



Metropolitan Housing Partnership's National Residents Group One-to-One Interviews 2009

**Francis Brazil
Resident Involvement Strategy Manager**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i> _____	3
<i>Recommendations</i> _____	3
<i>State of Play</i> _____	3
<i>Methodology</i> _____	4
<i>The Interviews</i> _____	4
NRG members: _____	4
Pre-amble: _____	4
Diversity _____	4
Questions and Answers: _____	5
<i>'How was it for you' analysis</i> _____	10
<i>Development Training Needs</i> _____	11
Knowledge _____	11
Being an NRG member _____	12
'Could you explain to others the role of the NRG?' _____	12
In your role as an NRG member, do you feel you can _____	12
Involvement with the NRG _____	13
Conclusion of development needs _____	14
<i>Conclusion</i> _____	15

Introduction

This report is written by the Resident Involvement Strategy Manager (RISM) and gives a qualitative analysis of what the National Residents Group (NRG) feels about their resident involvement input, how they are supported and the outcomes. It contains quantitative results on how they felt their input made and a 'training needs analysis' section taken from their Development programme. It will help Metropolitan Housing Partnership (MHP) plan its partnership working with the group and what direction to continue its development. The report will give guidance to the NRG on its development programme and how it feels it should develop.

Recommendations

1. The NRG remains a very important partner within MHP and will continue to feed a resident perspective on the Tenant Services Authority's proposals for regulation and resident involvement;
2. The group with the RISM will plan the 2009/10 Development programme based on findings from this report and implement throughout the year;
3. The group will continue to work throughout the year on interpersonal relationships, how group's work and group processes;
4. Members will develop their 'themed' roles further and take responsibility for setting up mechanisms to improve on outcomes;
5. The RISM will continue delegating responsibility for the group's expenditure to the group and work with the Treasurer to achieve this;
6. The group will actively seek to be involved in the development of the National Tenant Voice and seek roles in other outside groups.

Under each area of questioning there will be further detailed recommendations related to the above.

State of Play

A new group was selected by member organisations resident involvement structures in September 2008. Out of a possible 16 members, 12 attend the group regularly and 9 responded to this exercise. The group first met in October and began the first year of their development programme at the same time. The programme was agreed by the previous group from recommendations from last years 1-2-1's.

The NRG has turned a corner in how it views itself and its place within MHP. There is much more confidence about being able to achieve meaningful outcomes in resident involvement and working with MHP staff. Individuals are much more assured about the changes they make and have transferred this into to the group working well together. Throughout MHP staff are much more willing to work with the NRG and are well aware of a difference in the level of knowledge and commitment. The group will work hard to continue this transformation.

For 2009/10 the group will develop year 2 of their 'Development' programme. This will build on last year's successful sessions and will include 2 away week ends in Trafford Hall. The group will continue to build on its role and individuals will use their experience of last year to increase their successes this year.

Methodology

The RISM undertook one-to-one interviews with 9 members of the NRG. All interviewed members were allowed to reply for as long as they wished on questions 1 to 5 and were able to amend their responses by e-mail. Members then scored the group and its activities on 4 questions saying how well they inputted and how they felt things had changed (see page 10). The final section is a 'training needs analysis' self-scoring questionnaire (see page 11) which were supplied as part of their Development programme. Detailed answers are stored separately and are confidential. The interviews were undertaken from 02 April to 26 May 2009.

The questions are practically the same as those asked by the RISM last year, however with some relevant additional ones. The report (2008) produced from the 2007 interviews will be used as a comparison.

The Interviews

NRG members:

The nine members who had direct interviews were Michael Barron, Ken Armstrong (02/04/09), Elspeth Anderson, Stephanie Mathias, Terry Cutis (09/04/09), June Thompson, Alan Jones (21/04), Daniel Happi, Mary Burt and Anne Travers (26/05/09).

Pre-amble:

All members gave their names, where their membership route was from, other groups they belonged to and what was their current theme. There are 3 London members, 1 of whom is a service user and 2 are from the Regional Resident Panel. 2 regeneration members, one from Roundsaw and one from St Martins, There are 2 members from Clapham Park Homes and 2 from Granta. Each member must report backwards and forwards from their local group on NRG business. Membership length was from 6 months to over 4 years. Five members were reselected from last year's group and seven are new, all are serving a 2 year term to September 2010. Members list 29 other groups that they are involved with.

Diversity

Nine members gave replies at their 09 May 2009 meeting to all or some of the following:

Age: 41-50 = 1, 51-60 = 3 and Over 60 = 5
Gender: Male = 5 and Female = 4
Sexual orientation: Bisexual = 1 and Straight = 8
Disability: Yes = 5 and No = 4
Religion: None =1, Christian = 4, Jewish= 1, and Other = 1
Ethnicity: White British = 6, and Caribbean = 1

Questions and Answers:

A summary of the 2008 response will be in the box below each answer and then proposals from the RISM for improvement in 2009

1) The National Residents Group

a) How do you think NRG meetings are going?

Members felt overall that the meetings were going well although some felt that not all members are taking enough interest and find it hard to refrain from bringing up personal issues. There was also some concern about numbers attending meetings.

Summary 2008

Members were critical of the performance at meetings and that they were not running smoothly. However, a number felt that things had improved on the previous year.

Solution 2009

- There will be a social event in September and 2 of the training sessions are away so the group will bond better;
- The development training will involve further work on group processes.

b) Do you think the NRG is making progress?

Overwhelmingly members felt that the group had improved quite a lot and a lot felt the development training had worked really well. There were two comments about 1 or 2 members not knowing their role.

Summary 2008

There was a mixed response with some saying it had while others felt it had not.

Solution 2009:

- The 2009 development training will help members solidify their roles.

c) Do you have any suggestions for improvements?

Practically all felt that the group needs to take advantage of its situation and use the development training to their advantage. A couple felt that there was some rudeness at meetings and this needed to be overcome and a number asked for another social event so they could get to know everyone better.

Summary 2008:

There were a lot of suggestions, in particular remaining independent with a strong link to the manager. They all felt that they needed to improve on communications with other residents.

Solution 2009:

- There is a social event planned for September;
- We will continue to invite senior managers to meeting in order for the NRG to get their message across.

2) MHP and the member organisations

a) Do you feel that the NRG and MHP work well together?

The majority of members felt that things had improved considerably and there is a high level of respect for the group. Some felt that this needed to be improved on by more junior staff.

Not asked in 2008.

Solution 2009:

- The NRG to continually push their credentials;
- More staff will get better information on the NRG through the e-learning modules;
- A further Meet and Greet with key staff will be held in July 2009.

b) Are the member organisations aware what the NRG do?

Most members felt that this needed to be improved on. Some also felt that the member organisations do not care what the NRG does and do not want to work with them.

Not asked in 2008

Solution 2009:

- The NRG will continue to work constructively with the member organisation;
- The NRG will continue their links with local resident involvement structures and work with the member organisations in this way.

c) Are there any issues you would like to comment on?

Most members felt that MHP let itself down on communications and did not inform residents enough. A number also felt that some staff within MHP do not want to work with residents, although a number also felt that things had improved greatly.

Not asked in 2008

Solution 2009:

- Mary Dowling, Head of Communications, will attend the Meet and Greet on 02 July to discuss the issue of 'Everyone' and how things will improve;
- The NRG will be professional acting with staff and battle its corner for residents constructively;
- Staff will continue to receive training on resident involvement and at some stage in the year will have access to the new e-learning modules.

3) The Themes

a) How do you think your theme(s) is going/ is it making progress?

The portfolios have changed in October 2008 to 'themes'. Members do not have a number of services and mostly have one to concentrate on.

Members felt very confident with the new system and the vast majority felt that they were changing things and working well with staff.

Summary 2008:

Generally portfolios were going well, however there was some confusion about roles. Some NRG members were very active while others felt everything should be handed to them.

Solution 2009:

- To continue to work as is and monitor performance and what changes because of involvement in any particular theme;
- Individuals will ensure that they are creating mechanisms for their themes that work and are recording them on the 'job description'.

b) What have you changed to make your role more efficient i.e. set up a sub-group, get relevant staff involved?

Most members did not identify that they had changed anything with majority of these happy with the way things are. For the minority suggestions were made about what could be done to make things better.

Not asked in 2008

Solution 2009

- Stephanie to set up a resident group involved in communications and newsletters to help guide her work from a resident perspective;
- All members to make sure that they are changing the role to suit.

c) What do you think of the information and support you are getting from staff for your theme(s)?

Information and support from staff has improved dramatically and all felt that this will improve more. Staff are working a lot better with the NRG and are becoming aware of their important role.

Summary 2008:

There was mixed response although it was clear that members did not identify most of the support they received.

Solution 2009:

- A Meet and Greet will be held again in July 2009 and this will help bond the group and staff more.

4) Personal Issues

a) Is the current workload of the NRG and the frequency of NRG meetings manageable for you?

All nine members felt that they were able to cope. However a number wanted more information and a number less.

Summary 2008:

All interviewed members said yes to this question.

Solution 2009:

- Members continue their development programme and become better at time management.

b) Are you happy with the location of NRG meetings?

All were happy with London and Friends Meeting House although most did not mind travelling to Milton Keynes if needed. One was very happy with 1 day meetings.

Summary 2008:

A clear majority wanted to continue with Milton Keynes.

Solution 2009:

- Venues have been decided to the end of the year.

c) What do you think of the quality of support you are receiving from the Resident Involvement strategy Manager and what extra help do you need?

All felt that they got good support from the RISM and help was there any time it was needed.

Summary 2008:

Most felt that they got good support and help.

Solution 2008:

- The RSIM continues to work with the group and meet individuals to discuss issues where required.

5) Training Issues

a) Do you think you as an individual could benefit from any other training to support your role on the NRG and your theme?

- Laws on housing, including the Housing Act 2008.
 - Computers/IT
 - Chairing skills
 - CIH level 3
 - TSA
- The information contained above will be used to help write up an annual training programme for the NRG.

Training completed since Mar 08 - prior to this in the business plan	Member
General e-mail and internet	SM
Money Matter	SM
Writing skills with NRG	JT, AT, DH, MB
CIH level 2	AT, Michael B, KA

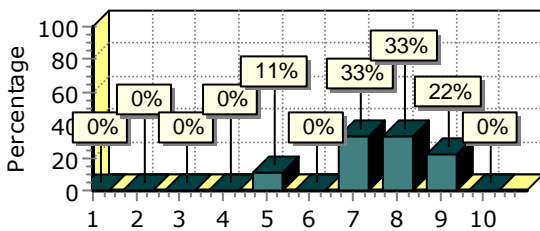
6) Other miscellaneous issues:

Most felt that the group works well together, however look forward to another social event. One felt that members needed to be more dependable.

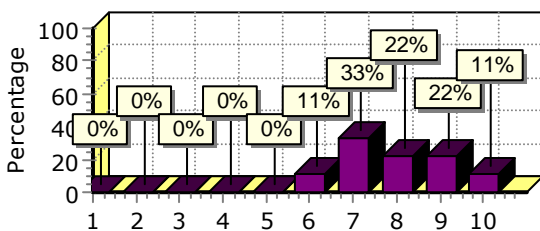
‘How was it for you’ analysis

The group was asked to mark themselves (1 poor – 10 excellent) on how they felt they contributed and how things would change throughout their term on the NRG.

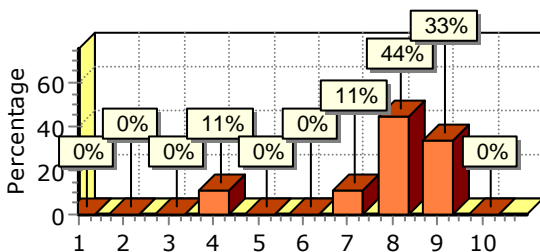
How well is the NRG meeting your expectations?



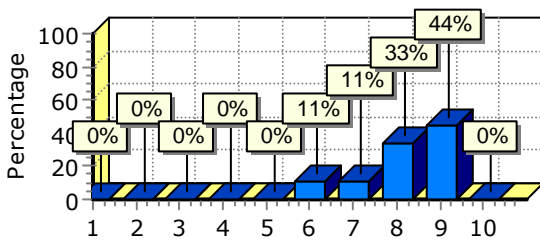
How satisfied are you with the way the NRG is organised and conducted?



How well are your views listened to in the NRG?



How confident are you that things change with your involvement in the NRG?



Development Training Needs

All members received a skills assessment form to complete at the start of the development training programme run by Engage Associates in October 2008. Members were asked to complete the same form at the end of the programme in May to see if skills and knowledge had improved since undertaking the programme.

Nine completed forms were received from NRG members in October and nine in May. All members did not complete all sections of the form.

Knowledge

Members were asked to complete the following question

‘Thinking about the topics below, can you tell us what you feel you currently know about the subject (please tick).’

Results in the grid show responses in October against the new assessment in May. The numbers in the grid indicate the number of responses from members.

	Nothing		A little		Good knowledge		Excellent knowledge	
	Oct	May	Oct	May	Oct	May	Oct	May
Group structures	4	0	2	1	2	7	0	1
The role of Board Members	1	0	6	2	1	6	0	1
Data protection	0	0	5	3	2	2	0	3
The Housing and Regeneration Act	6	0	2	7	0	1	1	1
Housing	6	1	4	3	0	4	0	1

Inspection								
Housing regulation	7	0	1	5	0	3	0	1
Delivery of a Resident Involvement service	6	0	3	3	0	5	0	1
Housing Finance	6	0	2	6	1	2	0	1
Total	36	1	25	30	6	30	1	10

From the assessment we can see that members feel their knowledge has improved in all areas, with only member reporting they know nothing on the topic of housing inspection.

The results show that NRG members have a clearer understanding of group structures and the role of the board, which is vital to their role on the NRG. Understanding of inspection, regulation and housing finance has also increased.

Being an NRG member

Members were asked to complete the following question.

‘Could you explain to others the role of the NRG?’

All nine respondents felt they could explain their role to others. Previously 5 members answered yes, 4 answered no. This demonstrates that members are now much clearer about what the NRG is there to do.

Members were asked the following question to explore how they currently feel about their role as an NRG member.

In your role as an NRG member, do you feel you can

	Yes		No		Sometimes	
	Oct	May	Oct	May	Oct	May
Effectively make your point	7	9	0	0	2	0
Understand the role of the chair	9	9	0	0	0	0
Present and explain things to groups of people	6	6	0	0	3	3
Deal with disagreement	7	7	0	0	2	2
Write easy to read reports	6	5	0	0	2	4
Make sure decisions get made	6	7	0	0	2	1

Understand and evaluate written reports	6	8	0	0	3	1
Understand and evaluate key performance indicators	4	5	1	0	4	4
Understand Financial Information	3	6	0	0	6	3

The numbers in the grid indicate the number of responses from members.

There were no significant changes as to how members felt about their role. Understanding of financial information is an area where members have improved with the numbers of members who understand this information doubling to six.

Involvement with the NRG

Members were asked what skills they thought they had strengthened during the development programme. A range of comments were received, these are detailed below

- ‘Learning about my specialist themes. ASB and community. Becoming aware of how everything fits together.’
- ‘My knowledge of housing and tenant involvement.’
- ‘Confidence’
- ‘Better understanding about housing association or social housing in terms of landlord aims. Working as a team with other members of the group in terms of providing better services to residents.’
- ‘Understanding of MHP and MHT structures.’
- ‘Used to working on my own, learnt to be part of a group. Improved my writing skills. Deeper knowledge of housing law.’
- ‘Knowledge.’
- ‘I feel better at talking to and working with staff. I feel easier speaking my mind and also offering my opinion. Before I would hold back, listen, watch and not question what was said or done.’

Members considered what information and support they felt they needed to be effective. Last time we did the assessment members noted that they needed to understand clearly the role of the NRG and that information should be provided to give clarity on this. In the May assessment there are no such issues with members focusing on their continued development. Comments included:

- ‘Guidance for MHT managers and current information.’
- ‘Continued training in key housing policies.’
- ‘To be informed on all new regulations regarding housing issues.’
- ‘Carry on with training and more explanations.’
- ‘Financial structure.’
- ‘To be given correct information.’
- ‘..... Training to be informed about housing.’

- 'Get connected to the right people and ask the right questions.'
- 'Computer skills (I am accessing one at my Landlords)'

In October when members were asked what skills NRG members required emphasis was placed on communication skills – particularly listening to others. This is largely reflected in the comments from the May assessment; however there is more emphasis on working together.

- 'Above all tact and diplomacy! Be prepared to take on any advice given by the professionals and perhaps slightly modify to suit the situation.'
- 'Good knowledge in housing, finance, resident involvement.'
- 'Communication, dedication.'
- 'Team working skills.'
- 'More training.'
- 'To be able to listen and then pass the knowledge on and to understand the information given.'
- 'Communication, commitment, committee skills, confidence.'
- 'I think we need to keep more up to date and in touch with each other as to how we are doing and what is going on. I still feel we are a group of strangers in many ways.'

Members considered what information and support they felt NRG members needed. Again the need for further training and being kept up to date on issues were key areas raised.

- 'Access to up to date information.'
- 'Changes to housing regulations, training.'
- 'Advice from MHP.'
- 'Information about housing sector structure, tenant needs.'
- 'Readers would be nice!'
- 'To be kept up to date.'
- 'IT, communication skills, encouragement.'
- 'I feel the way we get our information is good. I find some members of staff are more helpful and interested than others in what the NRG and resident groups are doing.'

Conclusion of development needs

The results of the skills assessment show a number of key areas where NRG members feel they have improved their skills and knowledge, these include:

- A better understanding of the NRG and it's role
- Improved understanding of MHP and of social housing in general, particularly with regard to inspection, regulation and finance

- Confidence to contribute at meetings
- Working in a group

Effective communication between the NRG and MHP is seen as vital and communication is a theme that is repeated throughout the skills assessment. Encouragingly NRG members are now focused on developing their skills further and working better together, which demonstrates they have clarity of purpose and want to be effective in their role.

In terms of training in the future members have identified a clear need to be kept up to date, both on internal issues as well as more widely with social housing in general. It is likely that they will need further information on the TSA and the HCA as their roles develop as well as team working and communication.

Conclusion

The group has taken the right direction in the last year to increase their capacity and ensure their continuing involvement at a high level in MHP. The findings identified in this report for the next year of the development programme will guide them on what structure and content it should have as well as ensuring the group continue to work well together. I am looking forward to helping the group implement this.

Francis Brazil - RISM