

Value for Money of Resident Involvement Scrutiny Review – April 2016

Introduction

In the period January 2016 – April 2016 a small team from the Scrutiny Group looked at the Value for Money of Resident Involvement (VfM of RI). The reasoning for this review was that Resident Involvement (RI) is an important issue especially now with all the current Government changes. The group wanted to evaluate the value of RI to the organisation and also to involved tenants.

Key Findings

We found that it is really difficult to put a monetary value on Resident Involvement and what Soha and its involved tenants do. Nor is it always desirable to measure in money. We found that Resident Involvement is led from the top of the organisation and cascaded down to all staff. However, we feel the measurement of social value can be improved.

Detailed Scrutiny findings

Our interviews with Soha's staff have shown clearly the way that RI is embedded throughout the organisation. Even departments that are not entirely customer facing know and understand the importance of Resident Involvement.

As part of our report, we posed a number of questions

1. If Resident Involvement was not led from the top what would happen?

Although Resident Involvement is embedded informally throughout the organisation it is not formally part of Soha's rules. Nic Bliss from CCH recently carried out a review of Co-regulation and Resident Involvement at Soha. At the beginning of his report he said:

“At best, there are only a few other landlords who come anywhere near to Soha's current co-regulatory relationship”.

The report has four recommendations and some areas for consideration. These recommendations and areas for consideration were discussed at the Tenants' Forum meeting on 17 March and also at the Co-regulation Away Day on 7 April. A Steering Group will work on how Soha and its involved tenants work together to decide which recommendations they carry forward and how they will be implemented. We support this.

2. What is the cost of RI?

The group found that Soha spends £70.80 per household per year on RI: this cost includes all overheads (staff etc.). The Housemark Dashboard for the RI indicator shows that Soha is in the Good Performance / High Cost quadrant and that Soha is in quartile 1 for RI. Benchmarking data below:

Organisation	RI cost per Household	Satisfaction - Views taken into account
Soha Housing	£70.80	76%
Amicus Horizon	£92.09	93.10%
B3 Living	£105.13	68%
Halton Housing Trust	£34.40	85.10%

The reduction of rents over the next four years has made some organisations cut its RI function. Although this is not currently the case at Soha, the group notes Soha will seem more expensive as others are spending less on RI. The Board need to be clear that this is a strategic choice.

3. What is the impact of RI?

- a) There is a lot of good work to track the impact of RI. The group found that Soha is out and about in its communities and is working innovatively to involve and engage with its tenants and also with wider communities. We found two areas of improvement:
- The group noted that although this work is going in the community Soha needs to record what they do more effectively. Soha needs to 'blow its own trumpet' and to record successes.
 - Soha could improve tracking the impact on individuals by using 'case studies' and timelines of tenant's journey through RI. We would like to see an innovative approach to this, perhaps building on the RI continuum used by co-regulation groups.

b) case study below

Paige Hudson

I was first involved with Soha in 2010 with Jane Cox, working on a community garden for my estate with a couple of other young tenants. Through this I was involved in taking photographs at Cornerstone for a young people's talent show. Last year my mother was taking part in filming for the annual report and mentioned that I was studying for a degree in media production at university. Soha offered me a summer placement to go through all the footage that tenants had shot and compile them into rough edits. I got to spend 2 days with a video production company in London and was offered work with a digital branding agency in Abingdon. This has opened up many opportunities to me as I now have contacts within the industry I want to work in. I have also been asked to come back and help for this year's annual report.

Some tenants said that there could be more tenant to tenant interaction. When involved tenants have door knocked or carried out phone calls they have found that tenants feel more able to talk to them than staff.

Soha's RI has a high profile in the wider housing world, we feel that Soha can take credit for RI but its involved tenants can take a lot of credit for Soha's profile and reputation in the sector

Conclusions

- The group feels that Soha must measure the value of RI, showing both the monetary value and social value. Soha is saving money by using volunteers to carry out reviews / inspections and not having to pay external organisation to do it
- The group thinks that it is ok to be relatively expensive as long as the quality equates to the cost, we noted that £70 per household per year feels like a low cost!
- Soha should look at the possible value of tenant to tenant activities

- We would like to say well done to Soha for its innovative and inclusive RI programme, but remember involved tenants are raising your profile and reputation

Recommendations

1. Use imaginative ways to measure the value of RI e.g. using case studies, timelines, continuum and improve capturing monetary savings where possible
2. Continue to invest in RI, but keep an eye on RI costs and try to ensure that cost and quality are balanced
3. Consider the value of tenant to tenant projects
4. Continue to support involved tenants to promote Soha and raise its reputation and profile

6. Methodology

This review was carried out using the following information and activities:

Review of documentation including:

Amicus Horizon Report – Success, Satisfaction and Scrutiny
 An Investment not a Cost
 HACT Report – Measuring the Social Impact of Soha
 HCA Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Standard
 HCA Value for Money Standard
 Housemark Benchmarking Data
 Review of Co-regulation
 Soha Impact Report

Interviews with

Maureen Adams, Director of Customer Services and Operations
 Sorrel Ayres, Service Charge Accountant
 Andrea Bain, Resident Involvement Officer
 Holly Caulkett, Housing Officer
 Craig Dransfield, Head of Development
 Steph Gibson, Customer Services Advisor
 Catherine Little, Head of Co-regulation and Policy
 Kerry Lobb, Resident Involvement Officer
 Jackie Logan, Resident Involvement Manager
 Richard Peacock, Chief Executive
 Lynn Wignall, Co-regulation Officer

Other organisations

Three of the group visited Amicus Horizon in Croydon on 18 March to speak to staff and tenants about Resident Involvement.

The group spoke to B3 Living about Resident Involvement when they visited Soha on 3 April.

The Group spoke to Halton Housing Trust when they visited Soha on 26 April.

Scrutiny team was

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