

Residents Involvement and Empowerment Strategy 2020-23

1.0 Introduction to the Strategy

1.1 This strategy addresses the regulatory requirement for housing associations to have meaningful resident involvement allowing residents to exert an influence on policies and services. The strategy has been developed within the regulatory framework of the national Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard, whilst at the same time looking forward to future regulatory requirements that are likely to emerge within the lifetime of the strategy from a future White Paper on Social Housing.

Aside from the influences from the external environment on the development of the strategy, this same strategy also reflects the objectives set out in the Hexagon Corporate Plan 2020-23 (see Appendix 1) reflecting the central role which resident's involvement plays in meeting these objectives.

1.2 This strategy runs from April 2020 until March 2023 and sets out the range of ways that residents can influence all aspects of how Hexagon delivers the housing service to residents. It has been shaped in response to suggestions coming from key stakeholders, namely the Residents Advisory Group and the Lead Board Member for Residents Involvement as well as by the key recommendations from the independent review of the Hexagon Residents Involvement service.

1.3 Hexagon has developed a range of involvement activities which are designed to take account of the different ways that residents may want to engage with us. By involving residents, we will make sure that residents' views and aspirations are heard, listened to, responded to and acted on. Our objective for embracing resident's involvement is that the residents input will be used to improve and develop our service to all residents.

1.4 This strategy is built up from the foundations of the involvement and empowerment activities already in place but with the aim to develop new ways for engaging residents so that we continuously improve on our model for involvement, particularly in response to future regulatory requirements coming as a result of a Social Housing White Paper. This strategy also acknowledges a change from the Residents Involvement Strategies which preceded it in that it seeks to embed residents involvement across the Hexagon organisation.

1.5 In delivering the strategy Hexagon will remain open and accountable to the opinions and input of residents. It is by being transparent and accountable that we are able to place a greater degree of influence and direction in the hands of residents. Residents input will be captured through a range of involvement activities that will be structured in a way to suit resident's interests, requirements and availability for engagement. In order to promote the benefits of residents input, we will use our communications channels to display a "you said – we did" feedback showing how we've responded to suggestions from residents.

1.6 This strategy will use the term "residents" to mean all those that Hexagon houses and who live in our homes. This encompasses those renting from us, shared owners, leaseholders,

and the people who live in these households. The strategy also relates to Hexagon residents who are members of a housing co-op and thereby receive the day-to-day housing service from their co-op.

- 1.7 Residents input has shaped the drafting of this strategy and we will continue working with residents to monitor the delivery of the actions under the strategy.

2.0 New areas of work

- 2.1 During the lifetime of this strategy we will build on existing involvement activities but also introduce new ones to capture residents input. We welcome new ways of engaging with residents including using initiatives not already offered under this strategy. This will include engaging with residents to find solutions to barriers to service delivery, such as problems obtaining access for property services. Being open to new approaches in this way will help strengthen and improve our framework of involvement activities.
- 2.2 We will respond to future regulatory and governance requirements arising out from the Social Housing Green Paper by reviewing and strengthening our involvement activities. We will develop this approach to ensure that scrutiny activities are fully resourced to challenge service performance, hold Hexagon to account and help improve service delivery in response to requirements emerging from a future White Paper on Social Housing.
- 2.3 We will promote engagement through new technology. This will involve using social media and other digital platforms and will be extended to existing involvement activities. Where resident's panels lend themselves to digital conferencing, then we will encourage this approach, allowing residents to participate together from within their own homes. When running residents focus groups we will offer residents the option to take part using online video technology. The use of digital engagement will also help broaden our range of engagement and widen our pool of engaged residents. We will also use digital platforms to engage with leaseholders who are under-represented within the involvement structure, to consult with and respond to the views of leaseholders.
- 2.4 One of the findings of the independent review of the Hexagon residents involvement service was that there was an over reliance on the specialist team leading to a lack of ownership of involvement outcomes elsewhere at Hexagon. In addressing this, we will widen out engagement with residents across the Hexagon organisation, and particularly with staff that have daily contact with residents. This will be facilitated through staff training on resident involvement and also staff working to individual involvement objectives. Instead of all involvement activities being co-ordinated through the Residents Involvement team, service managers will be equipped to facilitate resident engagement initiatives with support from the Residents Involvement team where required.

3.0 Aims and Objectives

- 3.1 This Strategy describes the ways in which residents have a key role in influencing the work of Hexagon. The main objective of the strategy is to improve residents' involvement further by placing greater influence on Hexagon becoming more accountable for the housing service

that we deliver. To meet this objective we will

- embed residents involvement throughout the Hexagon organisation
- ensure all residents have the opportunity to become involved and that involvement activities are accessible to all
- offer a range of involvement activities to allow residents to become engaged at a level to suit them
- ensure that residents feedback and input is captured and responded to and is utilized to shape and improve service delivery
- deliver resident-led scrutiny empowering residents to examine the Hexagon service and make recommendations on where the service can be improved
- develop new and innovative opportunities for residents to become more actively involved
- meet the requirements under the 'Tenant Involvement and Empowerment' standard and to reflect the aspirations put forward in the Social Housing Green Paper

Delivering on the main objective will help to ensure that residents have an influence in all aspects of housing provision and thereby shape better service delivery for all residents. Appendix 1 outlines how we will achieve the objectives.

3.2 Delivering on this strategy will require a step change within Hexagon. It will also empower residents to have meaningful involvement at every level of our organisation. In order to foster this, we will inform departmental work plans for those teams that provide resident-facing services to illustrate how involving residents will help meet that team's objectives. This will be shaped by the Residents Involvement team arranging residents focus groups to consult with departmental manager's when drawing up their team's work plans.

4.0 Consultation on the strategy

4.1 Consultation on this strategy has been carried out with the Residents Advisory Group, the Co-op Forum and with the Lead Board Member for Residents Involvement. The draft of this strategy has been developed in response to residents feedback and addresses their suggestions and priorities.

4.2 Whilst this strategy is being drafted, we are undertaking staff consultation to explore how residents engagement can be further embedded across Hexagon.

5.0 Involvement and Empowerment

5.1 The framework for residents involvement in Hexagon has been developed around three broad areas:

- Strategic involvement
- Residents scrutiny
- Service input

Within this framework "resident's involvement" is about empowering residents to work with

Hexagon to take part in decision making processes, influence strategies and policies, and influence and improve the delivery of housing services. “Empowerment” in this context refers to Hexagon providing sufficient good quality information to allow residents to participate and to hold their landlord to account.

- 5.2 We have developed a range of involvement activities whereby residents can take part and offer their views, opinions, suggestions, preferences and recommendations. Where residents get involved through one of our involvement activities we will commit to always respond with feedback to their suggestions and recommendations.
- 5.3 Although the Residents Involvement team provides development support to the involvement activities, most of them are resident led. That means that residents either Chair the group, set the agenda or determine their work programme, or any combination of the three. We believe that this is an important principle because it puts residents in the driving seat and lets the group become a vehicle for residents concerns and aspirations to be raised independently of Hexagon involvement.
- 5.4 The Residents Involvement team will undertake an annual recruitment campaign amongst all residents informing of the involvement activities and inviting interest to become involved. In undertaking the campaign, we will make it clear that we will only use residents contact data for the purpose of recruiting onto an involvement activity.

6.0 Residents Scrutiny

- 6.1 For some time Hexagon has had in place various scrutiny arrangements whereby residents challenge the housing performance and are empowered to make recommendations to the Board. The scrutiny activities are effective as long as Hexagon is open and transparent in the provision of performance information, and responsive to resident’s challenge of instances of weak performance. This allows residents to review the housing performance using evidence informed assessment without having to rely on personal experience.
- 6.2 The activities falling under the residents scrutiny activities are
- Performance Review Group
 - Residents Advisory Group
 - Repairs Group
 - Residents Inspection
 - Estate Grading

The Residents Advisory Group delivers scrutiny of Hexagon strategies and policies, whilst the other four provide residents scrutiny of performance delivery. The work of the scrutiny activities is described in Appendix 3 of this strategy

7.0 Sustainability

- 7.1 Hexagon is committed to achieving sustainability in all that we do, including in the maintenance of our existing homes and in the provision of services to residents. We

recognise that energy efficiency in the home is a priority for our residents because of the impact that domestic energy consumption has on the environment, and also in the managing of the rising cost of energy bills.

To assist residents in their desire to combat the climate crisis, we will provide user-friendly advice and information on the choices residents can make to improve the efficiency of their homes and which in turn will lessen the impact on the environment.

- 7.2 The Energy Champions are a group of residents who have been trained on the options around energy efficiency. The Energy Champions will attend Hexagon staged events to offer residents advice on domestic energy usage and on how and where financial savings can be made within the home. The peer-to-peer advice will help influence energy behaviour in the home and lessen the impact of domestic energy consumption on the environment. The advice will be designed to assist residents to recycle more, use energy efficiently and save money.
- 7.3 We will broaden the audience for domestic energy advice by arranging for an Energy Champion to write an article on energy saving tips in Home News. We will also publish the tips from the Energy Champions on the Hexagon website and on the Hexagon Facebook and Twitter pages.

8.0 Communications

- 8.1 We will continue to involve residents in the ways in which we communicate to the wider body of residents. The principal method of communication is Home News, the resident's quarterly magazine. The Readers Panel are a group of residents who review each issue of Home News to help ensure that key messages are delivered in effective ways and in an accessible language. The Panel also suggests articles of interest for inclusion in future editions of the magazine. Aside from the input made by residents on the Readers Panel, we will also encourage written submission from the wider readership through features such as Residents Spotlight.
- 8.2 Our Annual Report to residents will continue to be shaped by the Annual Report Group. This is a small panel of residents who work with managers to help determine the content and design of the Annual Report. This group decide on the service areas that they feel that the wider body of residents would be interested in. The group also determines the theme of the report. By determining and then reviewing the content, this group of residents helps to ensure that Hexagon produces an informative, honest and accurate annual report to residents.
- 8.3 Much of resident's engagement within Hexagon is accomplished within a meeting format. However other formats exist if only in an embryonic form. One of these formats is the use of social media. We will make innovative use of social media platforms and other digital tools which will increase the range of ways in which residents can engage with Hexagon. One area which we will explore during the lifetime of this strategy is to set up an involved resident's online forum whereby residents can share information among themselves of the work that they are doing in their chosen involvement activity.

The use of technology will not replace the standard meeting format; rather the use of digital options will supplement the regular involvement activities by engaging a wider range of residents. It will also have the added benefit that it is likely to appeal to younger residents which is a sector of resident base which is under represented among involved residents.

It is expected that during the lifetime of the strategy that certain involvement activities, such as resident's focus groups and residents panels, will migrate over to being held by video conferencing formats allowing residents to engage as a group with the service manager through digital mediums. This will take away the need for residents to attend the head office in order to take part in a resident's panel or focus group.

- 8.4 The development of social media throughout Hexagon will cut across a number of teams within the organisation. We will use our social media presence to promote our work to enhance digital inclusion amongst residents by linking in with the work of the Community Investment team around digital skills support. The Residents Involvement Team will also input into the action plan of the Hexagon Communications Working Group to ensure that key communication messages to residents are synced across a range of digital platforms that Hexagon uses.

9.0 Estates

9.1 Estate Champions

Estate Champions are residents who keep an eye out and periodically inspect the communal areas of the block or estate where they live and report any issues of concern to Hexagon. Estate Champions also submit monthly reports on the standards of communal cleaning and grounds maintenance on their estate, giving a satisfaction rating on the work carried out by estate services contractors. This feedback is valuable in helping us to monitor the quality of the work carried out by our Estate Services contractors.

9.2 Estate Events

We will hold Estate Events to which all residents from that estate and its immediate locality will be invited to attend. This will provide an opportunity for residents to meet Hexagon staff in an informal setting to and tell us about anything which is causing a problem for them or their neighbours. We will then take the issue back, look into it and respond back to the resident who raised it with an update and expected timescale for resolution.

Our approach at the Estate Event will be to listen to residents and learn more about their experiences of receiving our services. We will use what residents are telling us at the Estate Events to further improve our service.

As an activity, the Estate Events will draw in other Hexagon teams in the planning and delivery of the event, with particular involvement of the Community Investment team which will help ensure that the events are arranged to encourage community cohesion and enable neighbours to connect with each other.

9.3 Estate Grading

The Estate Graders are a small pool of residents who visit a selection of Hexagon estates and carry out a real time assessment of how the estates present themselves. The Graders give particular attention to the condition of communal cleaning (both external and internal), whether there is any dumped refuse, whether communal repairs are needed (especially for door entry systems, lifts and communal lighting) and whether the estate notice boards contain timely and relevant information.

For each estate that they visit, the estate graders will score the separate categories and then arrive at an overall score for the estate. This score will determine whether the estate is awarded a Gold, Silver or Bronze grade. We will publicise the list of grading in Home News as well as on the notice board for that particular estate.

In using their observations and team work approach, the Estate Graders provide a resident's perspective on how well our estate match up to the requirements in the Estate Services Standards.

When assessing an estate, the Estate Graders will record and report to us on a list of communal repairs and other issues that need addressing. We will take the list and turn it into an action plan for improving that estate. When the action plan has been signed off, we will display on the notice board of each estate what the Estate Graders identified for that estate and what Hexagon has done to rectify what was reported by the Graders. In this way, we will listen to what our residents as Estate Graders are telling us and will use this to deliver improvements on our estates.

We will provide specialist training in our Estate Services Standards and on expectations of how areas should be assessed to our residents who are Estate Graders.

9.4 Tenants and Residents Associations (TRA's)

We will support and recognise TRA's at the local level who work to promote the general interests of all residents on the estate. TRA's promote the priorities of local residents and we will work in partnership with them to address those issues that matter most to residents.

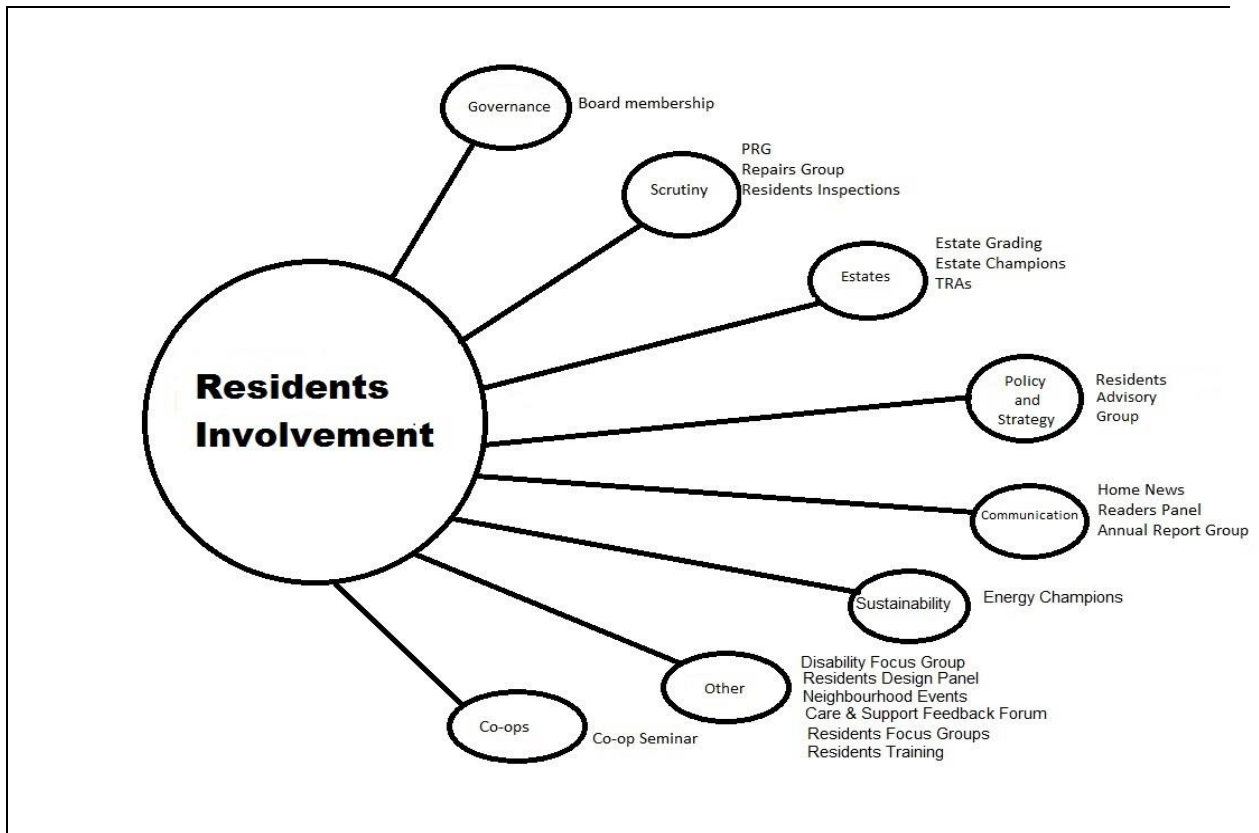
TRAs are independent of Hexagon and we have adopted a set of brief criteria for TRA's which seek formal recognition from Hexagon. The advantage for TRAs to become a recognised TRA is that Hexagon is obliged to attend TRA meetings where sufficient notice is given and also the TRA receives a small annual grant to run its affairs.

We will continue to provide support to the development of existing TRA's and also set up new TRAs where local residents request it.

10.0 Other involvement activities

- 10.1 Our approach to resident involvement allows residents to get involved in ways and at levels that suit them. We offer plenty of options for residents who want to get involved on either

specific issues or for short periods. This is illustrated by our involvement structure which offers a menu of activities for residents to get involved:



The other Involvement Strategies are outlined in Appendix 4 to this strategy

11.0 Housing Co-ops

- 11.1 Hexagon will maintain its long standing partnership with the housing co-ops. We will regularly monitor the service performance from the co-ops to ensure that they maintain their high standards and that their service does not fall below the standard of the service provided to directly managed residents. In addition, and during the lifetime of this strategy we will carry out a satisfaction survey amongst all co-op managed residents. The survey will be based on the STAR model and the findings from the survey will be used to compare against the satisfaction findings from directly managed Hexagon residents.
- 11.2 The relationship between Hexagon and the housing co-ops is governed by individual management agreements with each co-op. Both parties to the Agreement recognise that the document is badly in need of revision, and Hexagon gives a commitment to work with the co-ops to update and review the Agreement within the lifetime of this strategy
- 11.3 We will engage with the wider body of co-op managed residents by staging the annual Co-op Seminar. This will give co-op managed residents the opportunity to discuss policy related issues with Hexagon managers. In planning this event, we will continue to consult with the individual co-ops regarding the agenda of each Co-op Seminar.

11.4 The relationship between Hexagon and the housing co-ops is outlined further under Appendix 2

12.0 Training & support

12.1 We will provide support to residents aimed at enhancing their knowledge, skills and confidence to equip them to make a full contribution in their preferred involvement activity. This means that we will offer training opportunities which will meet the needs of involved residents. The training sessions on offer will be delivered by Hexagon staff or by external training providers. We will also explore running joint staff and residents training sessions as this will help break down barriers and foster the embedding of the resident involvement approach across the Hexagon organisation.

12.2 We will introduce a training programme to meet the needs of involved residents focusing on developing skills and knowledge within their preferred involvement activity. The programme will be structured around training needs identified by involved residents. The programme will also be offered to residents who are interested in becoming involved. Although focused on developing the capacity of involved residents, we will also promote the training programme in Home News

12.3 Aside from the training that Hexagon provides, we will assist residents to attend external training sessions that meet their training needs. External training sessions provides residents with an opportunity to meet with residents from other housing associations and to share and learn from their experiences together.

12.4 We will provide a system of incentives to thank residents for giving up their time to take part in involvement activities. The incentives will be provided in the form of shopping vouchers, either electronic or paper format. The incentives system is set out in the Resident's Expenses Policy, and this policy also allows for residents travel costs to be met in attending the Hexagon office to be part of an involvement activity. We will also contribute towards childcare or other carer's costs that resident's find that they incur by taking part in involvement activities.

12.5 We will provide training for residents who are involved in their co-ops and which will help improve the co-op's management of the Hexagon stock. We will actively consider suggestions for training put forward by co-ops and when putting on a training session we will ensure that the invite is offered to all of the co-ops that we work with.

12.6 We will provide an annual grant to recognised Tenants and Residents Associations to assist them in their work. The grant will be available to cover set up costs and occasional expenditure such as hiring halls for meetings and producing TRA newsletters

12.7 We in initiate an annual Involvement Recognition event. The invites for the event will be sent to existing involved residents as well as to residents who have expressed an interest in getting involved through our recruitment campaigns. The event will celebrate the achievements of involved residents and illustrate how they have influenced the Hexagon service delivery. We will also feature the achievements of involved residents through our communication channels

13.0 Expanding Resident Involvement

- 13.1 Perhaps the most valuable resource for resident's involvement is that of Hexagon staff. Therefore to ensure that staff from across the organisation is equipped to promote residents engagement and capture views of residents, we will deliver staff training on Residents Involvement. This training will cover how staff can incorporate a residents involvement approach within their own role. The staff training will be an important driver for embedding resident's involvement across the organisation because it will help foster improved communication and wider engagement on residents' views within Hexagon.
- 13.2 Staff providing resident-facing services, in particular Neighbourhood Officers and surveyors, will be given a key role in promoting opportunities for involvement in their engagement with residents. This will involve briefing staff about the range and the work of resident involvement activities.
- 13.3 Involvement will become embedded further with the Resident Involvement team expanding its joint working with the Community Investment team. This will include each team making residents who they engage with aware of the services of the other team. Along with initiatives such as Estate Events, this approach will help compliment the work of the Community Investment team around Priority Estates and sustainable communities
- 13.4 In order to free up resources within the specialist team to concentrate on involvement activities, we will relocate the monitoring of the operational performance of housing co-ops to elsewhere within the Hexagon organisation, as outlined in Appendix 2.

14.0 Resources

- 14.1 This strategy sets out clear and accessible activities for resident's involvement which will be delivered primarily by the Residents Involvement team. However it is not the aim of this strategy that all residents' engagement comes through the Residents Involvement team. Rather we will look to embed residents engagement throughout the Hexagon organisation which will mean that resident-facing teams will be empowered to liaise directly with residents that they provide a service for, supported by the Residents Involvement team where needed.
- 14.2 The effect of embedding residents engagement throughout Hexagon will have the effect of putting residents at the heart of what we do. As well as scrutinising and challenging the housing performance, we will also support residents to assess whether we are achieving value for money in delivering the housing service. Both the Performance Review Group and the Resident Inspection activities will be given opportunities to assess the value for money on the services that those activities are scrutinising.
- 14.3 Through the Residents Involvement team, Hexagon will provide support to the co-ops managing Hexagon's stock by making available advice, information and training which will assist the co-op in its work. This support will cover aspects of tenancy management and health & safety requirements and will be delivered in response to requests from co-ops.

15.0 Equality and Diversity

- 15.1 In maintaining our commitment to equality, we will work to ensure that our involved residents reflect the diversity of the wider resident profile because this will result in a stronger resident voice leading to improvements in the delivery of housing services that meet the needs of all residents.
- 15.2 We believe that it is important that involvement activities are accessible to all Hexagon residents and we will design activities to ensure that they are inclusive and accessible for all residents. We want to ensure that all residents have the opportunity for involvement, and further to identify any barriers which may hinder some residents from being involved. We will promote opportunities for involvement to not only increase the numbers but also broaden the diversity of those residents who become involved.
- 15.3 We will monitor the profile of those involved to ensure it is reflective of the profile of Hexagon residents as a whole. Each year we will report on the diversity profile of residents who have engaged with us throughout the year and compare this profile to those of the wider resident's base. This exercise will result in a diversity action plan which pinpoints sections of the Hexagon population who are under-represented in the involvement and empowerment activities, and we will target those sections when recruiting.

16.0 Regulatory compliance

- 16.1 The commitments set out in this strategy meet the current regulatory requirements for registered providers to have meaningful resident's involvement within a co-regulatory framework. In delivering on this strategy, we will be fulfilling the regulatory conditions set out in the 'Tenant Involvement and Empowerment' standard.
- 16.2 It is the expectation by many that the social housing sector will see further regulation in the coming years, with requirements around resident's involvement featuring prominently in this. The publication of "Social Housing Green Paper: a 'new deal' for social housing" in August 2018 signalled a break with long standing central government housing policy. The Green Paper heralded a change to the regulatory and governance framework which will likely emerge during the lifetime of this strategy. Pending any regulatory changes, this strategy reflects the spirit of the proposals set out in Green Paper because they help us to achieve meaningful resident's engagement and accountability to residents.
- 16.3 In preparing this strategy against the background of the Social Housing Green Paper, we will amend this strategy in the light of regulatory, compliance or best practice guidance which impacts on our delivery of our resident's involvement service. Where this strategy is amended to incorporate regulatory changes, we will consult with the Residents Advisory Group on the nature and context of the amendments.
- 16.4 We will respond positively to the National Housing Federation's "Together with Tenants" initiative which is being piloted as this strategy is drafted. We are proud that an involved Hexagon resident chairs the national Tenant Advisory Panel which monitors the pilot. We are supportive of the principles behind the Together with Tenants initiative and we look forward

to reviewing our accountability to residents in the light of the final Together with Tenants Charter once it is published by the National Housing Federation

- 16.5 The Social Housing Green Paper identified stigma as an area of concern for people living in social housing. We agree with the need to challenge negative perceptions of social housing, much of which has become ingrained within coverage in the popular press. At Hexagon we want to combat negative perceptions of social housing in everything that we do. We believe that the best way to challenge stigma is by developing a listening culture and then acting on the concerns raised by residents. It is by valuing and respecting the contributions of residents, and by making residents voices matter within Hexagon that negative perceptions of social housing becomes challenged and undermined.

17.0 Monitoring and Review

- 17.1 This strategy sets out our commitments and objectives for involving residents in influencing and improving the housing service. Attached to this strategy as Appendix 5 is an action plan showing how these commitments will be achieved. We will review the action plan each year with the Residents Advisory Group who will monitor and advise whether we are on course in meeting the commitments.
- 17.2 Each year we will carry out an impact assessment on involvement activities to evaluate what difference the activity made and whether it provided value for money. The Assessment will be reviewed by involved residents and will be given the opportunity to input their opinions on the outcomes from their involved activity.

The impact assessment will be reported to the Directors Group and the Board and will help us to ensure that involvement activities are effective and give good value. It will then be reported to Hexagon residents through the Home News website, the Hexagon webpage and through social media outlets.

- 17.3 Comments on the strategy or any interest in becoming involved in the work of Hexagon can be sent to the Residents Involvement team at getinvolved@hexagon.org.uk