

1. Introduction

This paper sets out approaches to measuring the value of Resident Involvement in Social Housing. In particular:

- What are the key terms (inputs, outputs, outcomes, impact and others) and their meanings
- How to show the value of resident involvement from the start by planning key outcomes
- How to review current processes for measuring the value of resident involvement
- How to measure impact
- How to feedback outcomes to staff, residents and the Housing Association board or local authority councillors
- The roles in identifying business outcomes and impacts using resident involvement mechanisms and data
- How do you make the business case for Resident Involvement?

Each are now taken in turn.

2. What are the key terms (inputs, outputs, outcomes, impact and others) and their meanings

The key terms for measuring the value of resident involvement in social housing are as follows.

The term resident which means a person living within a housing complex, defined in terms of the needs of that individual, and the way in which those needs are met by the housing provider. It is crucial therefore to view the resident as a customer, rather than by data held by the housing provider. In other words, the success of resident involvement requires acknowledgment of human needs and quality of life, rather than basing decisions on resident statistics (Peabody Group 2018).

Involvement which is described as the extent to which tenants are empowered to influence and change the approach and services of housing providers, including decision-making, and the power to change policies and improve performance (Pawson et al., 2012).

Resident input can be defined as comments/feedback from the resident body about the quality of and satisfaction with the services offered by the housing provider. The outputs of the process are the decisions-made by the housing provider based on resident feedback, with respect to improving the services offered. The impact of the process relates to the implications of the changes made to the service being provided by the housing provider, as determined by the residents' input (London Assembly 2018; Trotter et al., 2014).

Other key terms include communication which is an essential element in the success of resident involvement. In this context this includes the collection of data on current services offered across a range of services including but not limited to complaints, repairs, quality of accommodation, quality of communal/public space and safety, and relating that data to a range of stakeholders from service providers, residents and wider interested parties such as regulators (Sagoo and Khalfan 2017).

Within the resident involvement process there is informing which relates to the information being communicated in a two way process, between the residents and the housing provider. The term empowering is also used which relates to the way in which the resident involvement process gives the resident body greater control over the services being offered by the housing provider (Centre for Housing and Support, nd.).

Another term which is frequently used in relation to resident involvement is culture, which refers to the attitudes and approaches of those working for the housing provider towards an inclusive environment with residents, and willingness of residents to engage with the housing provider, for mutual benefit (Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) 2014).

3. How to show the value of resident involvement from the start by planning key outcomes

The value of resident involvement needs to be taken into account from the start, by setting the key objectives of the process. These may include the need to increase

levels of customer satisfaction with the services provided, including a list of those services. It will also require a business case for the process which indicates the financial value of improved services including lower cost of repairs, savings through more effective communication between frontline staff and residents, as well as the financial savings of meeting the regulatory standards (B3 Living, 2013).

The data for this process can be obtained from case studies of similar housing providers, and research from organisations such as the CIH. Once the housing provider has implemented the resident involvement process then it will be able to gather data from its activities to support the business case for this process (CIH, 2014).

However it is acknowledged that there have been many attempts to increase the number of residents willing to participate in the decision-making processes in social housing, many of which have failed. The suggestion therefore is that it is key to plan realistic outcomes and to determine ways of achieving those outcomes from the start of the process. A good example is offered by the Peabody Group (2018) which notes that there have been two approaches to increasing resident involvement, namely the tenant initiated approaches which involve tenant and resident associations and landlord initiated processes in the form of a panels and forums. However neither has been consistently successful in increasing resident involvement or in representing the diversity within the resident body, with the result that the outcomes have not matched the objectives of resident involvement. This problem is attributed to the use of outdated aspirations set at the planning stage which have relevance to the provider but not necessarily to the residents. The Peabody Group (2018) resolved these issues by placing residents at the centre of service and business improvement. The Group focuses on large-scale customer insights gathered using complaints and big data, along with empirical testing and social media. In addition the Peabody Group focus on empowering residents to be active community citizens, which is more difficult to achieve as it requires a fundamental change of mind set within the housing provider and the resident body. In setting outcomes, it is important to acknowledge that success cannot be measured by the number of people on panels, or forums, rather it requires an assessment of the levels of engagement of residents within their local communities. Effectively this requires objectives for housing provider involvement in the community, rather than community involvement in the housing provider's services. In other words,

outcomes should directly relate to activity of residents within the community (Peabody Group 2018).

4. How to review current processes for measuring the value of resident involvement

It is important to assess performance based on finances/budgets, resident satisfaction and value for money, recognizing that some of these criteria are easy to quantify whilst others such as sense of security, satisfaction with quality of housing and neighbourhood are less tangible, thereby depending on the subjective opinions of the residents. The current processes used for measuring the value of resident involvement can be therefore reviewed by gathering feedback of the residents and from frontline staff and using the data to compare agreed and planned objectives to actual achievements. This can include carrying out a survey of residents, and by discussing progress with various resident groups such as the Scrutiny Panel and local neighbourhood forums. This data will provide an indication of the success of the process and the effectiveness of the criteria used to measure the value of resident involvement. The measurement criteria can then be altered accordingly (Trotter et al., 2014; Pawson et al., 2012).

Using the example of the Peabody Group (2018) current processes have focused on the level of resident involvement in housing provider services. However it is more effective to consider satisfaction using a bottom-up approach, by redefining a resident by where they live, rather than by who the landlord is. This can be achieved by holding workshops with residents and conducting behavioural research, to understand ways of increasing participation in local volunteering, and to develop a greater understanding of residents' needs and interests, as well as their priorities and capacities. The focus therefore should be on using resident/customer insights to improve service delivery, whilst also supporting residents to become active citizens, by improving health, wealth and wellbeing (Peabody Group 2018).

5. How to measure impact

Impact can be measured by comparing planned outcomes to actual outcomes. It is important to measure intangible impacts such as the level to which residents feel empowered to connect with the housing provider and to influence the decisions made

regarding their housing and neighbourhood, and willingness of frontline staff to listen. These can be measured by assessing the levels of involvement of residents in the process, as a proportion of the resident body, and by assessing the level to which residents are involved in decisions about practical local issues such as communal areas, and/or local amenities. Aside from reviewing the levels of involvement, impacts can be measured by talking to residents directly, by discussion progress with frontline staff and by providing opportunities for residents and staff to come together to discuss progress, through community meetings and open days (Family Mosaic 2015).

In addition the tangible impacts of resident involvement can also be measured by comparing changes in the cost of services offered, and the level of complaints received within the assessment period, comparing before and after implementation of the resident involvement process (CIH 2014).

The key therefore is to study resident behaviour and to identify processes that are effective and those which need further work. For example surveys can be used to establish the ways in which residents feel empowered to shape their community, and willingness to participate in housing issues. At the same time, it is important to understand the issues which impede such participation, as this is essential in developing processes to increase resident confidence, and ability to participate (Peabody Group 2018).

6. How to feedback outcomes to staff, residents and the Housing Association board or local authority councillors

There are a range of methods that can be used to feedback the outcomes to all stakeholders, including social media such as Facebook and Twitter for residents, along with email, and newsletters. Residents can also be made aware of the outcomes by direct communication with volunteers within each residential block, tasked with informing all residents within that block of decisions and progress.

Feedback of outcomes can be communicated using Resident Consultative Panel which comprises elected representative and consultative body of residents supported by frontline staff. This Panel reviews policy and strategy development whilst also sharing good practice across the housing provider, as used for example in Peabody's. Local Neighbourhood forums communicate with the Panel, with feedback from processes such as estate walkabouts, caretaking and cleaning, along with the

management of anti-social behaviour and changes in staff/roles/functions. Other useful forms of feedback include the use of a Sheltered Housing Forum which is similar to the Neighbourhood Forum, representing those in sheltered housing. Another means of enhancing feedback from residents to frontline is to use a Menu of Involvement, providing information for all residents on the range of activities that residents can take part in, which can then be used to improve accountability and the services provides (Peabody Group 2018).

The housing provider can also use fun days to increase interaction and communication with residents, about the benefits of resident involvement. In terms of providing feedback of outcomes to staff, the housing association Board and local councillors it is argued that this can be carried out using informal and formal measures. Informal measures can include meetings with frontline staff where the impacts of the resident involvement measures can be presented and discussed, reviewing what measures have been positive, and which measures have been a challenge, and ways of improving the entire process. The findings of these sessions can be included in a report on the outcomes and presented formally to the Board of the Housing Association and Local Councillors. The feedback process should include consideration of the way in which frontline staff are supported by senior management, in terms of resources provided and the education and training offered to frontline staff. Feedback can also be gathered from such education and training, by assessing the competency of frontline staff and providing sufficient training to ensure that staff feel competent in improving the service offered. The key is to ensure that all stakeholders have an input on the process and are also aware of their level of responsibility and accountability to optimise continual improvement (CIH, 2014; Family Mosaic, 2015).

7. The roles in identifying business outcomes and impacts using resident involvement mechanisms and data

There are a range of stakeholders in resident involvement including the residents, frontline staff, senior management of the housing provider, Board members of the provider, the regulator and in some cases the local authority. Each of these stakeholders can influence the business outcomes and impacts of resident involvement mechanisms and data. For example the residents are key to the process, as such it is important to understand the factors which encourage resident involvement

and which discourage residents from participating in decision-making processes. Frontline staff are also key to the success and effectiveness of the resident involvement process as these personnel have daily interaction with residents and represent the culture of the housing provider. If these interactions are fraught with stress and conflict on either side, then there is a high risk that the process will fail. Senior management also have a role in the involvement process, particularly in relation to supporting frontline workers, providing resources for these workers to enable them to carry out their work effectively, and in creating a collaborative culture within the organisation. Senior management must be committed to the process of resident involvement, otherwise it will be difficult for frontline staff to commit to the process. Board members also have a role in the involvement process, as the Board decides on funding and budgets available for resident involvement. It is important that the objectives including inputs and outcomes are supported by the Board as this will empower both senior management and frontline staff to make effective decisions and to implement the processes needed to support and drive the involvement agenda. Finally it is argued that regulators and policy makers have a role in the resident involvement process, by setting the standards needed to underpin the process. This can raise awareness and commitment within the housing provider sector, thus putting pressure on all housing providers to raise their standards and to support resident involvement throughout social housing (CIH 2014; London Assembly 2018; Peabody Group 2018).

8. How do you make the business case for Resident Involvement?

A business case should be prepared at the start of the resident involvement process to ensure that the sums invested by the housing provider offer value for money without adversely compromising the provider's ability to provide good quality housing for the residents. At the same time, it is important to consider culture within the business case, to ensure that the individual resident is as important as the resident body, and frontline staff are supported in providing service improvements. The most effective way to make the business case for Resident Involvement is to calculate the costs of the additional resources for changing the approach within the organization and the additional staff required to carry out this process. This should include the cost of education and training, communication with residents and expenses for residents involved in the process. The benefits of the process can then be measured by making reasoned assumptions using social housing industry research to determine the impacts on

efficiency and customer satisfaction. This should include tangible benefits such as the reduced cost of managing complaints, and less tangible costs such as improvements in health and wellbeing among the housing residents. This can be carried out using the Value Calculator, developed by Trotter et al., (2014) specifically for the creation of an Impact Valuation Statement as a means of calculating the social impact of investment in the community such as social housing.

The business case should also include the do-nothing scenario, taking account of the cost of providing the existing services without increasing resident involvement, including the likelihood of not meeting industry standards or the requirements of the housing regulator (CIH 2014).

9. Conclusion

It is generally agreed that Resident Involvement plays a key role in the planning and operation of social housing and its effectiveness can be evidenced at many housing providers. As ever, an unquestioning approach should not be undertaken, and this paper set out to provide thought as to how the Value of Resident Involvement in Social Housing may be measured.

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