

REVIEW OF HOUSING FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS - 2008/09

Report of the Chief Executive

1. SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report presents a 12 month review of Housing Focus Groups (HFG's), the means by which Derby Homes consults and involves tenants locally on housing management issues.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Local Housing Board is requested to:

1. consider the detail of the review and,
2. approve the recommendations contained in section 3.11 of this report.

3. MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 The review has been achieved by the use of statistical analysis of each meeting since May 2008 through to May 2009 as detailed in Appendix 2, and by noting comments and feedback from tenants at Local Housing Boards and HFG meetings.
- 3.2 The review has looked at the following 7 areas:
 - Overall satisfaction with meetings
 - Attendance levels at meetings
 - Cases/Issues raised at meetings
 - Estates Pride bids approved
 - Number of new tenants engaging in the service
 - Facilitation by tenants
 - Equalities.
- 3.3 The overall satisfaction level at meetings is shown on page 1 of Appendix 2, from July 2008 to March 2009. The satisfaction is variable but none of the meetings is scored below a 7, and over 20 meetings the average score is 8.7. This indicates overall a reasonably high level of satisfaction
- 3.4 Attendance figures are shown on page 2 of Appendix 2. These figures from May 2008 to May 2009 are hugely variable with the average being 10 people per meeting overall. Some of the reasons affecting poor attendance have been extremely poor weather, error on travel arrangements and high profile sporting events clashing with meeting dates. Clearly some influences on attendance will always remain beyond our control.

- 3.5 Cases/Issues raised at meetings - as shown on page 3 of Appendix 2 the total number of cases raised is 140, with 134 cases resolved and 6 still classed as open. This means 95% of all issues have been resolved.
- 3.6 A function delegated to the HFG's allows tenants to allocate funds for environmental improvements in their area. Page 4 of Appendix 2 shows that over £44,000 out of £50,000 of spending has been approved by the HFG meetings. Please note that the figures for the South West HFG (£14K) are because they had unspent funds from the previous year.
- 3.7 As shown on page 5 of Appendix 2 we have engaged with a total of 173 tenants at HFG's during the year, of these 125 attendees are new names which suggests that the HFG's are helping Derby Homes engage with more tenants.

The Audit Commission Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) require that landlords work with more than just regular groups of tenants.

To put the total attendance figures into context, in the final year of the Community Panels, the total number of tenants at all Panel meetings was 89 people. With fewer meetings than Community Panels and more varied venues, we have engaged with 84 more tenants. The attendance figures may be variable, but on the whole we are engaging with more people. This demonstrates best practise and good value for money.

- 3.8 As shown on page 6 of Appendix 2, the majority of HFG meetings have been facilitated by tenants. This is a major change from the previous structured approach adopted at Community Panels. We will continue to encourage tenants to volunteer as facilitators and provide support to those wanting to develop in this role.

Introducing the facilitation process has had a positive impact on equalities. Housing Focus Groups are being facilitated (ran) by people with disabilities. This is equalities in action.

We are keeping facilitation under constant review but we committed to the long term aims and benefits of facilitation.

- 3.9 We believe that the Housing Focus Groups are attracting a more representative group of tenants than did the previous Community Panel network. Unfortunately we do not have any figures or records from attendance at panels in terms of equalities but experience of attending the Panels and now HFG meetings sense a greater number of minority ethnic tenants at HFG meetings between 2008/2009. From HFG attendance sheets we have noted the following in the table below:

Ethnicity	Number
African	2
Afro-Caribbean	3
Chinese	1
Polish	2
Indian	1

The figures are not groundbreaking in themselves, but for the purposes of showing that the HFG format is effective at attracting a wider range of tenant, they are very important. We are also seeing much younger people than the 50+ age range we are usually used to and also younger disabled people than previously at Panels.

We will develop more recording techniques to collect equalities to evidence if Housing Focus Groups are giving a wider range of people access to local consultation and involvement opportunities.

3.10 Feedback from tenants has essentially been around two issues:

- The 3 month gap between December and February, although originally feedback from tenants was that they disliked evening meetings during the winter months we have now received feedback that some feel the break is too long and loses the momentum of the meetings.
- The rotation of dates (days) and venues of meetings, feedback is that the mix of dates and venues is confusing to tenants and there is a call for regular days and venues.

We have tried to address these concerns within the recommendations for the future.

3.11 On the whole during the first year HFG's have been successful in that they have engaged with a higher number of and more representative group of tenants, enabled tenant led local environmental improvements and contributed to solving problems with the local housing service.

We need to accept that it is still early days and we are still learning, our proposals to continually develop the HFG's during 2009/10 are:

1. To set the dates earlier and try to make Wednesdays the day we always use. This will avoid DACP open meetings and Derby Homes Local Housing Board meetings and equates to one HFG meeting a week.
2. To try to use the same venues every year to enable tenants to get used to the locations.
3. We will commence the 2009/2010 cycle of HFG in February 2010. This will enable earlier consultation on local service planning which incorporates the preparation of bids for Estate Pride funding. This will reduce the gap between meetings over winter months to two months.
4. We will review the invitation letters sent out for HFG's to ensure that dates and venues are more clearly stated and easier to read.
5. We will develop improved equalities monitoring to enable us to monitor the effectiveness of the HFG meetings in attracting a wider range of people.
6. We will review the facilitation process of HFG meetings and simplify it, making it clearer and easier. We will pilot this approach by leading meetings and then hand over to tenant facilitators.

7. We suggest maintaining the meetings at 25 per financial year as this currently appears to offer value for money (inputs to outputs).
8. Current attendance at the HFG meetings by DACP members is not as widespread as we hoped. Given that we are engaging with a lot of new tenants, we propose to work with the DACP to use the meetings as a way of publicising their work and to promote involvement and partnership working with the DACP.
9. We will continue to develop the HFG Lites, during 2009/2010 we will examine our administrative processes to release resources to provide this outreach work.

4. CONSULTATION IMPLICATIONS

Under the 1985 Housing Act, Section 105, Derby Homes is expected to consult with service users on any changes or improvement to our services.

The presentation of this paper at tonight's Local Housing Board and consulting and involving tenants at the Tenant Participation Performance Improvement Team on the 1st of June 2009 fulfils this expectation.

6. LEGAL AND CONFIDENTIALITY IMPLICATIONS

The legal implications are stated in (4) above. There are no confidentiality issues contained within this report.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The use of vehicles by staff and taxi's by tenants/leaseholders to attend Housing Focus Group meetings means there is a carbon footprint issue with the meetings. The sharing of vehicles and taxis is practiced in order to minimise the carbon footprint.

Retaining the bi-monthly timetabling of the meetings will also help to control the impact of the carbon footprint created by the format of these meetings.

9. EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The current delivery of the Derby Homes Housing Focus Groups is designed to increase access to local consultation and involvement meetings to a wide range of ethnicities, ages, ability and mobility needs. The proposals contained within this report will not compromise access for any of these equality strands. Further information on the contribution of Housing Focus Groups to equalities can be found in (3) above.

The areas listed below have no implications directly arising from this report

- Financial and Business Plan
- Personnel
- Health & Safety
- Risk

If Board members or others would like to discuss this report ahead of the meeting please contact the author, or the Chief Executive, phil.davies@derbyhomes.org - Tel 01332 711010

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Background Information: None

Supporting Information: None.