



improving housing through partnership

Resident involvement strategy

2010 – 2013

Contents

| Content | Page number |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Foreword | 3 |
| 2. Our Resident Profile | 3 |
| 3. Defining Resident Involvement | 4 |
| 4. Our vision for this strategy | 4 |
| 5. National Context for the strategy | 4 |
| 6. Local Factors | 5 |
| 7. Key objectives | 6 |
| 8. Putting the strategy into action | 15 |

1. Foreword

Homes for Islington (HFI) is an arms length management organisation (ALMO) and was set up by the council in 2004 after a residents' ballot. It manages 36000 tenant and leaseholder properties and is also responsible for managing and monitoring the council's other two types of housing management providers; Partners and tenant led organisations. HFI is now in its seventh year of operation and is managed by a resident led board with a resident appointed as chair.

In 2008, following an inspection, HFI achieved the highest possible rating from the Audit Commission for the quality of housing services it provided and since then our resident involvement services have been cited as being among the highest performers by the same organisation.

As the major landlord in the Borough, we place great importance in creating a positive environment for our tenants to live in and realise the impact that our services can have within the community.

It is therefore essential that we are aware of the needs and aspirations of our residents for the homes and communities that they live in. For this reason, HFI is committed to involving residents in decisions that are made about their housing.

2. Our resident profile

Despite having a reputation for wealth, Islington rates as the eighth most deprived borough in the country.

28% of our working age population do not work. 48% of children and 33% of older people live in a household with a low income. Additionally, Islington has the lowest life expectancy for men in London and the third lowest for women.

Many of our residents are affected by unemployment, poverty, poor health and low levels of qualifications.

In our last major survey, just under a half (49%) of our residents described themselves as having a disability or medical condition. 7% said they suffered from mental distress and 6% said they had a mobility problem.

Our tenant profile is incredibly diverse. 74% of our tenants are below 50 years of age and we have a significantly higher proportion of residents of under 30 years of age (44%) than the average for both London and the UK.

47% of our residents are from an ethnic minority community, whilst only 38% describe themselves as coming from a white British background. A further 15% are from a white Turkish, Kurdish or white other background.

The six most spoken languages besides English are Turkish, Somali, Bengali, Arabic, Spanish and Portuguese.

We know how important it is to consider the different circumstances of our residents and to target our services to these needs and to where they are needed most.

3. Defining Resident involvement

HFI sees resident involvement as a process that allows residents to influence decisions about their housing and to have a say in how services are delivered.

We recognise that tenants may wish to be involved in many ways and at different levels and that we must have mechanisms in place to allow views to be expressed in the format of residents choosing.

In order to effectively demonstrate that we are listening to Residents we recognise the need to be accountable and show how residents' views have influenced and shaped our service delivery

4. Our vision for this Resident Involvement strategy

As an organisation that delivers services to residents in over 30,000 properties, our primary focus is to ensure that our residents receive the best possible service.

To achieve this we need to have mechanisms in place that allow residents to have a say in the decisions that affect them. HFI is of the view that when this happens it leads to better outcomes for residents and more effective decision making and accountability within the organisation.

Our tenant profile is incredibly diverse and HFI needs to ensure that it is listening to views across this spectrum. To achieve this, we will give residents the widest possible choice as to the way in which they can give their views and value them when they are received.

Our key principles are therefore based on the following assumptions

- HFI should actively encourage and support resident involvement
- All HFI services should be open to resident involvement
- Resident involvement should be open and accessible to all residents, not only those who attend formal meetings
- It is vital to keep residents fully informed of outcomes from any consultation exercise
- Residents should have a choice of ways to become involved.

The development of this resident involvement strategy reflects our commitment to involve residents in improving the quality of services and deciding how services will be developed.

5. The National Context for this strategy

Tenant Services Authority

Following a national consultation in April 2010, the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) introduced the following standards for social housing providers;

- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment
- Home
- Tenancy
- Neighbourhood and Community
- Value for money
- Governance and Financial viability

The theme of Resident involvement cuts across these new standards and is central to the ethos of the new regulatory framework.

Despite the impending dissolution of the TSA, these standards will remain when the governance of social housing is transferred to the Homes and Communities Agency in April 2011

Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard.

This standard is aimed at tenant involvement and empowerment and covers the following;

- customer service,
- choice and complaints,
- involvement and empowerment and
- Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants.

This standard requires landlords to consider the following outcomes;

- Offering all tenants a wide range of opportunities to be involved in the management of their housing, including the ability to influence strategic priorities, the formulation of housing related policies and the delivery of housing-related services.
- Consulting with their tenants and acting reasonably in providing them with opportunities to agree local offers for service delivery.
- Empowering residents in scrutinising a Landlords performance against the TSA standards and to influence the development of the annual report.
- Providing support to tenants to build their capacity to be more effectively involved.

Resident Inspectors

The Tenant Service Authority (TSA) has encouraged housing providers to introduce Resident Inspectors as a way of scrutinising housing services. The TSA expects to see tenants and residents given far greater opportunity to shape priorities, monitor and review performance. Despite the fundamental changes planned to the regulatory system brought about by the closure of the TSA, there is no indication that these landlord expectations are set to change over the foreseeable future.

6. Local Factors

Fairness commission

The Islington Fairness Commission has been set up to look into how to make the borough a fairer place and to tackle the problems of income inequality that exists in Islington.

It will be chaired by leading expert Professor Richard Wilkinson, and will include senior figures from Islington Council, Islington Police, NHS, Homes for Islington, Islington Trades Council, Islington Chamber of Commerce, City and Islington College, Cripple-gate Foundation, and London School of Economics.

The Commission will meet in public to hear evidence from the community and debate issues such as health, housing, family, community, social care, education, skills and training, employment, crime and safety, democracy, sustainability, environment and economy. Many of the above issues impact significantly upon HFI tenants

Working with other landlords

HFI is an active member of the Islington Housing Group and are working with other local Landlords to try and achieve a parity of service for all social housing tenants in the Borough.

Two housing conventions have been held in the past six months enabling tenants and landlords to come together to discuss issues of joint concern

Tenant Compact

The Council agreed a Tenants Compact with residents in 2001 and LBI has delegated HFI with the responsibility of ensuring it is delivered. Progress is monitored on an annual basis. Although there have been changes in the way the Compact is delivered its objectives are substantially met by HFI.

Area Based Representation

There are challenges in maintaining levels of interest in our Consultative Panel structure. Total attendances at Panels have shown long term decline. In 2007/8 there were 353 total attendances by Residents reducing to 260 in 2009/10. Total attendances including councillors since that time have declined from 400 to 290 in the last financial year.

Our exit surveys also show low levels of interest amongst residents in becoming a member of a TRA.

HFI will continue to promote the effectiveness of TRA's and the work of the Panels whilst ensuring residents are able to give their views in a range of other ways.

7. Key Objectives of the Strategy

Objective 1 - We will ensure that there continues to be a consultative framework that allows residents to be involved in decisions that affect their housing

Our commitment to involving Residents

To be sure we are delivering services in the way our residents want them, HFI recognises that Residents should be involved in decisions about their housing. Where possible, we are also committed to ensuring that Residents are given a choice about the services they receive.

All social housing providers are regulated by the Tenant Services Authority who require that all Landlords are accountable to residents.

How do we involve residents in making decisions?

Consulting with all residents

The Council and Homes for Islington are committed to involving all residents in decisions that have an impact upon their tenancy. In 2010/11 alone, we have consulted all tenants about issues as diverse as the "Local Offer", changes to the Communal Heating service and amendments to the tenancy conditions. We will go beyond our statutory obligation in ensuring that every single tenant is informed and able to comment on the issues that affect them.

HFI Board and Sub Committee

The HFI Board, made up of significant resident representation, is responsible for the performance of the organisation and its key strategic decisions. It also holds the objective of ensuring that the services run by the Partners and TMO's are working effectively.

Every two years, well-publicised resident elections are conducted which determine the make up of tenants and leaseholders on the Homes for Islington Board.

The *Performance Management sub committee* to the HFI Board consists of Resident Board members and locally nominated tenants who have been appointed as Associate Directors. Their role is to scrutinise and monitor areas' of the service including TMO's and Partners.

Consultative Panels

There are six *Consultative Panels that meet six times a year* and consist of residents nominated to represent tenant and resident associations. Five of these represent different areas of the Borough that HFI is responsible for. The other consists of residents who represent the views of those tenants in street properties managed by Partners. For those properties not represented by a Tenants and Residents Association, representatives can be nominated from a "one in a thousand arrangement"

The purpose of our structure is to allow residents to have a direct input into key decisions about our services.

Tenant Compact funding of £0.5m per year is made available to the Consultative Panels to spend within each area. This gives residents the opportunity to influence spending on their local environment.

Resident involvement in procurement

We have successfully increased the level of Resident participation when we are contracting out our services. This follows the extensive involvement of residents in the re procurement of the repairs services works contract that began in 2009 and was finally let in November 2010.

Tenant Management Organisations.

10% of our stock is directly managed by Residents themselves. We have over 30 Tenant Management organisations or Committees who have taken over management of services.

They are run by elected Resident committees who take responsibility for the key decisions on how their estate is run

Our priorities for 2010-13

Local Offers

Following an extensive consultation process, a new local offer for 2011-12 will be implemented in April 2011. All Social Landlords are expected to report back on their performance against these targets. In addition, the Tenant Services Authority expects Social Housing Providers to consult with tenants annually to ensure that the standards are fit for purpose. HFI will work with the Council to ensure that we meet this new requirement

Area based representation

Our Consultative Panel structure has stood the test of time and can be seen as an effective way of gathering views borough-wide. However, we recognise that there has been a drop in attendances over the last three years.

We recognise shortcomings in terms of needing greater TRA representation and in the ability of "one in a thousand" representation to compensate for this. We will talk with our Panels and TRA's to see if the current arrangement is meeting their needs.

We will also consult our Resident Involvement Register members on how we can get more area based views.

Greater choice

The Tenant Services Authority expects all landlords to provide choice to its tenants wherever this is possible. Two recent borough-wide consultations have shown that more tenants will respond if they think they have real influence over a decision. Similarly, the recent Repairs Procurement allowed Residents real influence in the choice of contractor. Where-ever possible, we will seek to give residents a say on the issues that affect them.

Resident involvement in Repairs and Maintenance Contract

Following the successful involvement of residents in the recent procurement, a committee of Residents and Board members will be involved in monitoring and administering the performance of our contractors.

Objective 2 - We will use a variety of means to ensure that the views of all residents are taken into account

Our commitment

A major theme of this strategy surrounds our commitment to listen to the views of the widest possible cross section of our residents. HFI believes that all residents should have the opportunity to have their say on issues that matter to them. We realise that our residents may have little time to make a contribution and that we therefore need to make it as easy as possible to comment on our services. Additionally, we accept that we need to let people speak to us in their “preferred method of communication” rather than adopt a “one size fits all” approach.

How are we getting more residents involved?

Setting up Tenants and Residents Associations (TRA's)

Due to the work of staff based at the area offices we have set up 10 new TRA's over the past year and will support these new organisations through their induction process.

Resident Involvement Register

Details of the Register are contained in Objective four.

Meeting up with local community groups

We also engage and hold liaison meetings with *local organisations* that represent BME communities who may not always get involved in commenting upon our services. HFI have established links with local community groups, including those for Somali, Turkish and Bengali residents. This also includes groups which have been set up to support women from within these communities. We also carry out regular visits to elderly groups in the Borough

The Disability Panel

The *Disability Panel* was set up to ensure that the disabled community are able to report back on their customer experiences and to assess the impact of our policies from a disabled perspective. It consists of twelve of our tenants and represents six different impairment groups.

Working with young people

On occasions, we also use our extensive *youth engagement programme* to seek the views of young people, a section of the community who are often difficult to engage with. HFI support a number of youth engagement initiatives, working in partnership with Arsenal Positive Futures, Access to Sport, All Change and Aqua-terra. We are using these links to develop employment opportunities for the young

Our priorities for 2010-13

Disability Panel

We will continue to develop the Disability Panel as a forum for assessing the customer experience of our disabled residents and as a means to assess the impact of our policies.

Developing greater representation on our estates

Currently, only 50% of our estates have tenants and residents associations and we would like to increase this number where it is clear that they are actively able to represent the views of all residents. Our CSDO's will continue to support the development of new TRA's. Where there is an expressed level of interest in an area that might not sustain a formal TRA we will work flexibly to ensure that a forum is provided where tenants can give their views.

Better Links in the Community

HFI places great importance on ensuring it has good contacts with Community and Voluntary sector organisations who may be representative of the tenant base. We will continue and extend our programme of annual visits and outreach events taking in the views of elderly groups, BME organisations and young people.

Contact with our BME communities

Following the success of the Disability Panel, we will assess whether there is interest in the following;

- Setting up a youth forum with the view to enable HFI to consider the needs of the young people on our estates.
- Setting up a Black and Minority Ethnic group to inform us on how our services can reach all groups

Objective 3 - Getting residents involved in their communities

Our commitment

We will continue to value our Resident activists who put so much time into improving their estates and communities and are often thankful for their expertise and knowledge. HFI recognises the important role played by Tenants and Residents Association in representing the views of local people and enhancing the local community.

How we support greater engagement

Supporting Tenant and Residents Associations (TRA's)

Our TRA's

- Represent the views of council tenants and leaseholders
- **Facilitate** events and encourage community spirit
- Campaign to improve services
- Are consulted by HFI on improvement programmes

These TRA's receive support from dedicated staff at local area offices and centrally from the service development team in the form of administration grants and funding for training and community event support

Community Engagement

HFI has developed a Community Engagement Strategy and action plan 2010 - 2013. The strategy sets out HFI's commitment to "listen to both the communities that HFI house and the wider community, as well as involving them in making a positive contribution to what really matters to them". We recognise that the aims and objectives of Resident Involvement Strategy and the Community Engagement strategy are interlinked. Further details of both the strategy and HFI's extensive community engagement programme is available on our website

Community centres.

Our estate based community centres stay open and provide well needed space for local organisations because of the valuable contribution of resident activists. HFI is committed to continuing its support and encouragement for over 44 community centre committees based on HFI estates.

Training for residents and volunteer's who run our community centres.

HFI provides a portfolio of training opportunities for residents and volunteers who run our community centres enabling them to develop such skills as chairing a meeting or managing a small budget. Much of this training is run through Voluntary Action Islington although we retain the flexibility to meet specific requests from Tenants and Residents Associations if necessary.

Funding Community events for our Tenant and Resident Associations

Many of our TRA's have requested financial support to assist them in running events believing them to be an excellent way of fostering community spirit. Over the past 18 months, we have supported 31 TRA's in running community fun-days or coach trips. The feedback from our Residents has been extremely positive with many people wanting HFI to continue this support.

Our priorities for 2010-13

Financial Support for Tenants and Resident Associations

A key objective in our last strategy was to provide resources so that residents could develop skills to run their TRA effectively.

Despite this, take up for training has been low and we have found that often tenants already have sufficient expertise or prefer to learn "on the job". Though it is important that these opportunities remain available, given the low response, its' continued prioritisation cannot be justified.

Against that, when HFI has offered financial support, TRA's have been very pro-active in running such events as fun-days and trips to the seaside. In-fact, two tenants were instrumental in organising "Islington's Got Talent" which is being held for a second year in November 2010. This strategy agrees with the view expressed by our residents-that they should be empowered to spend the resources allocated to them. In future, a single Resident Involvement budget will be created which will be used to pay TRA's grants and support training and community events.

Assisting new Tenant and Resident Association

To continue the process of developing TRA's and encouraging residents to become part of an existing TRA or creating a new one we will:

- Introduce induction sessions for new TRA's and new TRA officers.
- Ensure that all TRA details are on the HFI website including an email address to enable residents to contact members of the TRA
- Work with TRA's to encourage greater youth and BME representation.

Review of governance arrangements including the model constitution

It is proposed that the model constitution adopted by our Tenant and Resident Associations will be reviewed with a view to reflecting good practice elsewhere and the impact of increased leaseholder involvement in our resident structures.

Enabling our Community Centres to develop

We have undertaken a review of the current licence with the intention of empowering Community centre committees to make locally based decisions on what is best for their area. This work will be completed in early 2011 and will be piloted for 6 months in the same year.

Objective 4 – Involving residents in shaping and developing our services

Our Commitment

We believe that understanding the priorities of Residents is vital in ensuring that resources are targeted where they are needed. Consulting tenants about the way they would like a service delivered enables us to fashion our service to resident needs. We will offer Residents options to get involved in a way that suits them and are committed to hearing the views from people across our diverse tenant profile.

How we involve residents in shaping services

Resident Involvement Register

The Resident Involvement Register was set up in 2007 and is now in its 3rd year. It has a membership totalling 925, comprising of 657 tenants and 268 leaseholders (membership as at August 10).

The register allows residents to choose how they want to participate and engage. Residents can engage with HFI at a time, in a way and in the format of their choice. It may be they want to fill in a questionnaire or survey, attend a meeting or focus group or talk to a member of staff. This forum has been invaluable in developing policies and procedures and informing service improvements.

Mystery shopping

Homes for Islington have trained a team of 40 volunteers as *resident mystery shoppers*. By visiting our offices or by phoning, these tenants or leaseholders make regular assessments of the quality of HFI customer service outlets and comment on the customer care skills of our staff.

Readers Panel and the Disability Panel

We have set up a Resident Readers Panel whose role is to assess the accessibility of HFI written material. The group which has representation from disabled tenants is there to make sure that we use “plain English” and that we consider the accessibility needs of all of our tenants when presenting information. The Disability Panel is also used to “impact assess” HFI policies from a disabled person’s perspective.

Leaseholders

Although Leaseholders are well represented in our TRA structure, we recognise that there are specific issues for those who have purchased their property. Leaseholders are well represented on the Resident Involvement Register and we hold regular focus groups that are used to inform the development of these services. We also have a dialogue with the Islington Leaseholder Association, an organisation formed to represent Leaseholder interests.

TRA’s and Consultative Panels

As well as being involved in the decisions about our services, when necessary TRA’s and Consultative Panels are used as a sounding board when we are developing or shaping services.

Our priorities for 2010-13

Leaseholders

Improving services to Leaseholders remains one of the highest priorities for HFI and to that end we will

- We will continue our dialogue with the Islington Leaseholders Association and other groups of Leaseholders
- We have scheduled quarterly focus groups for homeowners. The first took place in May 10; the second will take place September 10.
- We intend to carry out online surveys during 2010/11.
- We will continue to hold the Leaseholder Information Fair once a year.

Resident Scrutiny

The TSA expects social housing providers to use Resident Inspectors as a way of scrutinising customer services. HFI has already introduced a scrutiny role on its Board sub committee that involves considerable resident input but is currently examining how this can be delivered elsewhere in the organisation. We have held an introductory session with Residents and will develop the Inspection and Scrutiny role in a way that our residents are comfortable with.

Mystery Shopping

Our Resident mystery shopping programme is new and there is further potential for testing the strength of our services through this project.

Resident Suggestions Scheme

We will include residents in improving our services by introducing a Resident suggestion scheme.

Access to resident involvement activities

HFI will ensure that resident involvement activities are open to all members of the community. We will take into account special needs or requirements when planning meetings or events and ensure that meeting areas are appropriate and accessible.

Where appropriate and with prior notice and agreement with HFI, out of pocket expenses will be paid to cover attendance at focus groups, special consultation meetings, childcare responsibilities and costs associated with attendance for resident training.

Objective 5 - Keeping you informed

Our commitment

Our Residents rate “being kept informed” as a priority for Homes for Islington. We will use a variety of ways to ensure that Residents receive the information they need. We also recognise that we are accountable for our performance and we will regularly report back on this.

How we keep Residents informed

HFI News and Homeowner

Our in-house magazines delivered to all tenants and leaseholders are used to update tenants on our services and how we are performing. One section “You said, We did” is used to inform residents of changes we have made to the service because of the input of residents. HFI also produces a six monthly briefing “the TRA newsletter” for resident activists.

Website

We maintain an up to date website that gives detailed information on our services and our performance. It also enables Residents to order or comment on aspects of our services

Leaseholders Fair

We hold an annual fair for Leaseholders attended by all sections in the organisation who deal with leaseholder issues. This event is also attended by the Islington Leaseholders Association and provides home-owners with a chance to discuss any concerns with staff

LBI Tenants Convention and local events

HFI attends the LBI Tenant Convention and other local events and provides information or discusses our services with Residents.

Information at Local Offices

We place great emphasis on making sure our offices display the most up to date information about our services.

Drop In Sessions for major work contracts

For each cyclical work contract where major works will take place, all residents are invited to a public meeting where they can meet representatives who will be delivering the project. These meetings enable the proposed works to be explained and any questions answered.

Our priorities for 2010-13

Better use of information technology

We will examine the more effective use of IT in the following areas;

- Involving the young in consultation exercises by developing the use of texting for this purpose
- Developing online consultation through our website
- Examining the use of the “Islington Blog” as a way of communicating with tenants
- Better use of e-mail to communicate with our customers.

Working with the Council and other local Housing Providers

Following the success of the recent LBI Housing Convention we will work with our partners to hold more events that inform our residents about our services

Smarter contact with Tenants and Resident Associations

We will place emphasis on ensuring our TRA's have an e-mail address making more immediate contact possible.

Use of estate notice boards

Residents have suggested that the use of Estate Notice Boards can be improved and we will work to achieve this.

8. Putting the strategy into action

Consultation Timetable

The agreement of this strategy followed a consultation that sought the views of all of our residents.

| Event | Date |
|---|--|
| Summer consultation - exit ,online and paper responses surveys involving use of Resident Involvement Register | Completed in September 10 |
| TRA Newsletter - with article | October 8 th - sent online to TRA's |
| Contact with Consultative Panel Chairs | Early October 2010 |
| Consultative Panels | November |
| Meetings with Panel nominees | November |
| Board | December |

Resources to deliver the strategy

HFI commits considerable staff resources to promoting Resident Involvement starting at Director level. The Service Development Team are responsible for supporting and administering resident involvement and Community Service Development Officers develop work with TRA's in area offices and work with the Consultative Panel.

The Service Development Team has responsibility for TRA allowances including start up costs and residents training. Over the period of strategy, it is proposed that this funding is brought under one umbrella so that it can be better targeted to residents needs.

Monitoring Progress

Attached to this strategy is a detailed action plan which sets out the targets for the coming year

Our progress against these objectives is measured in the following way,

- HFI Senior Management Team reviews progress on a six monthly basis
- The Board reviews the progress annually and agrees the objectives for the next years action plan
- An annual report detailing progress is produced for the Board and made available on our website
- We report back to the Council through the service standards in the “Local Offer” on issues relating to Resident Involvement.