

# My home, my say

**Resident  
involvement  
in decision  
making**



## An introduction to engagement

Traditional tenant engagement methods allow only the most committed residents to become involved. Until 2006, Hanover's primary method of engagement with residents was through regional forums. Whilst these are useful, they have their drawbacks. Travelling to meetings and public speaking deters the less confident residents, or those with mobility issues or hearing disabilities.

Hanover's key decision making processes ensure residents have every opportunity to contribute to Hanover's strategic direction, investment priorities and the quality of local environments and services.

Hanover has established a range of methods to involve residents. These include:

**Local Service Agreements:** We work with residents to set out the services and associated costs to be agreed and delivered at each Hanover location.

**Hanover Quality Standards:** We involve residents, along with the support of technical professionals, to determine the standard and investment priority for each property in our portfolio.

**Hanover's Greenshoots initiative:** We promote opportunities for residents to come together as a community, and seek funding to improve the places where they live.

**Intouch panel:** A panel of residents who want to be involved in decision making. Residents on the INtouch panel determine how they want to be consulted and on what topics. It is a means to make it easier for our older residents, who are dispersed nationally, to be

involved without extensive travel or the need to conform to meeting etiquette, which can be off-putting.

**Stronger Together events:** Previous events have seen us bring together over 1,200 staff and residents, at 11 locations across England, to share our direction, and consult on some critical projects – such as improving responsive repairs.

**Resident Forums and the Resident Council:** We provide more formal structures that ensure we have elected residents who attend forums on a regular basis, to challenge Hanover's approach to improving standards in retirement housing.

The aim is for the Council to have 15 members, with the primary purpose of ensuring Hanover is engaging sufficiently and effectively, to allow views of all Hanover's residents to be taken into account.

**Resident Board members:** Following an extensive recruitment process, we maintain two places on the Group Board for residents. This ensures that resident views are taken into account in Board decisions and consultation reports.

These methods have recently been cited on the National Housing Federation website (<http://www.housing.org.uk>) as an example of best practice in the areas of "Engagement and Consultation" and "Achieving Excellence Together" in the Code of Service "Delivery and Accountability". We have also conducted our STATUS survey with over 3,000 residents (carried out by ORC International), confirming that our approach to engaging residents underpins the achievement of very high overall satisfaction scores (91%), putting Hanover at the top of the ORC's own Registered Social Landlord benchmark.

We can take a look at these successful engagement methods in more detail...



## 1 Local service level agreements

Hanover is committed to consulting with residents on the services we provide. This keeps them in-line with residents' expectations. Local service level agreements ensure we are clear about the agreed services at a location, allowing residents a choice about those services, and the suitability of the location for their needs.

The agreement sets out the level of service provided by the locally based Manager of each scheme, as well as the emergency 24 hour alarm service (Hanover On Call), and service contracts that cover cleaning, gardening and local repairs.

Residents are consulted every year on the standard of work each contractor carries out, and the specifications are displayed. These contracts are tendered every two years, and the contractor is agreed by residents.

Local service agreements ensure residents have an opportunity to review services and costs on a regular basis.



## 2 Hanover Quality Standard

Whilst all of Hanover's properties already meet the Decent Homes Standard, Hanover remains committed to investing in ongoing improvements and refurbishments.

Hanover is one of the first housing organisations to begin the implementation of a new housing benchmark ahead of any government edict to do so. Hanover aims to raise standards well above the level of Decent Homes across its own portfolio, whilst setting a standard that meets contemporary expectations.

What sets Hanover apart from other providers is the consultation of residents to help decide what work is carried out to improve their homes. This is paramount in determining standards, giving residents real opportunities – with the support of technical professionals – to set out what they believe to be the investment priorities for where they live.

The key questions posed to residents include what they like about their home, shared spaces and external environment, and what they would want to change about any of these

aspects. Engagement here is mainly through a combination of postal surveys and in depth focus groups.

When our staff present the rationale and objectives of the HQS process there is always lively and constructive discussion and feedback.

Typically, the quality of bathrooms and kitchens are top of the agenda, with concerns over long replacement cycles affecting quality standards and residents' pride in their own homes. The need to provide a non-institutional feel to both the outside world and to residents internally also comes high up the list. Security, lighting and being environmentally friendly are important topics as well.

A plan is drawn up, taking into account views from finance and housing management, and the affordability of any works. We then return to the residents and explain the proposed work to be carried out.

To provide the best possible assistance to residents during the decision process, Hanover provides back up information on options, specifications and costs. Residents can then make their own informed decisions on how they want to improve their homes.



- “I love living here but I wish the building was more attractive from the outside”
- “All the lights (about 70) are left on in the corridors and hallways for 24 hours; this seems very wasteful – maybe reduce the number of lights”
- “Why can we not have an outside tap so we can look after our plants? Gardening is important to us”
- “I want a new kitchen and a new bathroom please”
- “There should be one seating area without chairs spread around the outside of the room”
- “A built in wardrobe and extra cupboard would be nice”
- “Shrubs and flowers to replace the grassy areas”
- “The entrance could be improved, for better access to cars and taxis”



### 3 Greenshoots

Greenshoots is an initiative that encourages residents to club together and “bid” for funds for a community project. There needs to be a majority of residents in agreement to show the project has global support, and residents must be able to put up 20% of the cost themselves. Hanover can then give the other 80% of funding to allow residents to implement ideas that benefit all. This gives residents the opportunity to independently change their scheme for the better. Residents often have fund raising events to obtain the 20% funding requirement.

In Camborne, Cornwall residents applied for aid for a recycling store. After receiving support from nearly all the residents, a bigger store has been approved. Residents have also bought a computer and access to the internet via Greenshoots funding, and have even received free training through Help the Aged.

Funding has also been given to St Georges Court in Addlestone, Surrey, enabling residents to improve the garden at the front of their scheme. Staff and residents designed the area, using beach cobbles in their gardens to make a low maintenance and attractive feature. Two beautiful planted pots have been installed, and the entrance is now easier to identify for visitors. The existing garden furniture has been refurbished, and the area is now a perfect place to sit and chat. Residents even got additional funding from the local property developer!



### 4

### Intouch panel

The Intouch panel was set up in 2007 as an opportunity for residents to make suggestions about Hanover services. It also serves as a sounding board for new initiatives, and gives members the choice of how they are involved. This can be through face to face interviews, telephone, email or postal surveys, and workshops or conferences.

Members can also choose the areas where they wish to contribute, such as :

- Repairs and maintenance
- Support services
- Hanover's communication
- Fair and accessible services
- Resident engagement
- Finances
- Housing services
- Customer services
- Community issues
- New housing developments



There are now more than 300 members. In the last 12 months alone, the panel has been involved in decisions on a manual for resident representatives; response repairs; pilot status survey; the images in Hanover publications; Decent Homes; Hanover On Call equipment; service charges; subletting and the transfer policy.

### Intouch in action

After a postal survey in December 2008 where 89 residents responded, the Hanover transfer policy was changed to include a third category of current Hanover residents with a genuine reason to move. This change gave their request to transfer to another property priority over other people.

Again in December 2008, a postal survey of 282 resident home owner representatives and Intouch panel members was carried out on the subletting policy. A number of residents had expressed concern that properties were remaining empty, as the current policy didn't permit them to sell, even though they may no longer be suitable for the older person living there. After receiving 145 responses, the policy was changed to allow subletting, with the same leasehold conditions (age of tenant etc).



## 5 Stronger Together events

In October 2008 Hanover held a series of events across the country, with the aim of bringing together staff and residents to hear their views. Locations were chosen that allowed the maximum attendance by reducing travel as much as possible. This resulted in a total of 1,250 people attending. Hanover was able to listen to general views from residents and get opinions and suggestions on key issues. There were also questions in an open style forum.

As a result of listening to residents at these Stronger Together events, several issues have been steered by resident involvement. One such issue related to response repairs:

Responsive repairs are often highlighted as a service priority for residents and this was again shown in our recent resident satisfaction survey. Prior to the Stronger Together events Hanover had been looking at changing the repairs process based on a single contractor. Feedback at all the events expressed concerns with this approach and many said they wanted to keep their local contractors rather than using one national contractor. As a result of this feedback it was decided to stop and rethink our approach and we are now making improvements to the current process rather than moving to a single contractor.

The Stronger Together events also helped recruit residents to the Intouch panel, with 70 residents joining as a result of these events. It's safe to say they were a real success, with 95% of attendees saying they enjoyed the event, and 91% finding them useful.

## 6 Resident Council

This group of residents aims to reflect the whole Hanover group, and includes tenants and home owners from Extra Care schemes, as well as from retirement housing in different regions of the country. The Council has the responsibility of challenging Hanover, and ensuring resident involvement in decision making. The group meets regularly with Hanover's Group Management Team, and the two resident Board members attend all meetings.

The Council has a detailed work plan covering six areas: Hanover group integration; Clarity, Classification and Quality Standards; Development; Communications and Engagement; Hanover Helps and additional Services; and finally, Finance and Performance.



Hanover staff have worked closely with residents over the last year to reform the national Residents' Council. New terms of reference have strengthened the Council's role through the 3 'i's - Influence, Involve and Improve. This places on Hanover the obligation to consider residents' views at the earliest opportunity in all the association's decisions, and ensures there are no off-limit areas for their involvement.

Over the last year, members of the Council have been involved in areas such as developing an action plan to improve Hanover's service, as a result of a resident satisfaction study. The Resident Council ensured resident involvement in the content of Hanover News editions including it is written in plain English. They have also influenced asset management, rents and service charges, finance and repairs.

## 7 Resident Forums

At every Hanover development, residents have the opportunity to elect a representative. This person attends regional forums to reflect the views of residents on proposed direction and investment priorities. Resident Forums are meetings held four times per year in each of Hanover's five regions. They bring together residents to discuss a particular topic.

Resident forums have recently been involved in the review of our service charge approach, resulting in the introduction of a fixed management fee instead of a percentage of costs. Hanover has also changed – in response to resident requests – the layout of the service charge budget. We have made it clearer and less cluttered, and also included the amounts spent in previous years to enable residents to compare costs, just as they asked.



## 8 Resident Board Members



We are very fortunate to have two residents on the Hanover Group Board – Brenda Jones and Tony Edwards. They champion the resident perspective, and really do ensure that residents' views are accounted for in making strategic decisions.

Brenda said recently: "I am passionate about helping residents. I have been a resident representative for over seven years; and on the Residents' Council for five years, working with staff on quite a number of subjects. I hope that with my understanding of the issues that affect residents I can make a difference to the Board."

## My home, my say

Hanover's work on engaging with residents is often pioneering, and always at the heart of everything we do. It is a cornerstone of our strategy to provide mixed tenure affordable housing that actively encourages independence and individuality for older people, whilst creating environments in which they aspire to live.



Since 1963, Hanover has become one of the UK's leading specialist providers of retirement housing. Today, we operate in over 170 local authority areas across England and Wales, with over 20,000 residents aged from 55 to 103 years. Hanover provides high quality mixed tenure retirement and Extra Care housing. This Insights document aims to share Hanover's learning and approach to resident engagement, and the very positive effects this has had on our decision making and delivery of services.

Hanover Housing Association – an Exempt Charity, Industrial and Provident Society No. 16324R, Housing Corporation No. L0071, Registered Office – Hanover House, 1 Bridge Close, Staines TW18 4TB.

For further information please contact:

**Write** Hanover, 1 Bridge Close,  
Staines TW18 4TB

**Call** 01784 446000

**Email** [insights@hanover.org.uk](mailto:insights@hanover.org.uk)

**Visit** [www.hanover.org.uk](http://www.hanover.org.uk)