

# Resident Involvement Impact Assessment

Sept 2020 - Aug 2021





## Introduction

Hightown Housing Association owns and manages over 7000 homes across Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire. We value the views of our residents, and recognise that involving residents in developing services is central to the way in which we develop and deliver high quality housing services.

The ongoing coronavirus pandemic, and the associated restrictions throughout the year changed the way in which we held resident involvement events, and we met with residents virtually, with the Resident Voice and Scrutiny Panel holding their quarterly meetings via Zoom, and a number of "virtual door knocks" across our estates. The lifting of restrictions during the summer of 2021 enabled us to hold some events in person, and we very much enjoyed being able to meet residents in person.



## Why get involved?

By getting involved, residents can make a difference by:

- changing the way Hightown works to improve the services provided, including setting standards
- improving the area and community they live in
- scrutinising Hightown's performance
- learning new skills, and building confidence through working with Hightown staff and other residents.

## Why is involvement important?

Resident involvement helps Hightown to continuously improve services, and gives residents a say in the management of their homes. Hearing the resident voice is central to the Government's Social Housing White Paper, "The Charter for Social Housing Residents" which was published in November 2020, and resident involvement is a key theme of the Regulator of Social Housing's consumer standards.

The value of involving residents can be demonstrated by looking back to see how residents have influenced improvements - this 'impact assessment' helps us examine what has been done and how effective it has been.

## Why produce an impact report?

We work closely with residents to measure and evaluate the difference our resident involvement opportunities has made to our services. This impact assessment report illustrates the ways in which Hightown's customers have been able to give us feedback, influence, shapes services, and have a say in the management of their homes between September 2020 and August 2021.

Members of the Residents Voice and Scrutiny Panel have considered our involvement activities and their feedback has been used to produce this report.

Residents will be able to see the impact that their involvement can have on Hightown's General Needs housing services.

Hightown will be able to evaluate areas that have benefited from resident involvement, and identify other opportunities to gain resident feedback.

It will show our partners and stakeholders the benefits of working with Hightown and our commitment to working with residents and to continuous improvement.

Our residents have looked in detail at the engagement activities held between September 2020 and August 2021 and have rated them using the assessment criteria described overleaf.

# Effectiveness

## How effective is resident involvement?

To show at a glance the level of impact made by Hightown’s various resident involvement activities we have used a star system – the more stars, then the more impact the initiative has had.

High level of impact



Low level of impact



## Are you getting value for money?

To check that we are using Hightown’s resources in the best way, we have also assessed the Value for Money each initiative offers. When organising an activity, Hightown must carefully consider what we hope to achieve, and also consider the costs and time (both of staff and residents) required. This enables us to ensure that the best services and activities are provided with the limited resources available, and in response to customer priorities and needs.

The following symbols have been used to indicate the overall Value for Money achieved, as assessed by residents. Even if the cost is high, if the outcomes and impact are high then good Value for Money can still be achieved.

Good value for money



OK value for money



Poor value for money



Don't know



## Resources

An annual budget is allocated for resident involvement initiatives (excluding staff costs). Staff working in the Housing Directorate have responsibility for promoting resident involvement, and activities are co-ordinated by a lead officer in the Housing Management team.




## Route to involvement

## What we did

## What it means to you

## Value for money / impact

<p>Quarterly Residents Voice and Scrutiny Panel meetings</p>	<p>Four Residents Voice and Scrutiny Panel meetings were held via Zoom and were well attended by a core group of regular panel members. During the year, the Panel reviewed and assessed the impact and value for money of resident involvement for the annual impact assessment. They also considered resident bids for estate improvements, and allocated the budget for the bids received. The Panel received information on the changes being brought in by the Fire Safety Act 2021 and the Building Safety Bill, which is currently going through Parliament. The Panel received a presentation on the Social Housing White Paper, which was published in November 2020. The Panel reviewed and gave feedback on the results from the Survey of Tenants and Residents (STAR survey) and the National Housing Federation's "Together With Tenants" initiative. The Panel reviewed and gave feedback on the independent review of Hightown's Financial Inclusion Service, which they had previously commissioned. The Panel assisted Hightown's Communications team with the development of the Annual Report to Residents and scrutinised Hightown's performance in key service areas.</p>	<p>The Residents Voice and Scrutiny Panel has kept abreast of current issues in the Housing sector, and had looked in detail at the draft Annual Report to Residents. Residents' views were incorporated into all of the documents that resulted from the discussions, helping Hightown to tailor services based on resident feedback.</p>	 
<p>Complaints Scrutiny Group meetings</p>	<p>The group gave feedback on complaints relating to a number of different service areas, including complaints relating to caretaking, contractors, estate management, anti-social behaviour case management, and customer service. The group gave feedback on complaints that were escalated through Hightown's complaints process and suggested ways that Hightown could improve where they felt the expectations of the complainant were unreasonably high. The group noted that complaints had risen and there had been more work on complaints handling over the year; they identified some themes in complaints that were felt to be related to the coronavirus pandemic. The group considered Hightown's approach to learning from complaints and suggested actions for staff training.</p>	<p>Suggestions and comments made by residents were taken into account for future complaints handling and lessons learned. The group also highlighted the positive impact complaints can have on developing services and improving the customer experience.</p>	 
<p>Strategic Plan working party</p>	<p>4 residents participated in a working party to discuss Hightown's draft strategic plan for the next 5 years. The plan covers all business areas for the Association, and was drafted by Hightown's Board.</p>	<p>Amendments to wording suggested by the working party were incorporated in the Strategic Plan, and were approved by the Board.</p>	 











## Route to involvement

## What we did

## What it means to you

## Value for money / impact

Virtual Door Knocking	We held virtual "Have Your Say" events, which took place over the phone and gave residents the opportunity to give feedback and make suggestions for improving different service areas. In total, 103 residents took part across 12 Hightown estates.	Comments and suggestions received during the door knocks were followed up, and residents received newsletter updates on progress. The Virtual Door Knocks were introduced as we were unable to meet residents face to face; however, they have been well received and we will continue with a programme of Virtual Door Knocks to enable us to reach out to more residents.	 
Joint Estate Inspection with Estates Champions	The Estates Champions at the following estates met with their Property Services Inspector to carry out a routine estate inspection of their estate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Woodland View, Saunderton</li> <li>• Braithwaite Court, Watford</li> <li>• Lester Road, Aylesbury</li> </ul>	The Estates Champions gained more understanding on how Hightown carries out inspections and gave feedback on the grounds maintenance contractor's performance. The Property Services Inspectors to various follow up actions after the inspections including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• arranging removal of accumulated rubbish on the estate</li> <li>• arranging removal of dumped items and sanitisation and repair of a bin store</li> <li>• cleaning of carpets and repair to a wall in an internal communal area</li> </ul>	 
Mystery Shopping programme	The ongoing programme of Mystery Shopping measures Hightown's delivery of customer service against our Customer Charter, and gathers feedback on the customer's experience when contacting us.	Feedback from a range of contacts with Hightown has been used to identify areas for improvement. Overall, positive feedback was received regarding response times and staff knowledge; a staff training need on the Right to Acquire was identified which resulted in a refresher session for the Housing team.	 
Living at Height Panel	Residents living at the 5th floor or above in Hightown's tall blocks of flats were invited to attend a meeting to give feedback and understand the experience of living at height. One resident attended and gave feedback. The RVSP members considering the impact of this activity commented that the poor attendance at the virtual meeting indicates that meetings are not an effective way of engaging with the residents.	The location of a virtual notice board was reconsidered following feedback from the attendee.	 

## Route to involvement

## What we did

## What it means to you

## Value for money / impact

<p>Grounds Maintenance consultation</p>	<p>A consultation was held with 2 residents at a small scheme where there was going to be a large increase in service charges due to an increase in grounds maintenance costs. The residents were consulted on the option for undertaking the grounds maintenance themselves instead.</p>	<p>The residents gave feedback on their preferences, which resulted in the grounds maintenance contract continuing with the higher charges.</p>	 
<p>Focus Group to review the Neighbourhood Management Policy</p>	<p>4 residents gave feedback over the telephone on the review of Hightown's Neighbourhood Management Policy.</p>	<p>Amendments suggested by the residents were incorporated in the policy review, which was approved by Hightown's Directors.</p>	 
<p>Review of letters</p>	<p>1 resident assisted the Income Recovery team to review the letters Hightown send when tenants have rent arrears.</p>	<p>The resident gave feedback on suggested changes to the letters sent by the income recovery team. The letters are due to be launched in the coming year.</p>	 
<p>Resident Involvement survey</p>	<p>6 residents responded to a survey which was sent to all general needs tenants to understand their priorities for resident involvement to support Hightown's review of the Resident Involvement Strategy.</p>	<p>Resident priorities were considered in the development of Hightown's new Resident Involvement Strategy.</p>	 
<p>Summer Events</p>	<p>During the lifting of coronavirus restrictions in the summer, Hightown hosted several summer events focused on gaining feedback on the draft Resident Involvement Strategy. Each event also had an environmental sustainability theme. Events took place at 6 Hightown estates, and over 162 residents attended in total. The events were held at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kite Way, Luton</li> <li>• Charlotte Close, Berkhamsted</li> <li>• Goldfinch House, Watford</li> <li>• Manor House Close, Aylesbury</li> <li>• The Cornfields, Hemel Hempstead</li> <li>• Oysterfields, St Albans</li> </ul>	<p>Residents had the opportunity to meet Hightown staff and Board members and partner agencies including the Police, Fire Service, Waste Management Services, Local Authority representatives and local Councillors. Resident gave feedback on Hightown's services and resident involvement opportunities, which was used in the development of Hightown's new Resident Involvement Strategy, which was later approved by Hightown's Board. Hightown staff also addressed tenancy and estate queries raised by attendees.</p>	 