Nojmul Hussain, Senior Resident Feedback Officer.

Legislative developments in tenant participation

- 2.1 Tenant participation became popularised during the 1960/70s with the rise of consumer rights. However, it was not until the 1980s that tenant participation become a central part of the social housing landscape with the Housing Act 1985, giving a legal right for tenants to be consulted on the management of their homes. In 1999, the Government introduced the National Framework for Tenant Participation Compacts. This provided a toolkit to help councils and tenants agree and implement effective arrangements for tenant involvement in their local areas.
- 2.2 The Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 marked a significant turning point for tenant participation. The Act laid the foundation for an approach to social housing regulation which incorporated the principles of tenant empowerment and choice. This new approach to regulation, referred to as co-regulation, required landlords, the regulator and tenants to work together to set, monitor and enforce standards. This change was expected to help move the focus of decision-making and performance management away from the regulator towards service users themselves and their own locally defined needs and priorities.
- 2.3 In 2010, the Department for Communities and Local Government undertook a review of Social Housing Regulation and emphasised the following changes:
- landlords should be accountable to their tenants, not to the regulator, for customer facing (service delivery) standards
 - tenants would need adequate information and effective influencing structures to hold their landlords to account, and to shape service delivery
 - there should be a clearer role for tenants in scrutinising performance
- 2.4 More changes in the way social housing providers were expected to involve residents came in the form of Localism Act 2011. The Act introduced requirements on social landlords to set and support resident led scrutiny panels. It also established the Consumer Regulations for social housing, which including a dedicated Tenant Involvement and Empower Standard to regulate the standards across the sector (see table on next page).



Current regulatory framework¹

Regulatory Standard	What is expected of social landlords?
Tenant involvement & empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide residents greater choice and communicate clearly • Have a robust complaints process • Provide residents wider involvement opportunities • Treat residents with respect
Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver the Government’s Decent Homes standards • Provide cost effective repairs and maintenance service
Tenancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lettings of homes to be fair, transparent and efficient • Provide opportunities for mutual exchange of tenancies, including internet based options
Neighbourhood and Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep the neighbourhood and communal areas clean and safe • Do partnership work for the purpose of social and economic wellbeing • Tackle anti-social behaviour

2.5 In 2018, the Government published its Green paper ‘A new deal for Social Housing’ which seeks to rebalance the relationship between landlords and tenants. The Paper underpinned by five core principles sets a ‘new vision for social housing’. Its principles include a commitment to:

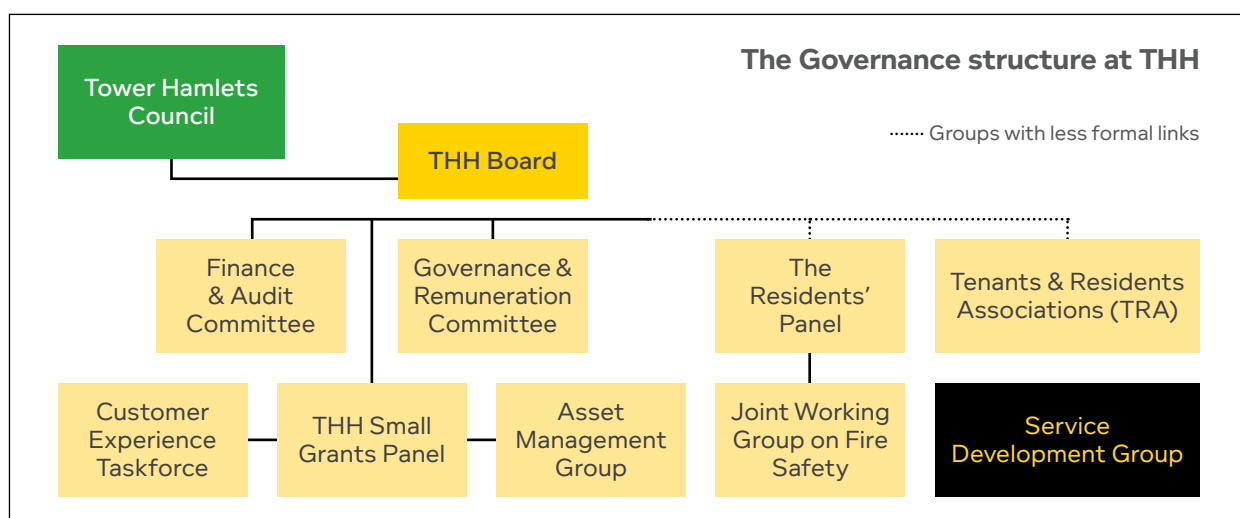
- maintaining safe and decent homes;
- improving and speeding up how complaints are resolved;
- empowering residents and ensuring their voices are heard so that landlords are held to account;
- tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities, challenging the stereotypes that exist about residents and their communities; and,
- building the more social homes and ensuring that those homes can act as a springboard to home ownership.

2.6 Whilst the outcome of the green paper’s vision is still pending, the Regulator for Social Housing has started to take a more robust approach to regulation within the existing framework, and has written to Chief Executives of local authorities reminding them that regardless of the models used to manage social housing in their areas, they remain responsible for ensuring compliance with the regulatory standards.

¹<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/regulatory-standards>

Local governance framework

- 3.1 The Regulator for Social Housing stipulates that the 'Boards and councillors, who govern registered social housing, are responsible for ensuring that the Consumer Standards are met'. Landlords may also be bound by the Company Act 1996, as is the case for THH, or the Charities Act 2011 which impose additional requirements to ensure good governance. This requires boards to promote the success of, or act in the interests of the company or charity, exercise independent judgment and act with reasonable care, skill, and diligence to further the aims of the organisation.
- 3.2 Since the creation of THH, the THH Board has been responsible for setting the direction and overseeing the performance of the organisation. The Board comprises twelve Directors which includes four councillors, four independent members and four residents of Tower Hamlets Homes. Whilst the Board sits at the top of THH's governance structure and is responsible for overseeing its operational management, the relationship between the Board and its sub-groups are reciprocal. As a company wholly owned by the Council, the Board works closely with the Executive Mayor and Lead Member for Housing. It also oversees the reporting of performance to the council through the Executive Management Team at THH.
- 3.3 The work of the Board is managed through a number of sub-committees. This includes the Finance and Audit Committee, whose role is to receive reports from officers concerning budget setting, annual statements of accounts, internal controls and risks, and the Remuneration and Governance Committee which oversees the remuneration arrangements for the Chief Executive and Directors of THH and ensures that the Board is compliant with its Code of Governance. Since 2016, THH has established a number of additional sub-committees in the form of the Customer Experience Taskforce and the Asset Management Group. These have been designed to provide dedicated oversight to all aspects of work aimed at improving the experience of residents accessing services, and the planning and delivery of investment in THH's portfolio through the Better Neighbourhoods Investment Programme.
- 3.4 In 2020, the Tower Hamlets Homes Small Grants Panel was formally embedded as an additional sub-committee of the Board to strengthen governance and oversight of its work. The Panel is responsible for considering and making decisions on the Inspiring Communities Fund (ICF) grant applications for environmental, social and other community projects and events that will benefit the residents of THH.



Resident Involvement at Tower Hamlets Homes

The Residents' Panel:

3.5 In addition to appointing residents to the Board, THH operates and supports a range of forums to enable residents to provide feedback and actively shape the services they receive. The Residents' Panel, established in 2010, serves as a formal forum for engagement. It provides a platform for residents to ensure that the resident voice is heard, and acted upon by THH. Meetings are held bi-monthly during which members scrutinise performance, provide constructive challenge, and help to shape service improvements. The recommendations made by the Panel through its scrutiny reviews are formally reported to the THH Board for its endorsement before being adopted. Membership of the panel consists of 5 tenants, 4 leaseholders and 2 tenants of leaseholders to reflect the composition of tenures across the stock managed by THH. Meetings are attended by senior officers, the Chair of the Board and are open to observers.

Joint Working Group on Fire Safety:

3.6 The tragic events at Grenfell Tower in the summer of 2017 served as a turning point for landlords across the country. In the immediate aftermath of the event, THH committed to a programme of engagement with residents to provide reassurance and share information on the steps being taken by THH to enhance safety across its housing stock.

3.7 In 2019 THH established the Joint Working Group on Fire Safety as a sub-group of the Residents' Panel. The group aims to serve as a strategic resident led forum whereby residents can influence how THH manages and engages residents on issues of fire safety and responds to changes emerging from

the Grenfell Inquiry and Hackett Review. Membership of the group includes a total of eight resident representatives from across a number of THH's involvement forums. This includes representatives from the Residents' Panel, Resident members of the THH Board, the Service Development Group (SDG) and THH residents associated with the Tower Hamlets Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations. As a sub-group of the Residents' Panel, its activities are reported to the Panel and the THH Board through the respective members.

Service Development Group:

3.8 To broaden the opportunities available to get involved, in 2012, THH established the Service Development Groups. Originally structured as thematic groups centred around Repairs, ASB and Caretaking and Leasehold Services, the model was revised in 2018 to become a single flat structure. Residents are now instead invited to participate in task and finish projects driven by services across THH. This change introduced greater flexibility for residents to determine their level of involvement based on their availability and level of interest, whilst also ensuring there were clear outcomes for participants and THH.

Tenants and Residents Associations:

3.9 Tenants and Residents Associations (TRAs) are a positive force in the community. Operated as independent resident led organisations, TRAs help to build social capital by bringing people together and serve as a platform for residents to influence the management of their neighbourhoods. There are currently 28 TRAs across Tower Hamlets Homes' estates. THH provides support to TRAs

to be self-sufficient and well governed organisations. It also actively engages with all TRAs at a local level through front line staff and at a more strategic level through bi-annual Resident Roadshows aimed to provide an overview of THH, its performance and future direction.

Resident surveys:

3.10 To further complement the range of opportunities available to residents to influence the delivery of services, each year THH commissions almost

15,000 surveys each year to capture the views of residents on the services they receive. Feedback from the surveys serve as key indicators on performance levels and satisfaction and help to drive improvement. This approach allows THH to engage a broader audience and ensure those that may choose not be actively involved in forums can still provide feedback on their experiences and help determine the priorities for the organisation.



Embedding effective resident led scrutiny

4.1 The Panel invited Anne McLoughlin from Campbell Tickell Consultancy to help the group explore best practice in the areas of resident empowerment and co-regulation across the social housing sector. Drawing on her experience as a former Director, Board member within the sector and a serving Chief Executive of Soho Housing Association, Anne provided an overview on the role and principals which underpin a successful scrutiny panel. The presentation highlighted the principles developed by the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), the leading industry body within the housing sector.

4.2 Officers highlighted that the operation of the Residents' Panel had been greatly enhanced following a review of resident involvement opportunities and practices in 2018. The review, supported by the Tenants Participatory Advisory Service (TPAS), engaged members of THH's Senior Management Team, and involved residents in workshops to explore and define common principles which would help to deliver meaningful engagement and tangible outcomes for all those involved.

4.3 As part of the changes introduced to the Panel, a new model was adopted to improve the efficiency and impact of how it carried out its scrutiny function. This required scrutiny reviews to be clearly scoped and supported by a clear rationale, be delivered within a short timeframe to ensure findings remain relevant, and strike a balance between recommendations that are aspirational and deliverable to ensure the exercise is able to secure tangible change. The process was also aided by ensuring Officers clearly outlined limitations and challenges to enable the Panel to better understand constraints and be guided to make recommendations that could deliver change.

4.4 By adopting this new model, the Panel has been able to increase the pace and the impact of its scrutiny reviews. Since 2018 the Panel has completed five in-depth reviews, including one in partnership with Tower Hamlets Council and other social landlords in the borough. This has also helped the Panel to reassert itself as an effective scrutiny body and consultative forum for service areas. The success of this model has led to THH being recognised as an organisation with good practice from peers within the sector.



POWER

Participants involved in scrutiny activities should be able to examine services and standards, and make recommendations for service improvements. Landlords should respond by agreeing which measures can be implemented and, where they can't, explaining fully why not.



INDEPENDENCE

Scrutiny activities should be separate from governance, management, and mainstream tenant participation structures, but have a formal recognised status with support from the organisation at the outset.



FORMALITY

Scrutiny activities should include clear roles, remit, terms of reference and lines of reporting for those taking part.

Embedding effective resident led scrutiny

- 4.5 Additional changes were also adopted to increase the transparency of the Panel and widen participation from residents. These changes included a review of the terms of references to provide greater clarity on the role of the Panel, a simplification of the recruitment process to reduce the barriers to involvement, and increased visibility through the publication of member profiles and meeting agendas online. Rules were also amended to allow observers and prospective members to attend meetings. These changes have collectively enabled the Panel to gain broader recognition and increase the diversity of its membership to better reflect the communities served by THH.
- 4.6 The Panel welcomed the positive changes that had been adopted by THH in response to its review of resident involvement opportunities and practices and concluded that THH operated a good structure. Members also noted that THH was also in the process of refreshing its Resident Involvement Strategy which would build on existing work and include a stronger focus on making better use of new technologies to widen engagement.
- 4.7 Reflecting on the principles for a successful scrutiny panel developed by the Chartered Institute for Housing, the Panel concluded that it broadly met all three areas. This was reaffirmed by Anne McLoughlin who emphasised that THH was a pioneering landlord which operates a successful governance framework and had strong good practice in the area of resident involvement.
- 4.8 Whilst the Panel recognised its journey of improvement, it noted that it lacked formal links with other involvement forums, aside from the Joint Working Group for Fire Safety. This meant that the Panel was often unable to sense wider resident priorities, and its role was often unclear to other groups operated or supported by THH. The Panel recommended that officers develop processes to enable the Panel to engage with other forums and ensure its own work programme is equally informed by residents and groups associated with involvement forums across THH.

Recommendation 1

Develop a process for Service Development Group members and TRAs to feed into the Residents' Panel



Strengthening the relationship between the Board and the Panel

- 5.1 As part of THH's approach to embedding the principle of formality in its Residents' Panel, the Chair of the THH Board attends all meetings alongside senior officers to present updates and support the Panel's work. The Chair of the Board serves as an important link between the Board and the Panel ensuring both are aware of each other's work and priorities.
- 5.2 The Panel recognised that it had a strong relationship with the THH Board as a result of the active engagement it receives from the Chair. Whilst this approach had served it well, members noted that its reliance on the Chair to maintain this link meant there was limited exposure to the rest of the members of the THH Board. This approach meant that there was still a risk of there being a disconnect between the Panel and the Board, despite the best efforts of the Chair, and for significant change in how the Board engages the Panel in the event of any changes in membership at the THH Board.
- 5.3 To help strengthen the relationship and transparency between the THH Board and Residents' Panel, Members proposed that THH look to facilitate joint away days between both forums. This would help to increase visibility and help members of the Panel and the THH Board to explore, identify and share ideas and priorities to inform their respective work programmes. It would also enable the Panel to influence and directly hold to account the Board on its proposals for the future direction of THH. Organisation such as River Clyde Homes who have adopted this practice note 'joint training with managers, staff and board members meant that all parties were comfortable about asking or being asked difficult questions. Although this approach had been used previously by THH, it had been discontinued due to challenges around scheduling.

Recommendation 2

Organise joint away days between the THH Board and Residents' Panel

- 5.4 In addition to organising joint away days, the Panel felt more could be done to ensure the Board was more formally sighted on its full range of activities. Although scrutiny reviews are presented to the Board with Panel members presenting their reports directly where possible, this did not reflect the full extent of the input and scrutiny activity carried out by the Panel.
- 5.5 The Panel recommended that officers produce an annual report for the THH Board summarising its key activities and contributions over the previous year. This summary document would not only help the Board recognise the full range of contributions made by the Panel, but also serve as the basis for promoting the activities of the Panel to other involvement forums and residents that may wish to participate. Despite their being improvements in the diversity of residents being engaged following THH's review of involvement opportunities, in line with national challenges, more work still needed to be done in order to continue targeting harder to reach groups and ensuring forums such as the Panel remain sustainable.

Recommendation 3

Develop an Annual Report highlighting the work and key outputs of the Residents' Panel to increase its visibility to the Board and the wider body of residents

Creating a more outward facing organisation

- 6.1 As part of its review, the Panel explored the role of partnership working amongst social landlords as a way of promoting innovation and sharing best practice in how residents can be empowered and involved in decision-making processes.
- 6.2 Officers highlighted that THH maintained a strong outward facing approach and had good working relationships with landlords within the borough. This included being an active participant in the Tower Hamlets Housing Forum (THHF) which brings together 14 registered social providers with stock in the borough. Since 2018, THH had held the Chair for the forum's Community Involvement Network (CIN) subgroup, a platform designed to promote best practice in resident involvement. This approach to collaborative working locally had allowed the Residents' Panel to carry out a scrutiny review in partnership with the Council's Housing Scrutiny Committee and other landlords for the first time in 2019.
- 6.3 In addition to maintaining strong local links, officers were also engaged with landlords further afield. This included carrying out visits to landlords such as Phoenix Housing Association, Wandle Housing Association and South Cambridgeshire County Council who have been recognised for their good practice in the field of resident involvement. THH was also actively engaged with forums such as the Tenants Participatory Advisory Service (TPAS), the Housing Quality Network (HQN) and the National Federation of ALMOS where it had participated and presented on its practices in the area of resident involvement. In 2019 THH had also hosted best practice visits from Basildon Council and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive at the recommendation of peers within the sector.
- 6.4 Whilst welcoming THH's collaborative outlook, the Panel agreed that it would benefit by being able to form links of its own with partners and scrutiny panels across other landlords to share ideas and examples of good practice. This would help to build the confidence of panel members through the exchange of ideas and strengthen its independence.

Recommendation 4

Identify external partners and scrutiny panels with which the Residents' Panel could engage with in order to share learning and best practice

- 6.5 The Panel concluded its review by noting that its recommendations would be presented to the Tower Hamlets Homes Board before being adopted. Once agreed, an action plan would be produced setting out how these recommendations would be implemented. A progress update would be offered in 12 months.

Tower Hamlets Homes Residents' Panel
Scrutiny Review Action Plan 2020-21
 Strengthening Co-regulation

Recommendation	Actions	Lead	Completion
<p>1 Develop a process for Service Development Group members and TRAs to feed into the Residents' Panel</p>	<p>The Scrutiny and Resident Feedback Team will work closely with the Residents' Panel to develop processes to enable members of the Service Development Group and TRAs to influence and shape its work programme each year. Steps will also be taken to encourage greater collaboration between the Panel and other involved residents as part of the Panel's regular scrutiny function to allow them to draw on the experiences and expertise of a broader group of residents. This may include the use of surveys or joint reviews on specific issues/service areas.</p>	<p>Scrutiny and Feedback Manager</p>	<p>December 2020</p>
<p>2 Develop an Annual Report highlighting the work and key outputs of the Residents' Panel to increase its visibility to the Board and the wider body of residents</p>	<p>The Scrutiny and Resident Feedback Team will develop an annual report summarising the key outputs and activities of the Residents' Panel each year. This report will be presented to the THH Board and be used to publicise the work of the panel to existing and prospective residents that may wish to get involved in our forums.</p>	<p>Scrutiny and Feedback Manager</p>	<p>April 2021</p>
<p>3 Organise joint away days between the THH Board and Residents' Panel</p>	<p>The Business Development Team will work closely with Directors and the THH Board to organise joint sessions between the Board and Residents' Panel each year.</p>	<p>Head of Business Development</p>	<p>April 2021</p>
<p>4 Identify external partners and scrutiny panels with which the Residents' Panel could engage with in order to share learning and best practice</p>	<p>The Scrutiny and Resident Feedback Team will work closely with other landlords through local and regional links developed through the Tower Hamlets Housing Forum and TPAS. Opportunities will be explored to allow Panels to undertake joint training, shadowing and undertake best practice visits to other organisations. This will be subject to the availability and willingness of other partners to host/engage in such partnership activities.</p>	<p>Scrutiny and Feedback Manager</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

Residents' Panel
Strengthening Co-Regulation
Scrutiny Review Report
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