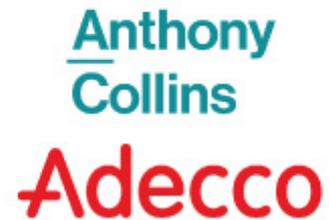




## What does it mean to be resident-led?



Monday 27 February 2023

### Introduction

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Chaired by Sarah Patrice, from Anthony Collins Solicitors, the session was led by Hattie Llewelyn-Davies Chair of [Eastlight Community Homes](#) (“ECH”) and her colleague Michelle Baker a Board member, tenant, & chair of the Customer Involvement Committee (also ECH) talking about What does it mean to be resident-led?

### What does it mean to be resident-led?

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They shared their thoughts and experiences including information on their [All In](#) Programme engaging individuals to be involved in tackling issues within their communities.

The presentation slides are available to download [here](#) and started with the initial commentary by Emma Palmer, ECH CEO taken from the Campbell Tickell brief 2.23.

Hattie explained that ECH is one of the largest Gateway housing associations ensuring accountability to residents and the wider community, with a huge membership that they have made work, to allow accountability and engagement. They were previously told that you couldn’t merge Gateways, but you can! It all began with resident scrutiny committee who were engaged from the outset - they changed priorities – influenced new homes, green agenda, cost in use, commitment to diversity – completely revised the

business plan! One of the most important committees now being the Customer Influence Committee (“CIC/ the Committee”) where there is paid membership and the same expectations on those members as every other ECH committee. This is not the only space for residents, ECH do also have residents on the Board. It’s not all plain sailing and not everyone agrees all the time, but the scrutiny and engagement is real.

Michelle explained how she came through the merger ensuring residents are represented; organisations need a diverse group of engaged tenants.

How do you do this? Rip up the rule book on recruiting! To engage different people Michelle explained you have to do things differently, they moved away from questions about housing and housing knowledge ‘what do you know about the White Paper’ or ‘Tenant Satisfaction Measures’ etc explaining that you can’t expect tenants to be housing experts from the get – go. This was simplified into 1) why do you want the job and 2) what are you going to bring? Taking down barriers and making this accessible to all. They also advertised in different ways - multimedia promotion, TikTok videos and a text out to all customers which had a huge impact, much bigger than anticipated. They held Q&A sessions being mindful that people don’t know what it’s like to be part of their housing association, what it means to be involved and assurance that they belong there.

How do you get people to represent? Celebrate everything! Michelle explained they did a lot of publicity around disability and 75% of people who applied declared a disability; a direct correlation between what you shout about and those that engage. Repairs teams know the residents as they are on the ground, so they shared intel which enabled Michelle and colleagues to pursue individuals identified, to engage. Michelle stating a clear message is for organisations to get out to the people, not sit back and wait for them to come to you.

Michelle stated the most important things to get from your tenants is excitement and drive – the rest you can teach them! ECH then had to think how to create this space as usually people in housing, are already in the sector. So they created mentors for Board members which have proven really helpful to build confidence which is often the biggest barrier. This recruitment then fed into “All In”.

“All In” was explained and how a selection of tenants work with and solve problems within community – if you can trigger that spark – they can grow, develop and in time, lead the organisation. Showing individuals what housing is about, making it exciting, Michelle making clear it always has to be exciting on housing and non-housing, using key relevant issues such as Pride, working with Purple re disabilities. All part of a long-term plan including the “tenant take home” training, up-skilling people to feed into Committee – then on to broader committees and board members. Resident Academy will train people and build succession and engagement. Not always plain sailing in the CIC as they do have to scrutinise and be trusted to, but its working – the Committee and individuals on it have focus areas to ensure that people can fulfil a role and well, enabling some organic growth making ECH truly resident led.

## Questions

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### **What got Michelle interested in first place? (How do you trigger that enthusiasm?)**

Michelle explained that she is very passionate about disability and thought ‘this is something I could do, this feeds into her love around changing people’s lives’ but she didn’t get the Board role! Instead, she put time and investment in the CIC and this started the idea to ‘grow your own tenants’ taking approximately 6 months to develop into a good Board Member.

### **What are the things that NEDs need to let go of, in order to really enable Resident-Led Boards to take off?**

Hattie noted that it can be very painful at times - leaving Michelle and the CIC to it can be terrifying on occasions! Hattie explained ECH need to ensure CIC is equipped to hold the organisation to account. They have had to learn new ways of doing things, understanding how talented their tenants are the most important thing being to develop tenants, learning new ways of doing things and ways of working together.

### **Succession and building this in, how does this work?**

Hattie confirmed that they have thrown some bits of governance manuals aside e.g. gone back to 9 year

board term to allow tenants to develop as 6 years just isn't quite long enough. The National Housing Federation (NHF) and Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) accepted and understood why they are doing this – not stepping too many steps ahead at once, getting the partnership right. Michelle adding that they are good at understanding how talented their tenants are and each bringing a different skills to the Board. They have recruited a diverse group with really great skills across a range of sectors and professions which are transferable. Removing the stereotypes and accessing the skills that tenants have, has been key here.

### **How can housing associations embed the tenant voice more?**

Noting that ECH also have tenants on the Board, looking at longevity and how do they embed it – leading people and places. ECH are not describing structures to do this, but energising people. ECH acknowledged their challenge is that good enthusiastic people keep coming through and sometimes you lose them – but how do you keep and retain individuals when long boring meetings take place and huge board packs are received (and off-putting for all!)?

Michelle explained that they have changed this up. The CIC has asked for key things to be reported on one page, not 20, meaning less time is spent reading and more time having active conversations around the table with the knowledge that individuals on the CIC have deeper knowledge also. Hattie also stated this has had impact on Board papers too which are much lighter paper wise as a result.

Also to be remembered that ECH was created with tenants from get go, there is a real sense of ownership and some of those individuals are still with ECH today. There has been real growth, development and capacity by the tenants to hold the organisation to account.

### **How or what support has been provided to enable ECH to function effectively as a Board?**

Michelle confirmed that the CIC and she has to reassure the Board at times and they know sometimes, the Board are not convinced which can be challenging. But all individuals on the Committee have an area to lead on and do a deep dive once a month, at least one person always knows what is going on behind the scenes. All CIC members commit to 15 hours per month. Pure attendance at meetings won't help, ECH experience is that it has the opposite effect – ECH need to know what's going on and the Committee

need to function really well and know what's going on, tenants and staff work together which also builds good strong relationships between them. This then has knock on impact for the Board and all through the organisation – this is fundamental.

Support provided to Board and Committee members includes mentors, induction, training and ECH are stepping this up for the whole Board at present. Hattie explained that she is doing a post graduate diploma in strategic housing, demonstrating commitment from Board level also, noting the announcement that day for all housing staff to be professionals. Gently building and developing people who are engaged, empowering them and having one area to focus on seems to make this more palatable and allows ECH to recruit to fill gaps identified. The requirement of 15 hours per month and remuneration is made clear to those interested; this fits the time input required and quite a lot of Committee members like to be paid – there are clear expectations and not just to turn up to meetings. This is not however a cheap option. ECH are paying more people to be involved in governance than if they were a 7-person Board – they have a Board of 12, plus 7 CIC members, not only remunerating for performing the role, but the cost of development and training isn't cheap either - but it is proving to be responsive.

### **Board composition - why would you devalue input?**

Being aware of the change from 9 to 6-year Board terms, this has caused succession issues where another organisation quoted their 'Board Readiness Programme' to seek engagement. They found that people will take part, they have 12 people in the programme and others who stepped forward have become mystery shoppers etc. They have a Group Board 50/50 Execs and tenants and they have only agreed this April for the Board to pay anyone. Why would you devalue input? Hattie confirmed that ECH have 4 out of 12 Board members who are residents, they have reviewed this previously and it may change again. ECH had its first full IDA one year ago and G1, V1 ratings were maintained but heeded caution that as soon as you show a crack in the system the concern is that this will be 'blamed on tenants' and tenant involvement. ECH went back to the 9-year term after having consulted with NHF and RSH, seeking support well in advance of implementation and the IDA – lesson being to work through what will scare people and work on it, bring them on the journey to understand why.

Michelle noted that research on the 'All In' programme revealed that lots of people don't want to sit on the Board, but often it's because they don't know what it means to be on the Board. Michelle also flagged that lots of their tenants raised concerns about paying CIC members and yes, they did get some who were only in it for the money, but the lesson learnt there is; don't be scared of disengaging an engaged resident if they are there for wrong reasons.

In the aftermath of Grenfell it was also noted TPAS etc making training available and questions arose how does this fit in with wider governance remit - the time commitment and balancing expectations? Michelle again referenced that the CIC try to ensure each member has a remit to delve deeper into specific areas but agreed the challenge of 'how do you keep all of these in balance'? The delving deep into detail by those individuals and groups creates feeders into the CIC – a full committee of the Board where scrutiny is done and feeds into that. Organisations also need to be mindful of not always asking “the usual suspects” for responses or input – either because you know they will make time, or you anticipate they will give “the right answer”.

History of social housing really useful also - <https://www.eastlighthomes.co.uk/my-community/resident-academy/the-online-resident-academy/>

### **Digital or in person?**

ECH have almost totally remote staff as it was formed midway through the pandemic, but they have nice offices and better suited for committee use, by local groups etc – so quite a split within ECH – some staff are digital, with local engagement / offering face to face. Hattie flagged this means that staff on the ground have to be visible, inclusive and accessible, give people the choice, there is a good mix of virtual and in person and it works well. Previously people thought everything would be wonderful if it was all digital, but ECH don't want it all digital – there is a true mix.

### **What are ECH's plans to share and inspire, so others can learn about what doing and impact making?**

Hattie confessed to hating the getting information out there and they are currently working with University



## NED Network

Bi-weekly Mondays  
16:00 - 17:00

of Essex to ensure they are having the impact they think they are. ECH is also trying to make all resources freely available, they don't think they should charge neighbouring associations for everything. ECH colleagues are also very generous with time as it is seen as very important that people can learn from disasters as well as things that are going well. Some things are naturally coming along e.g. podcasts from lead areas which are getting people excited, tenant engagement and giving tenants the ability to create things for themselves is also positive.

The biggest hurdle is changing attitudes and removing stereotypes – believe it will happen – CIC members know straight away when Board members don't quite have faith. For it to work, you have to trust your tenants and win over non-believers, changing their mindset.

Don't be afraid of failure – it might not go right first time, simply change it and try (and try) again.

## Register for our next session

What do lenders want from you for ESG Finance?

Monday 13 March 16:00 - 17:00

We will be joined by Chris Yau, Director of Origination & Sustainability, Housing at Lloyds Bank to share a lender's perspective on what matters most when measuring ESG and the top considerations to deliver ESG finance..

Speakers: Chris Yau, Director of Origination & Sustainability, Housing at Lloyds Bank

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