Customer Experience Panel Service Review
Barriers to Engagement Report

Introduction

The aim of this scrutiny review was to identify the barriers that prevent residents from engaging with Hightown and in them having their say in the services that are delivered to them.

As a group we wanted to identify any particular barriers for people which may get in the way of them getting involved in the residents engagement activities that Hightown offer.

Methodology

As a group we looked at the different ways we could reach out to residents and ask them about potential barriers that may prevent them getting involved.

We initially sent out a questionnaire via a QR code and emails with an explanation of why we were asking the questions we were and what the purpose of this was.

There were 5 questions within this questionnaire which were;

- Are you aware of the following opportunities to have your voice heard?
- Would you like to get involved in any of these opportunities?
- What would stop you wanting to get involved in these opportunities?
- Would you like to have a say in how Hightown delivers its services to you?
- What is stopping you have your say?

Once we collated the data from this survey, we then interviewed key members of the Hightown operational staff to get their insight into this discussion. This took place on 7th October 2025. We asked 6 questions which were:

- How do you make sure feedback from tenants is acted upon, rather than just collected?
- What do you think stops residents having a voice and how do you know this?
- How do you balance organisational policies with the need to respect tenants voices?
- How are you increasing engagement in your role?
- How do you measure whether tenants feel their voices are being heard?

- What would you say the biggest challenge is in ensuring that all tenants feel listened to?

We used this information to then help us plan the next steps. From this we then organised workshops, due to the limited members of the group who were actively involved in this review, it was decided to offer one online meeting, in the evening, to invite residents along to talk to us.

We wanted to focus on speaking more to the residents who felt that there was no point in getting involved, that they didn't feel their voice would be heard to find out more about why they felt like this. These people were then invited along to the online meeting. An online poll was designed for them to take part in at this meeting.

From there we then collated all of the information we had acquired over the time period spent reviewing this in order for us to compile the final report.

Findings & Conclusions

The findings from the initial survey that was sent out was interesting. Hightown sent out the survey via an email and a QR code along with a letter written by members of the group to explain the purpose of this.

Out of all the number of emails sent out we received 243 responses which we found to be very positive.

Q1. Are you aware of the following opportunities to have your voice heard?

The overall consensus was that a significant number of residents knew about the different opportunities there were to get involved with Hightown and get their voices heard. They also knew about the group but this was not reflected in the numbers of new residents joining the panel. This started to get us thinking about why they did not then get involved.

Q2. Would you like to get involved with any of these opportunities?

Yes – 72 responses (34%)

I'm not sure – 72 responses (34%)

No – 68 responses (32%)

We noted it to be positive that the numbers of people who did want to get involved and those who were not sure were quite high. We also questioned whether or not we could do something to encourage the I'm not sure responses into Yes responses. Thought and discussion then took place about how this could be done.

Q3- What would stop you wanting to be involved in these opportunities?

30% of responses were nothing, I don't want to be involved, and 32% were no, which tallied up with the previous questions results.

From this data we were able to identify several barriers to engagement such as limited public transport for in-person poor connectivity.

Q4. Would you like to have your say in how Hightown delivers its services to you.

Yes – 112 responses (53%)

I'm not sure – 47 responses (22%)

No – 53 responses (25%)

This was positive to see that 53% of responses said that they would be interested in having a say.

Q5 – What is stopping you from having your say?

43% felt that I don't think my input would make a difference

28% felt that they had previously had a bad experience with Hightown

24% felt that Hightown would not listen to what I have to say.

These results were interesting and we felt that these were where we needed to do some more deeper work into why they felt like this.

We then sent out an invite and photo of ourselves via Hightown's printed newsletter to reach out to all residents as well as those people who said No to getting involved to find out more about their feelings behind this.

The meeting took place on Jan 28th at 7pm. Over 30 residents responded and registered to take part in this, sadly only 4 residents attended the meeting, 1 more joined after the meeting had finished and so Sam spoke with her and asked the poll questions.

The three poll questions that were asked were;

Q1. What stops you getting involved with Hightown and having your voice heard?

Q2. Would any of these things help you to get involved with Hightown and have your voice heard?

Q3. Which of these things if any, would you like to get involved with? (the list of opportunities were given)

Out of the 5 residents questioned they all wanted to get involved, they did not seem to have any barriers and all showed interest in some of the existing opportunities, stating whether this would be online or face to face.

These results were very positive and they were given contact details for the Resident Involvement Officer for more information about the opportunities and to get signed up as well as receive their vouchers for taking part.

From the staff surveys, we found out the following and summarised the responses as:

1. How do you make sure tenant feedback is acted upon?
Staff said they listen to feedback through surveys and everyday conversations. They follow up with residents using things like “You Said, We Did” and make sure the right teams review the feedback and make improvements.

2. What stops residents having a voice?
Staff felt that some residents may not speak up because of past negative experiences, language or confidence issues, fear of consequences (especially with ASB cases), or simply because they prefer not to get involved

3. How do you balance policies with tenant voice?
Staff explained that they follow policies but try to be flexible when residents have individual needs or vulnerabilities. They also try to manage expectations when policies create delays or limits.

4. How do you increase engagement in your role?
Staff increase engagement by using surveys, doing walkabouts, being present at events, working with partners, and reaching out directly to residents through visits and door knocking. They regularly promote ways residents can get involved.

5. How do you measure whether tenants feel heard?

Staff use surveys, complaint outcomes, post inspection feedback, event feedback and compliments to understand this. They said it is harder to measure ASB feedback because fewer people respond.

6. What is the biggest challenge in ensuring all tenants feel listened to?
Staff said the main challenges are the wide range of resident needs, low turnout at events, high expectations in ASB cases, communication issues, and the large number of complaints they receive.

Recommendations

The following five themed recommendations are being put forward to Hightown.

1. Improve Communication & Awareness

- Create and make public a clear communications plan to tell residents about all the ways they can get involved.
- Give residents regular chances to receive emails or messages directly from the panel, not just from Hightown staff.
- Use different ways to share information (email, text, posters, website, portal) and keep explanations simple.
- Share residents' stories to show the benefits of getting involved.
- Keep recruiting new people to join the group and remind them how to take part.
- Provide regular updates about changes that have happened because of panel feedback so people can see their voices make a difference.

2. Increase Accessibility & Reduce Practical Barriers

- Offer both online and in-person sessions so residents can choose what works for them.
- Provide meeting times that suit different schedules, including evenings and weekends.
- Support residents who have digital difficulties by offering help with connectivity or digital skills.

3. Build Trust & Show the Impact

- Continue using "You Said, We Did" to show how feedback leads to real action.
- Be clear about what can and cannot be changed, and explain policies in simple, easy-to-understand documents.
- Improve follow-up after events so residents feel informed, valued, and appreciated.

4. Broaden Inclusion & Reach Under-represented Groups

- Identify groups who don't usually get involved and tailor engagement activities to reach them.
- Use more informal ways to engage, such as surgeries, pop-up events, and drop-ins.
- Make it easier and more welcoming for residents to join the Customer Experience Panel and other groups.

5. Strengthen Support & Improve Insights for Resident Involvement

- Offer training and mentoring to residents who want to take part.
- Keep an up-to-date engagement database so outreach can be more personalised and effective.

Next Steps

The next step of the journey will be presenting the report back to the group in the April meeting, for the group and Hightown to agree on the recommendations for an action plan which would them be monitored by the group.

A presentation to the Board will also be completed in July.

As a panel, the aim of why we are in post is to help the continuous improvement of services offered by Hightown using our lived experience perspective. The aim of this scrutiny project was to find out what the barriers were to the low numbers of residents wanting to engage in the panel. We found that there was a lot of interest in joining this panel, a lot of residents knew what was on offer which is positive.

We have now got 3 new members join us since we held the online meeting which is fantastic.

Lessons Learnt

This review has taken a lot of work and time on behalf of us as a panel and for the staff who have been involved in supporting us. We feel the biggest lesson we have learnt is that this size of review requires commitment from us as a panel as well as from the staff. We certainly got the staff commitment but sadly the commitment from the panel did not come through so this was left to two of us to see it through from start to finish. We feel that although there was a lot of hours spent doing this review for little outcome, we have successfully

managed to recruit 3 new members which we would not have achieved without this review taking place.

Hightown is spread across a huge area of the country and so trying to organize meetings in each area was not possible but the online option seemed to work well.

We think that maybe smaller, less time consuming reviews may be more manageable that the larger ones. This has been planned into our annual agenda plan as a smaller online session focussing on a service area chosen after a performance review.

Report by Bernie Roles, Customer Experience Panel Member
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