



Eastern Leaders 2020

FIT FOR THE FUTURE
END OF PROGRAMME PRESENTATIONS



Introduction

Overview

At this critical time, leaders are having to think differently, question the status quo and lead their teams through significant change. This requires a growth mindset, curiosity, creative thinking and the need to look outwards to see what is happening around us and collaborate to learn from each other.

The Eastern Leadership Programme was launched in 2020, and was a vital and timely development, which gave participants from across the region an opportunity to not only learn, but practice and apply vital leadership behaviours and strategic thinking skills that reflect the transformational workplace and industry environment post-pandemic.

Participants worked collaboratively in groups to make the most of their diverse skills and backgrounds, and used the tools and behaviours learned to research, develop and present group projects which explored the following themes:

Organisational Leadership What practices have we learnt in this crisis to effectively lead our teams in the future?

HR/People Strategy What will a new people strategy contain? What skills and attributes will be required in future? What will a competitive employee offer look like?

Best Practice What practices can we adopt to engage our residents more effectively? What delivery models will be fit for purpose in the future?

Sustainable Homes What learning can we take forward to make our homes fit for purpose in the future? What impact will building safety, climate change, and the housing crisis have on our investment strategy?

14 participants took part in the programme, bringing a wide range of experience across a variety of disciplines including housing management, communications, customer insight, learning and development, repairs and maintenance, estates management, finance and business planning and housing development. The programme was sponsored by 7 organisations from across the East of England:

Broadland Group, B3 Living, Eastlight Community Homes, Flagship Group, Havebury Housing Partnership, Orwell Housing Association and Saffron Housing. Each sponsor provided a representative to join our expert panel to listen to each presentation, providing their feedback and comments.

Fit for the future project: Housing Best Practice, the new normal

The three projects all reflected the changes experienced by individuals and wider society due to the Covid pandemic and sought innovative solutions to the post Covid world.

Project One proposes a collaborative technology project to provide a better housing application and letting service.

Project Two proposes social housing providers taking a leadership role in recreating town centres as places for people to live, work and play.

Project Three proposes a collaboration to produce an app to enhance tenants engagement and influence with their landlords.

All three projects were applauded by our expert panel and Greenacre is exploring how we can support this work with one of the projects being brought into life.

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**Choice
Based
Lettings
Digital
Tool**

Choice Based Lettings Digital Tool

A choice-based social housing letting app which cross-collaborates resources and information across the East of England.

Participants

David Feveyear-Ward – Business Planning Manager & Systems Accountant, Havebury Housing Partnership

Dawn Edwards – Development Manager, Orwell Housing Association

Paula Tuck – Assistant Director of Customer Service, Saffron Housing Trust Limited

Stephani Davis – Head of Housing, Broadland Housing Group

Trish Worden – Head of Cyclical Works, Flagship Housing Group Ltd

Introduction

The idea of a Choice-based Lettings app was born off the back of a conversation in which Trish Worden shared that she had met a couple who were living in a very small van. Their situation had changed rapidly, forcing them for the first time in their lives to have a need to access affordable housing.

Due to current processes and red tape, they had been unable to register with their local authority. By the time Trish met them and had begun to support them, they were in dire need, due to one of the couple being diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer. Trish's team had to fight to get them registered for both benefits and housing, even to the point of having to support them in a tribunal hearing, where the judge had displayed shock that the process had failed them. Following that hearing, they were accepted onto the housing list and were then banded as an emergency. But even then, they had to be intensively supported with the process to secure a home for themselves.

There is a clear need for improvement of the allocations policies and processes to make the service truly a choice based one, which enables applicants to have one point of contact to access the housing that best suits their and their family's needs.

The challenges

A need for change

Many applicants struggle with the process and feel they don't truly have choice. A number of reasons were identified as being responsible for this experience:

- The feeling of having to jump through hoops
- a time-consuming process, raised expectations
- being told when to move, disappointment, pressure, raised expectations
- a different experience to the private sector
- lack of progress information after initially bidding and a feeling of no real choice for most.

There are recognised difficulties of the allocations process, such as more families registering for housing than the available stock, and change is still needed to allow more control to applicants to choose what is best for their families.

Now seems a perfect opportunity to learn from Covid. During the pandemic, housing providers and local authorities have had to adapt how they deliver services, and this has included the allocations and lettings service.

Now is a great opportunity to engage with customers, tenants, partners and colleagues across the sector to capture what we've learnt during Covid, to build on it, listen and engage with tenants and future customers, working with them to shape the future of allocations. Choice is key, and people's homes are part of their future. By utilising housing stock, there is an opportunity for us to tackle the housing crisis and focus on homelessness and choice.

The Social Housing White Paper and Digital Transformation

The regulator of social housing is introducing a proactive, proportionate, outcome focused and risk-based approach to consumer regulation. By looking at joint partnership, working with local authorities and reviewing the allocations process, we are aligning ourselves with Social Housing

White Paper objectives. We are listening to tenants, removing barriers to access social housing and providing customers with true choice when it comes to choosing their home.

The operating environment in social housing has taken a significant shift in direction over the past twelve months and the Coronavirus pandemic has accelerated digital transformation, which has shown that many systems are outdated. The pandemic has also shown us that we can do things differently. We can work without paper and without offices, and the publication of the White Paper provides the opportunity for us to galvanise the rapid progress that we have seen over the last twelve months, and really focus on improving processes and customer experience such as letting and allocations.

Doing things differently - the affordable housing sector

Research was carried out into housing organisations that were doing things differently with their approach to lettings. Qlinker¹, a housing association based in Utrecht in the Netherlands, which aims to serve tenants in the most customer-friendly way possible and provide a completely digital customer journey, using a smartphone-based app. The digital process from application to tenancy sign up can take as little as six hours.

Closer to home, the group looked at UK providers who have moved away from existing choice based letting systems, such as Thirteen Group in Middlesbrough and South Liverpool Homes². SLH had moved from a choice-based lettings system in 2014 due to the length it took to let properties, which was contributed by no-shows to viewings and refusals. On average it was the fifth applicant who accepted the property, and the process was slow and complicated.

Significant support came from local authority councillors, however, there was resistance from council offices, due to concerns around stock transfer and regulatory compliance, which were successfully challenged. Today, South Liverpool Homes have seen their letting time cut in half and a 200% increase in applicants to their register. They can pre-allocate homes, including new build properties and can carry out tenancy training before tenants move in. They also have accurate needs data that helps to improve their growth strategy.

Digital Excellence – out of sector inspiration

The group also looked outside the sector for inspiration, and found some obvious digital examples, Right Move and airbnb, for comparison. Both are successful digital platforms which are not that different to affordable housing allocations, and they do it well. The customer is in control, they can search in their own time and way, can easily identify their own choices, which are presented in a clear and informative way. Adverts persuade them that a property is intended for them, selling the positives whilst acknowledging there is a choice. The customer can set up alerts for when a new property becomes available and can then following this up immediately. No one sits on Right Move at midnight waiting for the latest properties to be uploaded, so why should we expect our customers to do that?

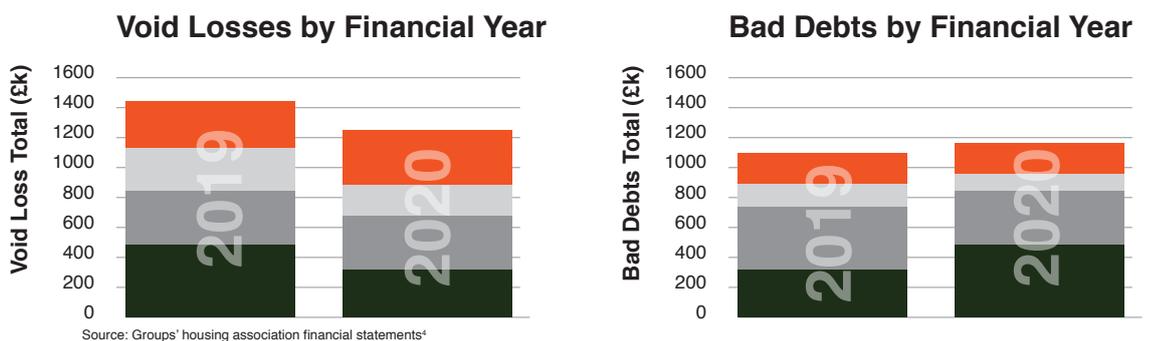
These examples reinforced the belief that the allocations process could be better.

Significance of the project to the East of England or wider

The way in which we allocate homes can be modernised and digitalised and as a collective with the buying power of the Eastern Region, or even nationally, great steps can be made to improve the lives of current and future tenants.

From four of the housing associations within the group, covering 22K properties, void losses in 2019 were £1.4m, and in 2020 were £1.3m (pre-covid). Bad debts covering the same period in 2019 were £1m and £1.1m in 2020.

Global accounts from the regulator show bad debts across the country totalling £100m in 2019 (data was not yet available for 2020).



As of October 2020, in West Suffolk there were 600 pending applications, with over 2.5K people already on the waiting list looking for a home³. In East Suffolk, as of 1st April 2020, there were 3,797 people on the waiting list (Gateway Annual Report 2019-20). In the East of England as a whole, there are currently 94K people on the waiting list (ONS).

The Benefits

Project Value

Reductions - The initiative can bring reductions in unsuitable applications, void costs and rental loss, and increase revenue, which could be reinvested back into existing homes or in building new homes.

Value for money – By utilising cross sector collaboration, collective buying power would increase considerably.

Consistency – Creating consistency across one platform would enable residents and tenants to visit one digital platform to access all the information they require at the touch of a button.

Reduced stigma – Rebranding social housing as a viable option rather than a last resort, creating a slicker service fit for the future.

Tenancy sustainability – By giving real choice, we can build better communities for the future, which has the potential to sustain tenancies for longer.

An opportunity for change

There is an opportunity to not only change what we do as a regional sector, but how we do it. Alongside looking at how we allocate homes, the group proposes a social lettings app as part of the solution to issues surrounding choice-based lettings.

An applicant should only have to complete one application, and there should be one system that can link with existing partners' systems. The app could also incorporate looking for mutual exchanges.

The pace of change for technology is increasing and there is an opportunity to embrace this. Choice based letting systems must catch up.

Further benefits

The app can bring other benefits, such as widening the pool of available homes. For example, private landlords may use the app to advertise privately rented homes - affordable housing is not the only solution for everyone. If we can engage with private landlords we can provide more choice.

There is an opportunity to look at spare bedrooms. Some people with no commitments who need to travel for work may want the flexibility to move around different areas. There is an awareness that there is some under occupation in existing homes, and it would be beneficial to explore a more proactive approach to find a solution for this.

Housing providers have not always made appropriate use of adaptive homes, and the app could provide a way to enhance usage. Throughout the region there have been instances of reversal of adaptive homes when a tenant does not need them. Housing providers have invested in these homes and there is a case for looking at how the right people can be found for existing adaptations, recognising that this may sit outside authority boundaries but that it is more important to find the right person for the right home.

It could also over time help other agencies allocate homeless hostels, night shelters and domestic abuse provision. The app can give applicants more choice and control over the process, but it also gives us the opportunity to improve the information we provide to applicants when they are looking for a home.

Quality comparisons

Research was carried out on choice-based letting adverts, which showed very big differences in quality, such as a lack of quality photos and limited information compared to the comparisons.

People coming to housing providers for housing deserve the same higher quality level of service, information and detail, including the EPC, fire safety information (especially for people who are looking at flats) and this information should be offered well in advance, rather than much further down the line, leading to forced property refusal due to lack of information provided early on.

Shared ownership homes are likely to be better quality than the level currently offered to the affordable rental home seekers, and this is ethically questionable. The app could allow providers to advertise all properties in one place, with the same level of information available for all.

Things can be different

The emphasis is on collaboration. Individuals from different organisations have come together to work on a project which they believe will improve how providers allocate homes and the services provided to the people who need a home in the Eastern Region. The complexity of this work is understood; however, this is not a reason not to do it, and initiates a conversation on how we can all work together to change allocations in the East.

"In all of our organisations we are always looking at what we do and how we can improve our service to our customers. For many of us, this will include the allocation processes, but these interactions are often too late. Allocations are often the first conversation that we have with people, and we want this to be the best it can be, from the very start of the process. Things can be different if we want them to be, and we believe that the time for change is now."

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1. <https://www.housingevolutions.eu/project/qlinker-social-housing-comes-to-you/>
 2. Microsoft Teams Meeting – ELP Team 1 & Julie Marsh, Executive Director, South Liverpool Homes, 26th February 2021
 3. Meeting Notes - West Suffolk Council, 28th October 2020
 4. Groups' housing association financial statements, covering a total of 22,000 properties across four organisations.
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**Reimagining
Our Town
Centres**

Group 2 Presentation

Reimagining our Town Centres

A vision for funding new homes and revitalising town centres across the East of England.

Participants

Robert Longfoot - Tenancy and Estates Services Manager, Havebury Housing Partnership

Nadine Tapp – Head of Learning and Development, Flagship Group

Michelle Pile – Housing Manager, B3Living

Mike Penman – Property and Construction Manager, Orwell Housing

Sarah Cawley - Head of Communications and External Affairs, Eastlight Community Homes

Introduction

The pandemic has affected everything around us. As we emerge from the Covid-19 crisis the strategic challenges are stacking up. We won't know the full impact on our communities for some time to come. The unique circumstances around us provide an opportunity to adapt to the new world creatively and think bigger. Housing associations need to be bold and lead the recovery, to build back better, and to create sustainable communities. This is an ideal time for housing providers in the East of England to step forward collectively and be at the top table, forming and shaping the multi-agency response to the mammoth task ahead.

The challenges

National housing need

Our high streets have been in decline for many years. There are several reasons for this, including many of the bigger named stores losing out footfall to online shopping migration. We will not really know the full effects of this loss until we head into the future, perhaps in ten or twenty-years' time. We need to be looking at this now, and potentially what role housing associations could play in regenerating the high street, as well as the traditional remit of providing affordable homes.

The number of people in need of social housing in England has now hit 3.8 million. That is some 1.6 million households – 500,000 more than the 1.16 million households recorded on official waiting lists. Whilst the overall number of people in need has fallen since 2015/16, the number of people for who social rent is most appropriate has risen.

Reasons for this include:

- There being approximately 1.5 million fewer social homes today than there were in 1980
- Population and household growth continuation; poverty and homelessness are rising
- The gap between income and housing cost continuing to widen
- The dynamics of the market changing due the continued rise of the 'for profit' providers, which owned 5,342 social homes in 2019, showing 146% growth over 2018, with delivery being over 50% shared ownership
- Affordability, suitability, size, and condition of affordable homes throughout the UK being under question.

In addition, the impact of the coronavirus pandemic continues to increase unemployment with low-income earners twice as likely to face unemployment¹.

East of England Housing Crisis

The East of England includes Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, and Suffolk. Over 6 million people live within the region, just under 10% of the total population of the country. In 2019, reports show that there were 107,000 people on local authority housing waiting lists in the East of England. With the population set to grow by 7.3% this number will continue to increase. However there is a continuing gap between supply and anticipated demand, in common with other parts of the UK.

Many office staff are currently being forced to work from home, which has contributed to a reduction in the footfall around town centres even more than the previous decreases, due to a large percentage of the public, who would normally be out and about purchasing coffee and lunch or browsing the shops, being removed from the high street. Many businesses are now questioning the need to return to the office, with a focus on either permanent remote working or a hybrid workforce which could result in a permanent decrease in town centre footfall.

Regulatory Environment

Registered providers will need to make hard choices – between investment in existing stock and new supply. They recognise housing associations can't do it all and we won't be able to keep everybody happy. The trade-offs must be understood, clear choices have to be made in consultation with all stakeholders. They RSH expects the sector to:

- Spend on existing stock – ensure compliance with Decent Homes (and Decent Homes²)
- Deliver new supply
- Continue to adapt and maintain services amid the pandemic
- Meet building safety requirements – and the financial burden that may entail
- Play a wider community anchor role - react to increasing concerns from residents about their estates and neighbourhoods.
- Make financial provisions for 2050 carbon neutrality in their FFR submissions.
- Evidence value for money

Data from 2018/19	East of England	England
Unemployment rate	3.4%	4.1%
Average (mean) house prices	£333,833	£303,006
Income required for 80% mortgage	£76,305	£69,259
Ratio of houses to incomes	11	10
Mean annual earnings	£30,867	£30,170

Political Environment

The current Government recognises the need to provide more homes, however its primary focus continues to be on homes for sale. Conservatives have pledged to work with housing associations to identify and accelerate opportunities for shared ownership, leading to a decrease in the availability of social housing in the future. The Government expects:

- A "significant proportion" of new homes to be delivered using Modern Methods of Construction (MMC).
- Initial minimum Shared Ownership share to be reduced from 25% to 10%, with shared Owners allowed to "staircase" by 1% at a time.
- Rented homes funded by the Affordable Homes Programme (AHP) will be subject to a Right to Shared Ownership
- £60m for social housing decarbonisation fund to be sufficient

Town Centre Decline

Emerging evidence suggests that lockdown has changed consumer and business behaviour, with a permanent shift to homeworking and online shopping. This will impact urban spaces, risking widening income and wealth inequality. Reduced commuting costs will benefit white collar professionals, while those working in retail and hospitality face widespread job losses².

The pandemic has accelerated more store closures and we don't know how many will continue to survive. If town centre offices close, in favour of a smaller shared collaboration space out of town, there will be further empty buildings in our towns. Before the pandemic, Experian, in their Retail Planner Briefing Note, said the share of non-store retail sales in 2018 was 20% of total retail sales (£68.1bn) compared to a just under 5% in 2008. Price Waterhouse Coopers (PwC) reported that in the first half of 2018 a net 1,123 stores disappeared from Britain's top 500 town centres compared with a 222-store loss over the equivalent period in 2017.

Pension Deficit

Pensioners and savers around the world are facing the retirement insecurity as plunging interest rates since the financial crisis wreak havoc on the funding of pension schemes. This is further exasperated by average life expectancy increases, pensions have become a political issue. Defined benefit pension schemes' liabilities have escalated over recent years, with many employers being required to pay ever-increasing contributions to recover deficits.



The chart is based on publicly available data from valuation reports for a number of the largest UK defined benefit pension schemes. It shows the expected cost of accrual of benefits has increased to be around 500% of initial estimates – i.e. the pension accrual has increased in value from 10% to 50% of salary over time. Pensions Schemes will need to adapt creating portfolios with steady income and asset growth. Employees may also want to reduce their liability and join together to either create their own pension fund or apply pressure to pension schemes to invest in socially acceptable assets to bridge the gap³.

The Solution

A genuine opportunity for the sector to work together

Town centre plans made by Local Authorities won't be relevant in a post pandemic world. With the relaxation of planning rules they will be considering how the future will be for their towns. We want to be 'at the table' with like-minded partners to shape that future.

Housing Associations can play a leading role in revitalising our high streets and making them places people want to visit and live. It is proposed empty and failing shops could be converted to mixed tenure housing, shared office spaces and community hubs; where local residents can live 'green', utilise public transport and make use of facilities and shops on their doorsteps to live a carbon neutral, metropolitan lifestyle. This in-turn will reduce the need to build on greenfield land⁴.

Cross-service provider and community benefits

It is acknowledged that building and managing housing in urban environments has challenges with anti-social behaviour. Housing associations are uniquely placed to work with local people and partners to develop sustainable communities to be proud of. There is the potential for benefit to other service providers, such as police, as they will not require additional resources to tackle issues in run down areas that attract crime, and councils could benefit from the council taxes generated from the development, with the biggest winner being the community. The vision of a diverse and thriving town centre is gathering pace. This month Ipswich was named as a 15-minute town, meaning everything a resident needs can be reached within a quarter of an hour by foot or bike. This shows there is clear evidence of an appetite for a plan of this nature⁵.

Next Steps

The vision is dependent on an accurate prediction the continued decline of the high street. It is acknowledged the proposal may not be viable if commercial property prices remain high. But there is an appetite to be bold and start the conversations with external partners in the East of England now. We may need to pause, pivot or progress, and there is much to be ironed out in terms of detail, however, this is an opportune time for housing associations to step forward and lead, so our communities are 'Fit for Future'.

1. Source: National Housing Federation (NHF)

2. <https://www.smf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/New-life-for-the-high-street-July-2020.pdf>

<https://www.hewitsons.com/latest/news/government-consults-on-new-permitted-development-rights-to-allow-town-centre-uses-to-convert-to-residential>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/supporting-housing-delivery-and-public-service-infrastructure/supporting-housing-delivery-and-public-service-infrastructure>

3. <https://www.ft.com/content/c95deea4-03e2-11ea-9afad9e2401fa7ca>

<https://www.barnett-waddingham.co.uk/commentinsight/blog/deficit-contributions-the-retrospectivepension-pay-rise/>

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[david-jobling/could-the-rejuvenation-of-the-high-street-also-solve-our-housing-crisis/](https://www.david-jobling.com/could-the-rejuvenation-of-the-high-street-also-solve-our-housing-crisis/)

5. Ipswich aims to become 'UK's first 15-minute' town - BBC News

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**Broadening
The Resident
Voice in the
East**

Group 3 Presentation

Broadening The Resident Voice in the East

A cross-sector collaborative online engagement tool which uses web app technology to improve resident engagement.

Participants

Dale Wordley – Head of Customer Experience and Insight, Flagship Group
Sophia Howells – Head of Housing services, B3 Living
James Greener – Head of Performance and Compliance, Havebury Housing Partnership
Scott Bridge – Housing Services Director, Eastlight Community Homes

Introduction

Now is a pivotal moment in time. The past year and a half has highlighted just how important it is for cross-sector collaboration in the areas of tenant involvement and digital transformation. The Eastern Leaders programme brought together the different strengths, experiences and viewpoints from a range of organisations, and there were a lot of grand ideas to start with. However, it became clear that what was really needed was a tangible offer that everyone felt the group could deliver successfully together, pooling each person and organisation's unique strengths to add the best service, value and benefit to the tenant pool of the Eastern Region. The one thing that everyone agreed upon was that they really wanted to truly put the East 'on the map' when it came to tenant engagement.

The challenge

The Social Housing White Paper and resident engagement

The Social Housing White Paper and the Charter for Social Housing Residents sets out what the government will do with us as providers to raise standards and meet resident aspirations, now and into the future. Chapter 5 specifically of the Charter says that residents should have their voice heard by their landlord. Clearly this has arisen off the back of the Grenfell Review, however, many tenants' conditions are still not up to par and many feel their voices are still not being heard.

In addition to this, the wider outcomes of the white paper will require us to actively engage and consult with residents, as well as with the government, further on plotting the route forward.

The Charter states that engagement can take many forms, but the crucial factor is that it is tailored appropriately. The government want to see landlords inform and engage with residents in an effective way. The group took this as a cue to find ways that we can collectively and effectively do better.

A collaborative regional approach is needed to tackle to problems around resident engagement

In the Eastern Region, housing associations manage 278K social housing units, almost 60K of which are managed by housing associations involved in this project. By working together it is possible to gain better quality insights, more often, particularly around the issues consistently affecting everyone within the joint pool of residents. For individual organisations, this proposal has the potential to help tenants previously off the radar to engage in a valuable way.

Currently, in the East, we spend a total of £16M annually on resident involvement functions. This is all from the tenant purse and gives cause for concern, due to the current relative effectiveness of resident involvement outcomes, and there is a valid question over whether we are getting the best value from this spending.

Case studies

Havebury recently completed a resident survey in order to find out how tenants would prefer to engage, as well as working with TPAS on a Behavioural Insights project.

- 63% of respondents said that they wanted to engage
 - Of those who didn't the majority said they were happy with the services provided to them and wanted things to continue as they are
 - Others did not have time or were simply not interested
 - Typically, residents said they had less than 30 minutes per month to be involved
 - 5% preferred a more 'traditional' face to face method of engaging, whereas 85% said they would prefer to engage electronically.
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With TPAS, Havebury looked at their People and Property data together to gain insights on how residents were accessing their services, in order to target those who engage and for whom the issues being reviewed were relevant to. Sample sizes were relatively small, however, because residents were targeted specifically, the value of the feedback received was of a high quality. This also enabled the team to do randomised control trials which started them on the path to building a database of characteristics, behaviours and preferences, for future consultation activities. Most of all though, what it proved was that there is a better way to build resident involvement.

Customer Insights

One of the positives that has come from Covid has been increased agility in the way that we all work. This has allowed many of us to engage more than we normally would have done previously, due to increased avenues of communicating virtually. This has also been borne out for our customers, and the project aims to actively build on this, whilst engaging better with those harder to reach groups.

“The last twelve months has changed the way everyone is engaging. Being the mother of two small boys, life is always a bit crazy, and I spent the majority of 2019 in Great Ormond Street, which left me feeling very disengaged from both work and life. Then along came Covid, and it seemed everyone else also became disengaged. The world really is changing, and people are starting to think outside the box. I can now drop into meetings from anywhere in the country, and now my voice can be heard, and I can make a difference.

But it's still tough. Sometimes I am having to build a Lego car underneath the desk whilst also trying to hold a grown-up meeting. Everyone is so much busier now. Call applications such as Zoom are starting to feel restrictive, and it would make life much easier if I were able to drop in and out to engage at times that fit in with my busy daily life. This would really help to take engagement to the next level for tenants. Traditionally, engagement hasn't been that flexible. If we really want to build diversity, we really need to do something different.” – Michelle Baker Resident Committee Member at Eastlight Community Homes

The Solution

What are customers looking for?

According to the customers in the survey who expressed they would be willing to engage, they wanted to have access to a wider range of customer voice platforms that would be easy to use. A fully functioning customer engagement tool not only fulfils this criteria, but also has the potential to increase customer engagement, specifically with those who would typically not wish to engage. The group's research identified two main options: building a bespoke app, or buying existing software.

The digital solution should be not only accessible to residents and customer providers across the eastern region, but also their neighbours and people within their local communities, who are, after all, our future and potential customers. A collaborate approach between providers would spread the cost and reduce financial impact on the residents' purse, as well as reducing the amount of time each housing provider would typically need to invest if carrying the product through alone.

Alternative approaches to increase inclusivity among tenants

Consideration was also given to those who may be at a disadvantage technically, or who would otherwise be unable to use the tool. By creating an automated platform for those who wish to use it, this then has the potential to free up more time for service providers to spend with those who still need or prefer face to face or over the phone contact.

What works that's already out there?

Nextdoor app

Nextdoor have 27M users worldwide, who have left over 100K reviews, with an average star score of 4.7, and 4.2 stars on Trust Pilot, which is a big achievement.

“We believe by bringing neighbours together, we can cultivate a kinder world where everyone has a neighbourhood they can rely on.” – Nextdoor

The group believe these values align fully with what the East is trying to achieve in building effective resident and community engagement, and the app proposed would encompass a genuine neighbourhood feel and vision.

The Nextdoor app includes a variety of functions that could be useful to the region's tenants, including help maps, local information and guidance, events and a lost & found section, as well as a social media function (although this gave concerns about potentially requiring a lot of moderation and management, with little reward to users or the collective organisations).

Citizenlab app

The group met with Citizenlab to investigate whether it could meet the offer requirements. It is an online portal (rather than an app) which uses a range of engagement methods, including polls, surveys, Zoom style meetings, as well as allowing for co-creation of ideas and community feedback.

Benefits:

- Auto-moderation of comments, reducing the need for manual moderators
- Proven high levels of engagement from younger people (around 65% of current users are under the age of 45)
- Reports and insights access, without the need for manual analysis
- Can target audiences for specific content.
- Lower risk due to being an off-the-shelf tried and tested product
- Potentially power lead-in time and overall costs

Using Gamification to keep a diversity of residents engaged

It is understood that it's tricky to get resident to engage, especially younger people, and when they do, we want to keep them engaged. So how do we retain those who sign up? We know that gamification is a great way to keep people engaged, and there are many different ways to utilise this technique. The Nike app uses this tool a lot, and Nike are often used as a case study as they are market leaders in this area, using tools such as badges, challenges, prizes, streaks and rewards.

If we were to develop our own bespoke tool, suggested modified hooks with a community-oriented feel may look like:

- Augmented community treasure hunts
- Parish versus parish or neighbourhood versus neighbourhood friendly competitions
- Personal reward vouchers
- Planting of trees for the winning community
- Chosen charity donations

Citizenlab Vs Building a Web App

Area	Citizen Lab	New Web App
Increased Engagement	3	4
Wider pool of people	4	4
Accessing harder to reach group (age 20-40)	4	4
Cost	4	3
Lead-in time	5	3
Customer Segmentation (login key)	5	5
Methods of engagement (polls/surveys/consultations etc)	5	5
Gamification	0	5
Ease of access	3	3
Clear Benchmarking	5	5
Adaptability	2	4
Risk appetite	4	3
Total (out of 60)	44	49

Creating a bespoke web app

The group met with an app developer who relayed the benefits and advantages to creating a bespoke web application engagement tool, and supplied the following information:

- A web app is preferable to a standard app due lots of regulations and 'hoop jumping' processes. Also an apple and an android app would have to be built separately, increasing costs considerably
- Housing providers could post tailored content such as stories
- Can use engagement tools such as surveys, polls and events creation as well as getting real time feedback
- Enablement of custom gamification tools with the potential to build cross-community engagement
- Build time would take longer (approximately 6 months)
- Overall cost would be around £3K, although potentially costs could be significantly reduced with cross-region buy-in, and annual costs would be significantly less than an off-the-shelf product.

After test-scoring both options it became clear that a bespoke app will provide the best product and value for the region's requirements.

A solutions-led collaborative approach – the first steps

- A Project Manager will be recruited to lead the initiative.
- A committee will be formed, comprising of nominated representatives from each of the contributing housing providers The offer proposes to be a real partnership opportunity for all housing providers across the east of England.
- The committee will negotiate and decide of the vision and direction of the app engagement solution, as well agree on shared data capture such as large-scale surveys and consultations, which would target the entire user audience. Organisations would also have autonomy to circulate their own individualised surveys and consultation with just their own residents.

How It Will Work



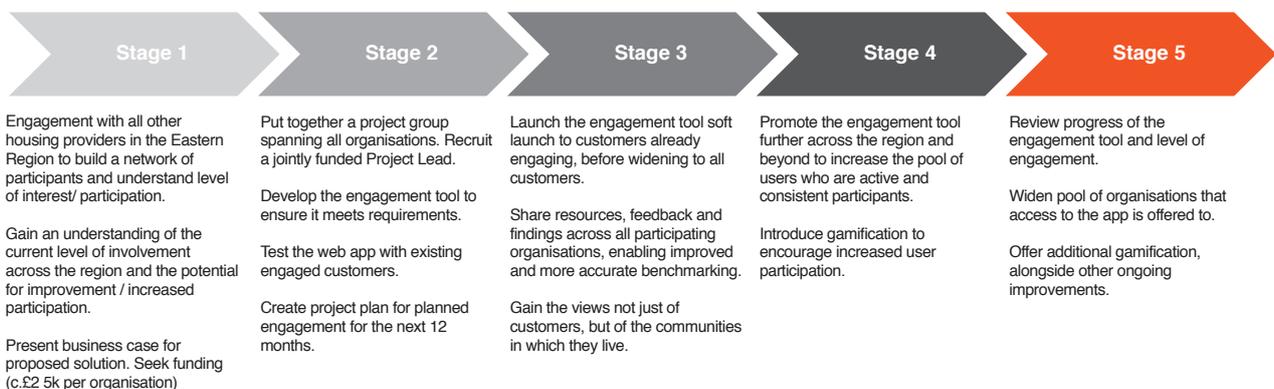
Next steps

Stage 1 - A detailed roadmap has been created and is ready to get the proposal off the ground and allow guided forward movement. Those organisations who’s people have already been involved in creating the initiative the offer will be anticipated to launch the project at stage 1. It makes sense to work with those organisations who are already open to engagement and getting their feet around the table. 30 organisations in total across the Eastern Region have been identified as potentially benefitting from this offer, and a pitch has been prepared to engage with each of these groups and offer them a seat at the table.

Stage 2 – Organisations who have bought in to the initiative will agree roles, scope and be involved in creation of the app (approximately 6 months).

Stages 3 to 5 – The rest of the details of the app requirements for each individual organisation/community will be fleshed out and design will be completed, giving each individual organisation control over their own individual areas.

Recommendation / Roadmap



The project group members and their organisations welcome further discussion and possible collaborative ideas relating to the implementation of this project, which already has considerable interest from key regional players and local authorities in the East’s housing market.