

Ways to increase resident engagement

Three workshops hosted by *Inside Housing*, in association with Aico, looked at ways social landlords can increase engagement with residents. Here are the ideas that the group came up with

As part of our Resident Safety Campaign in partnership with Aico, *Inside Housing* recently hosted three workshops.

The purpose was to allow readers to discuss how the sector might further increase engagement with residents on safety issues in the coming year and provide new ways for residents to have a voice in policy discussion and matters relating to their homes.

More than 100 people signed up for these informal discussions to offer ideas and insight to inspire a cultural change in the sector. Here are the key points.

Workshop 1: how can landlords co-produce with residents?

The Social Housing White Paper outlined how social landlords need to improve how they communicate with residents and provide the opportunity to co-produce projects with landlords. While there are examples of good practice, there is work to be done.

The pandemic saw many landlords introduce new ways of communicating. Martin Hilditch, editor of *Inside Housing* and chair of the session, said: “The pandemic has seen many landlords introduce and trial new ways of communicating, along with different approaches to working and co-producing with residents. For example, the Northern Housing Consortium’s tenants’ climate jury intended to provide tenants with the opportunity to inform landlords on views on climate change.”

He asked the group to define what co-production looks like at present and how different methods might be tried in the future. Points from the discussion include:

- Understand the demographic of your residents: digital became the hero in 2020, but to get to know who your residents are, their needs and diversify if necessary, it is good to continue with face-to-face conversations but mix it with digital to get more residents involved, such as young people or those who work at different times and might not be in when you visit.

Part of this is understanding ‘silent tenants’ – those who may not want to be involved – and that there are

cycles of engagement and safety issues which might be more engaging than others at different times of the year.

- Provide the board with a tenant perspective: the group found there was a gap here and some participants suggested that not all board members understand what it means to live in social housing. Having tenants on the board can offer a perspective on how an organisation’s processes might work for the residents.

- Feedback mechanisms: encourage residents to provide their thoughts on all aspects of a project, for example, by asking them to complete surveys. Another example was from an organisation which has residents who work similarly to ‘secret shoppers’ and listen in to customer service calls when residents report repairs to map performance and resident satisfaction. Active listening is vital for making the conversation two-way, building trust, understanding what residents want and adapting after receiving feedback.

Workshop 2: how can landlords inform residents about the safety of their homes?

At a time when stock is being upgraded to meet new safety standards, fibre broadband targets and carbon net zero goals, new technology is being introduced to monitor temperature, ventilation and carbon dioxide levels to improve the quality of well-being in homes, as well as reduce energy consumption and costs.

Part of this change involves residents understanding the technology in their homes and their role in changing behaviours to work towards safer and healthier homes.

Welcoming everyone to the second workshop, Mr Hilditch spoke about the new Building Safety Regulator that is currently being set up by Peter Baker, chief inspector of buildings. One of his key priorities is to look at the way that landlords engage with their residents, saying: “There is a need for the sector to challenge its own performance and look at ways of improving.”

Mr Hilditch asked the group to think about what could be stopping communication being effective and how they can be overcome by trying different methods.

“The pandemic has seen landlords introduce and trial new ways of [talking with residents], along with different approaches to working and co-producing with residents”

Martin Hilditch



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Coming up with new methods to communicate with residents can enable them to have a voice in matters relating to their homes

Points from the discussion include:

- Consistent messaging: when informing residents about the safety of their homes, make sure the message is strong and consistent throughout the organisation, particularly on the frontline, where staff are having more contact with residents day to day.

- Sharing learning: several participants spoke about how their organisations’ teams work in silos and that there is a need to create microsites so that all communications, such as fire assessments, can be found in one place; and partner with other organisations to communicate messages in a different way, such as working with fire services to speak to your residents.

- Up-to-date data: for smaller housing providers without large amounts of resource, having data on buildings is essential, not only for compliance but on dashboards for all levels of management to access a clear picture of the organisation’s safety and any issues.

Workshop 3: how can landlords create inclusive and safe communities where residents want to live?

Jack Simpson, news editor at *Inside Housing*, chaired the final session to talk about how the increase of development to reach government targets has meant fresh discussion about what we would like our neighbourhoods to look like. In the past 18 months, factors such as green spaces and creating inclusive communities have also risen on the priority list. Social

landlords and local authorities play a large part in this.

Introducing the session, he said: “The sector has a high target of providing 300,000 new homes a year. It is not simply about hitting this target, but ensuring these developments are providing safe, inclusive places to live that are pleasant for people to live in and provide well-being in terms of environmental, mental and physical health needs – and not just new builds but ensuring that existing communities are being catered for as well.”

Points from the discussion include:

- Listening to local groups: one of the challenges is that providers do not know who is going to move into a new build development when they are planning them. It is also important to maintain connections in existing communities, so door-knocking can be effective to find out what residents like about their area and what they might like to be different. Be specific and write bespoke surveys to gain feedback about the local environment.

- Being proud of where you live: in mixed-tenure or mixed cultural areas, hold social events that might bring the community together to speak to one another, get to know what residents want and feel an ownership to their area. This could create a safer, more inclusive community and can help reduce anti-social behaviour.

- Engaging under-25s: consider all residents, particularly those of future communities. Look at behaviour in resident engagement and use nudge techniques, such as sending out text messages and emails to generate a response. ●

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Jack Simpson