

Residents' Working Group: Workshop Two
17th April 2019, 6-8pm

The Residents' Working Group met on 17th April 2019 for the second workshop of the series. This workshop focused on the Council's formal participation structures and the relevant constitutions.

Council's current formal structures

Council officers provided an overview of the current formal structures to the RWG.

Formal structures are a key element of consultation and participation in the Borough. They give the opportunity for residents to take a scrutiny role in decisions affecting their housing. The formal structures comprise Residents' Associations (RAs), Area Housing Panel (AHP), Co-op Forum, Sheltered RA Focus Group and Borough Residents' Forum (BRF). Each meeting has a specific remit and allows for matters to be addressed at the relevant level. The meetings feed into one another as set out below.

RA meetings are an opportunity for local residents to address matters relating to their block/estate. The agenda is set by the RA and Council Officers will attend as appropriate (e.g. estate managers/resident participation officers.) Issues should be dealt with first at RA meeting level and then, if unresolved, these can be raised at AHP.

AHPs bring together two representatives from each RA in the housing area (i.e. central, southern, western, eastern.) Overall there is a 40/60 split of tenants to leaseholders. AHPs provide an opportunity to discuss unresolved issues relating to a block/estate, scrutinise performance, approve small improvement grants, consult on housing related policies (where there is an affect at local level), liaise with the BRF. The agenda is set by the Council with RAs invited to submit agenda items in advance.

Co-op Forum brings together representatives from each resident management organisation (RMO) / Co-op in the Borough. These are an opportunity to discuss issues relating to RMOs, scrutinise performance for RMOs, approve relevant small improvement grants and liaise with the BRF. The matters discussed are similar to those at AHP, but relating to RMOs. This meeting is an RMO led meeting with Council officers in attendance.

Sheltered RA Focus Group brings together representatives from all Council sheltered schemes that have an accredited RA. The agenda is set by the Council with contributions from the focus group. Representatives from sheltered RAs may also attend AHP, however the focus group provides a meeting with a specific focus on issues relating to sheltered housing.

BRF is the Council's most formal resident consultation body. The purpose of the BRF is for resident scrutiny of policies and strategic matters affecting council housing, as such the focus is borough-wide and the agenda is set by the Council. The vice-chairman of the BRF (an elected resident member) attends the HROSC to report resident views and feedback.

Resident membership of the BRF is:

- Four representatives (and one deputy) from each AHP
- Two representatives from the Co-op Forum
- One representative from the Sheltered RA Focus Group

Constitutions

The RWG discussed and reviewed the current constitutions.

Why review the current constitutions?

- Social Housing Green Paper requires social landlords to empower residents and create a stronger resident voice. It highlights that residents are best placed to scrutinise performance and decisions about their housing. It emphasises the importance of celebrating the role of residents in shaping communities. The Social Housing Green Paper considers the issues facing those who live in housing managed by social landlords, including those who rent and resident leaseholders.
- Clear and robust constitutions ensure that structures are effective.
- The constitutions were last reviewed in 2015.
- As the Council's formal structures feed into one another, it is important that the constitutions are aligned with one another.

Membership of formal structures

The Council suggested changes to the membership of its formal structures to ensure that residents are at the centre of the structures, in line with the requirements of the Social Housing Green Paper. The proposed model provides a role for everybody in the formal structures, with a focus on those living in Council managed housing.

The proposed model was put forward to the group and views were sought:



The RWG voted unanimously in favour of adopting this model.

Further amendments to the constitutions were then proposed by the Council and by members of the RWG. The key matters discussed are summarised below. Other minor

matters and clarifications were agreed, and the constitutions have been updated to reflect these.

RA model constitution

Residents raised the issue of annual accreditation. Several residents felt that the accreditation process was burdensome, particularly in relation to seeking signatures from members and GDPR. It was recommended that a group should be arranged outside of the RWG process to review accreditation.

It was proposed that limitations on multiple property owners should be included in the constitution. It was suggested that multiple property owners may be a member of more than one RA (where they own property in more than one area covered by an RA) but must not sit on more than one RA committee nor hold an officer position on more than one committee. This suggestion was agreed by the group.

It was suggested that the model constitution should specify which elements are optional for RAs to adopt and what elements are mandatory to gain accreditation. This was agreed.

AHP constitution

A member of the RWG suggested that there needs to be more clarity/transparency around RAs submitting agenda items for the AHP. The current constitution states that issues must have already been raised with the area team but remain outstanding. Further clarity was requested to ensure that items are not unduly refused. It was suggested that after a set amount of time, items must be accepted regardless of whether they are still in process. After discussions, it was decided that although a 'one size fits all' approach would not be suitable (as some issues will take longer to resolve), there should be greater transparency around agenda items refused. For example, there could be an option to escalate if items are refused multiple times and remain outstanding. The Council will consider how this could work in practice and bring options back to Workshop Three when complaints are discussed.

It was agreed that the June AHP would be brought forward a few weeks to the beginning of June to allow consultation on papers going to June committee ahead of BRF.

The current constitution states that meeting agendas will be circulated in the week preceding the meeting. It was agreed that this should be changed to 7 calendar days before the meeting to ensure these are received in adequate time.

It was proposed that quorum should be considered for AHPs as these are decision making bodies, but the limit should be relatively low to ensure business continuity. A 20% quorum limit was therefore agreed. It was also suggested that where small improvement budget applications are being submitted, the RA making the application must attend the panel. Following discussions, it was decided that this should be an expectation rather than a rule.

It was agreed that elections for BRF representatives will take place by secret ballot (usually in the June cycle of meetings, however this year voting will be postponed until the review is complete.) It was also agreed that in the case of a draw, votes will be recast and if there is a still a draw the chair will draw a name at random from the drawing nominees.

BRF constitutions

As with the AHP, it was decided that agendas will be circulated 7 calendar days before the meeting.

It was suggested that whilst the Council set the agenda for the BRF, there should be an annual poll of members on a set of topics to be considered during the year. This was agreed.

It was proposed that whilst quorum is not needed because the BRF is not a decision making body, it could be considered for the annual meeting where vice-chairman elections take place. Following RWG discussions, it was decided that setting a quorum limit might prevent a vice-chairman being elected and therefore this should not be set.

It was proposed that voting for the vice-chairman will take place in September BRF. This would line up with the other constitutions. AHP votes will take place in June meaning that reps will attend their first BRF of the year in June ahead of vice-chairman elections in September. These timings were agreed.

The RWG discussed whether voting by proxy should be allowed when electing the vice-chairman or whether all members must attend. It was decided that in exceptional circumstances, members should be able to cast their vote in proxy by writing to the RPO by a certain time/day before the meeting. This would replicate the process undertaken for voting into this RWG.

It was agreed that a line would be added into the constitution to clarify that the vice-chairman may be nominated to attend other bodies on behalf of the forum as agreed annually at the forum and will provide feedback.

A resident member asked whether public meetings would be recorded as this would be beneficial, for example where a guest speaker presents useful information. Council officers confirmed that public meetings are not yet recorded but will confirm what plans are in place going forward.

Major Works Consultation Process

The Council sought views on its major works consultation process. In particular, whether the consultation undertaken with tenants could be improved and how the Council can more proactively notify residents that major works are added to the schedule of works. It was recommended that the Council could notify tenants when works are added to the schedule through Homelife magazine and by proactively promoting the online schedule. RPOs could also conduct a proactive RA campaign in areas where works are due.

A resident member raised concerns with the statutory consultation with leaseholders and recommended that the Council should clearly explain the purpose and limitations of the consultation (i.e. that it is statutory consultation and whilst views are sought on specifics, the work is already established). Council officers advised that views provided during the consultation process are taken into consideration and extremely useful. It was agreed that the Council would review how to better explain the process in its literature, so leaseholders are aware of the reasons.

Another resident suggested residents' working groups in relation to major works schemes should take place ahead of the notice of intention. This will be considered as part of future workshops.

The Council advised that a redundant Major Works Review Panel was established in 1994 and has not sat since 2000. This has since been superseded by the property tribunal (whose remit was extended in 2002) which is a more robust and independent system. The RWG agreed to disband the panel.

Procurement of Contracts

The Council highlighted that residents are well placed to inform discussions around procurement of services that they are in direct receipt of – e.g. estate cleaning, gardening and repairs. Residents can provide invaluable insight into how services are currently delivered and what they would like to see covered by a new contract.

The Council recently involved residents in the design stage of a new estate cleaning contract. Council officers explained this process which involved 5 leaseholders and 3 tenants attending interactive workshops.

The group then considered how best to involve residents in the procurement of contracts. There was consensus around the table that residents should be involved in procurement of services which directly affect the home (e.g. cleaning, gardening, repairs).

Views were sought on the best approach to recruitment. A resident highlighted that all residents should get the opportunity to be involved in the services they receive and that there should be more options at a lower level of involvement, for example a pool of residents who are interested in getting involved. Members also stated that they would like options to be involved throughout the life of the contracts – i.e. in contract monitoring. It was agreed that options would be considered and brought to the next workshop which will look at informal structures and widening participation.

Training

The RWG were provided with an overview of the Council's previous training programme for RAs. Training sessions were delivered by the RPO and covered a range of topics including organising community events, managing grants and writing newsletters. The RWG were asked for suggestions of any additional topics which might be beneficial. A resident suggested GDPR training and this was widely agreed (this would help with the RA accreditation process). Another resident asked whether training could be provided online and the Council will explore options for e-learning and feedback to the group.

The Council suggested the idea of an annual RA conference as an opportunity for networking, training and workshops. The group were supportive of this suggestion and keen for such a conference to be established.

RA Handbook

It was agreed to move this agenda item to a future workshop as the meeting had overrun.

The Council thanked residents for their invaluable input and commitment. The next workshop is being held on Wednesday 15th May 2019.