



Briefing Note to BMBC

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Review of Berneslai Homes Engagement Framework

1.0 Purpose

This briefing note outlines

- key drivers for change to our engagement framework;
- proposals for the changes;
- implementation plans; and
- issues arising including staffing.

2.0 Background

Social Housing landlords have a duty to meet the Regulatory Standards for Social Housing in England. The objectives of consumer regulation as set out by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) are:

- to support the provision of social housing that is well-managed and of appropriate quality;
- to ensure that actual or potential tenants of social housing have an appropriate degree of choice and protection;
- to ensure that tenants of social housing have the opportunity to be involved in its management and to hold their landlords to account; and
- to encourage registered providers of social housing to contribute to the environmental, social and economic well-being of the areas in which the housing is situated

Our current engagement framework (set out in the Customer Involvement Agreement 2018-2021) has delivered a strong track record of:

- listening to tenants and residents on an individual basis and responding to their needs;

- involving them in the running, monitoring and shaping of the housing service;
- providing opportunities for community based issues to be raised and responded to; and
- supporting and developing communities and volunteers in communities to enhance their neighbourhoods and the lives of residents.

The main aspects of the current framework are as follows:

- The main consultative partnership is via Barnsley Federation of Tenants and Residents, who manage the Challenge Berneslai Scrutiny Panel, the designated tenant panel and offer co-regulatory assurance that Berneslai Homes meets the standards required by the RSH. They also have tenant representation on various groups including the repairs partnership and grounds maintenance service monitoring and the appeals and review panels. The Federation is supported by an annual HRA grant of £26,000 and support from two staff members (1 full time and one 25 hrs). The Federation manage Summer Lane Community Centre as a resource and community space and pay a rent of £6,000 back to the HRA.
- We have strong community partnerships with 13 TARAs whose volunteers contribute significantly to local communities by organising and supporting social activities, offering a local view through liaison meetings with Housing Management Staff and monitoring standards in communities.
- Local Engagement is also delivered by partnership with the various Your Community Your Say Groups, partnership working with BMBC, estate walkabouts, ad hoc local consultations, and events and projects such as the youth engagement projects.
- The 30+ strong Customer Panel meets 4 times a year to discuss relevant topics
- The Service Excellence Assessment Programme is a way for tenants to be involved in monitoring and testing service delivery, through mystery shopping, special focus groups including plain English, web review, complaints review, spot checks in communal areas, independent living schemes, empty properties and ground maintenance.

3.0 Key drivers for change

There are a number of drivers to change the current arrangement.

- The recently published Green Paper –“A new deal for social housing” aims to offer major reform to improve fairness, quality and safety for residents living in social housing. In doing so it has a particular focus on empowering residents and ensuring their voices are heard so that landlords are held to account. Co-regulation is a fundamental aspect of our governance arrangements and so we need to ensure our co-regulatory framework is effective and ensures tenants in Barnsley have a strong voice. The membership of the Federation has significantly reduced and

has become less representative and less effective. Without significant change resourcing this traditional framework means we're less able to develop a modern approach to strengthening the tenant voice. This is even more of a driver given around 70% of our tenants are online.

- We are seeing different and more complex estate based issues and we recognise the need to work in closer partnership with other providers to provide a collective approach to engaging with local people to build stronger and resilient communities. In April 2019 we will have new areas for housing management teams, which gives us the opportunity to reflect on the local engagement framework we currently have. The current arrangements through TARAs and Your Community Your Say have been in place for many years and again are becoming less effective with declining membership.

4.0 Review Methodology

Given the long standing engagement structure we felt it would be more effective if the national tenant engagement champions, undertook a full review of the current engagement framework.

We procured their service to look at the following:

- Is the co-regulatory model effective and challenging?
- Is the Federation, (our main consultative group), representative and effective?
- Is our approach to scrutiny delivering results and enhancing services?
- Are we supporting TARAs effectively to enhance their communities?
- Are we doing enough to engage and listen to views of younger, disabled and other underrepresented groups?
- Is our Service Excellence Assessment Programme providing good quality feedback?
- Are we making best use of digital engagement?
- Do we have effective community based engagement, giving local people a voice?
- Are we making the most of the data we get from complaints and comments and using it to improve services?

TPAS undertook this review in September 2018 by examining our structures, policies and other documents relating to tenant engagement, and speaking to staff, tenants and residents, and board members

The report (attached) made significant conclusions regarding the existing framework which affirmed the need to change. It recommended various options for change and after considering these options we have agreed some outline proposals for changing the model.

5.0 Proposals

The following are our outline proposals which will require further development in partnership with tenants, officers and board members.

- **Keep supporting TARAs** – We recognise the social value the 13 TARAs have within their communities and their local knowledge and networks. We will continue to support TARAs
- **Keep running SEAP but extend its representation through selective recruitment** – This programme is an effective way of involving tenants in giving opinion and testing service experience. We will continue with this programme but we recognise that we need younger people involved. We will aim to recruit a more diverse range of tenants and develop e-opportunities for being involved.
- **Review the role and remit of Your Community Your Say (YCYS)**– We agree that since the devolved budgets were ended (3 years ago) the purpose of the groups has become unclear and public attendance has reduced. We propose to:
 - end the Your Community Your Say groups and explore opportunities of tenant/staff involvement with BMBC area based engagement structures; and
 - develop local e-engagement opportunities through social media.

We anticipate these changes to be effective from April 2019.

- **Revise our approach to scrutiny** - We recognise that the current Federation managed arrangements are not working effectively. We propose to end current arrangements and set up a tenant scrutiny task and finish group. The scrutiny group will have 4-6 tenant members with officer support. They will meet on a task and finish project basis and will have access to a delegated budget to enable them to conduct scrutiny. There will be 2 core members who also sit on the co-regulatory panel (see below) and other members will be selected by the co-regulatory panel from engaged tenants who have expressed interest in scrutiny and who have or are willing to undergo scrutiny training. This ensures that there is no conflict of interest and also widens opportunities for engaged tenants. The scrutiny panel will report findings and recommendations to the co-regulatory panel.
- **Revise our co-regulatory and main consultative body arrangements** - Whilst recognising individual member contribution, we concur that the Federation model is no longer effective and given unsuccessful attempts over the last few years (supported by independent consultants) to improve effectiveness and increase membership we do not feel it has a viable future. This type of model is not common among other social landlords. St Leger Homes, Sheffield Council and Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing have all ended their Federation models over recent years.

We feel the best option is to close the Federation and develop a co-regulatory panel. The panel will be responsible for holding the landlord to account. They will receive various reports and information including:

- performance reports,
- satisfaction reports,
- complaints reports,
- benchmarking data; and
- policies and procedure.

They will also be consulted on new initiatives, and legislative changes.

The panel will be made up of around 8 tenant representatives, one officer and one board member.

They will meet around 12 times per year and will be part of the Berneslai Homes governance structure and will report directly to Customer Services Committee. Members will be appointed and will work to a volunteer profiler. They will receive training and ongoing support.

They will have the power to:

- commission and direct scrutiny projects including requesting further research; and
- advise Berneslai Homes on appropriate customer consultation on new initiatives and policy developments.

Representatives from the panel will attend BMBC quarterly liaison to provide direct assurance to our shareholder.

The panel will have an allocated budget to enable effective scrutiny, training and research.

The model better aligns to our Board governance arrangements and ensures that tenants are selected for attitude and have skills developed through effective training.

6.0 Implementation plans

Our aim is that the new model is developed in partnership with existing and newly recruited involved tenants, staff and board members. We anticipate a go live date of 1st April 2019.

Date	Key Action
4 th January 2019	Meet BMBC Communities to explore local engagement alignments
24 th January 2019	Meet the Federation to discuss proposals and agree involvement in developing new co-regulatory model
24 th January 2019	Make contact with members of YCYS groups and advise of

	changes – invite to a meeting to develop new local engagement opportunities
24 th January 2019	Make contact with TARAs to advise of proposals and agree involvement in developing new co-regulatory model
24 th January 2019	Make contact with SEAP assessors to advise of proposals and agree involvement in developing new co-regulatory model
February – April 2019	Develop new JDs and profiles and agree with staff and unions
February – March 2019	Develop new model and produce report for Board approval including developing a new Customer Involvement Agreement.
April 2019	Recruitment and training of new panel members

7.0 Issues arising

Staff

The new model will not impact adversely on existing Berneslai Homes staff who work with the Federation. Their job profiles will change and their work base. Consultations have taken place and staff are fully on board and looking forward to a new model.

Federation Resource Base

A decision will need to be taken regarding the future of the Federation office on Summer Lane. Regular bookings are in place but these do not generate sufficient income to cover running costs. There are issues with parking and so its use as a community hub or alternative uses may be limited. There may be potential to redevelop the building or demolish and rebuild but it is a sloping site. Further assessments will be undertaken but we do not feel it is needed to support the new engagement model. We will discuss options with BMBC as per our usual development arrangements.

Finance

Currently an annual grant of £26,000 is paid directly to the Federation from the HRA on a quarterly basis. £6,000 per year is deducted from this for rent for the resource centre. Discussions will need to take place with the Section 151 officer regarding the financial implications. It is proposed that for the 2019/20 year to transfer £20,000 from the HRA to Berneslai Homes management fee. This will enable us to directly manage the budget and set up the new model. We propose to review the spend after 12 months and anticipate any budget savings to be refunded to the HRA. The Federation currently have a balance of around £21,000, the majority of which will be directly refunded to the HRA. A small proportion of this working balance is money generated from room hire and so the Federation will (under the terms of our current constitution) have the power to distribute to other voluntary organisations or charities on their closure.

Risks

We anticipate that there may be some resistance by a small number of existing Federation members who will not wish to see the existing model changed. Our understanding is that they wish to see a standalone Federation which is directly funded by the council. There is no evidence to show that this model would be any different to the existing model, as the inherent flaws would merely transfer with no change.

We propose to manage any fallout by ensuring honest explanation of the review, the positive aspects of the revised model and ensuring tenants are involved in developing the model. We will have positive media releases prepared which will focus on the positive impact of the proposed new model, as and when required.

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