HACT

NED Network

Bi-weekly Mondays
16:00 - 17:00

Briefing Notes

UK Housing Data Standards:
The role of boards in a sector
wide data governance
strategy

PlaceShapers
Together we help communities thrive

Anthony Collins
solicitors

Adecco

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Introduction

Following the recent recommendations in the [Better Social Housing Review](#) (BSHR), HACT Managing Director, Jacqui Bateson and Digital Lead, Michael McLaughlin led the session to explain what Boards need to know about the UK Housing Data Standards and discuss the importance of the standards in mitigating risk and making most of opportunities.

This session followed on from the HACT NED Network session on 16th January 2023 with Helen Baker as Chair of the Panel for the BSHR. It reflected recommendation 2 that housing associations should work together to conduct and publish a thorough audit of all social housing in England and do so by all adopting and applying the new HACT UK Housing Data Standards as a common way of reporting.

1. **Understanding the confidence in the data you have presented to you as a board.**

   There was a discussion about whether boards are confident about the data which they have been presented with.

   ■ Some organisations felt confident of their information and look at 3 years' worth of data.

   ■ Some mentioned there are cases with the RSH regarding issues with poor data management and these mainly stem from organisations not having/maintaining accurate records.

   ■ When looking at viability standard downgrades, whilst data is not a sole factor in the grading, it is an

underlying point. There is a challenge ensuring that data is correct.

- What is meant by 'data'? There is so much that it can cover. Organisations have a strong grip on the data they want to see but there are worries about the unknowns. What would be classed as critical data besides stock condition? Is there other data that we should be thinking about?

- Some organisations are confident in the data that has been presented at board level but some question whether it includes the right data. Boards should also take an interest in the operational data/core delivery data. Operational points are coming to board level more often and the Regulator is encouraging this. The pandemic showed that it is useful to have Boards aware of operational data.

2. Strategic outlook

From a strategic standpoint, housing associations should consider the data sets that are being received. Consideration should be made regarding how KPIs can be tailored around data sets and what information is being collected. A challenge that is being faced currently is quality of the data. Moving forward, there should be a cohesive approach to what data is collected and how it is collected.

3. Why does data matter?

- How you interpret performance? Going back to White Paper, it states that information should be transparent and insightful. Organisations need to understand what they want the data to be telling them. In order to improve the ability to make decisions, we need to ask for an increased level of data.

- Data has to be of good quality and consistency. This has been seen in the Decent Homes standards returns.

- There is so much technology and data out there now. Engaging in data in a different way which can improve services and help manage costs.

- As stated in the BSHR, housing associations should work together to create a collaborative model to get the right data. Looking to see what they could do with full data sets. HACT worked with Microsoft and found that the data quality was so varied that they could not get reliable results. Biggest challenge

is the lack of confidence in driving change. Hackitt Review indicated that the sector needed better data governance in the context of building safety.

- There is a changing regulatory context which demonstrates a further focus on data – e.g. Social Housing White Paper, Customer Voice, Tenant satisfaction, Net Zero Carbon and Sustainability, ESG reporting, Golden Thread reporting on buildings.

- Key elements of data: need to have constancy in how we express data so that everyone understands it on the same level. This includes the board, employees, the Regulator and suppliers.

- Data led decision making: organisations should interpret the data standards in the full facet of data governance. This is about quality and assurance in the data collected.

- Benefits of the Standards:

    - A generic benefit would be that it would lead to better efficiencies. Things such as legacy software systems and mergers of HAs means that the integrity of data gets poorer over time. As well as this, people then develop their own work arounds for collecting and collating data. Creating a standardised method in data collection would avoid these issues and retain data integrity.

    - Specific benefits include creating accurate data for handovers, measuring performance becomes easier, organisations get a complete and consistent picture with aligns with other organisations in the sector. It can also lead to better engagement with supply chains, benchmarking and collaborations for the organisation. Opportunity to get ahead of the curve before it becomes a requirement

- Objective is right, but some feel that achieving the objective is worrying. People struggling with different systems within an organisation still have issues with common standards; it seems difficult to have a common standard across the sector. Easier to apply data standards rather than own data model. Investment in time and use case, it is robust and provides good opportunities. We do not have to think about creating a standard it is about the willingness to take on the standard. It is a large job, but standards are created in a modular way and can be implement in stages

- A risk that becomes evident is if some organisations put a disproportionate amount of effort in perfect data collection. It could create unnecessary doubts in the data and this lack of confidence can push decision making further down the road. Organisations should be mindful of the level of risk that they can accept with the gaps in the data. There is a question of how organisations make decisions in the meantime. It is not something that can be done overnight without resources. The Data Standards worries are less about the intricacies and instead focus on having a minimum level of standard and create a fit for purpose service based on the data you have.

- Interested in forward planning usage of data. Data will be benchmarked and wondering about the forward application. It raises a question of whether organisations want to be compared to one another. If the sector is coming together then it is up to the sector about what it wants to do with that data and it could be used in different ways. Ultimately, it is for the sector to use as it sees fit but there should be a degree of maturity from a benchmarking perspective.

- It will be good to understand what the minimum standard of data is to be captured. There is also a question about what does information governance mean from an operational perspective. If there are set definitions, it makes information governance easier to follow. This would ensure that people are skilled on the same framework across the sector.

- There is a question as to whether the sector will get the software houses to adopt their required practices. Information is captured by software suppliers for 'bespoke' data. The more organisations that use a standardised position and require this in their procurement for software, it will make matters more effective and cost effective and break the hold that software providers currently have. We are beginning to see the software suppliers having to adapt to the practices.

- Interoperability will also be a big factor. There needs to be the ability for organisations to share data e.g. with retrofits etc. The Hackitt Review said that we cannot yet rely on the data that organisations have on hand.

4. How does this sit with the Better Social Housing Review?

- Many organisations are internally focussed and, in order to adopt common standards across the sector and capture the efficiency and other benefits on offer, it is important for hosing associations to focus on the benefits for everyone. This requires an externally focussed viewpoint that agrees on the benefits for everyone. The financial benefits then to an individual organisation will be secondary, once everyone agrees adopting common data standards will benefit everyone. The main challenge facing the sector is getting everyone on board to follow the Data Standards.

- It is beneficial to be having the conversation from a strategic perspective and discussing whether benchmarking should be viewed as an important factor.

More information on the UK Housing Data Standards

- You can learn more and download the UK Housing Data standards [here](#)
- Read Andrew van Doorn, HACT Chief Executive, response to the Better Social Housing Review [here](#)

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Register for our next session

Holding onto optimism during times of extreme pressure

Monday 13 February: 16:00 - 17:00

The social housing landlords and society as a whole is under extreme and mounting pressure. The agenda of Boards is increasing in both complexity and intensity as we grapple with the transformation needed to deliver greater tenant involvement, building and fire safety, Net Zero, development, digitisation and community impact. This all during a time when we face considerable workforce challenges, a Cost of Living crisis and the melting down of the NHS and social care.

Within this storm is the need for all Board and each NED to hold both optimism and hope for our organisations, communities and each other.

Speaker: Heather Thomas, Chair of Croydon Churches Housing Association and CEO of Sapphire Independent Housing

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