

SQUARE PEGS AND ROUND HOLES

Forming a Resident Management Company at Ashfields

Baseline Report- Summary



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Report Summary

Overview

This is the summary of the report *Square Pegs and Round Holes* which looks at the establishment of a Resident Management Company at Ashfields, a leasehold Retirement Housing scheme in Shropshire, owned by Housing & Care 21. The report can be found at <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/social-policy/housing-communities/publications/working-paper-series.aspx>

The report is the result of a research project commissioned by Housing & Care 21 and undertaken by the Housing and Communities Research Group at the University of Birmingham. It represents baseline research at the point when management transferred to a Resident Management Company. It is based on a resident survey and 12 depth interviews with resident directors, staff and enablers.

Context

Society is changing and the coming years will see a significant growth in the older population. New approaches and models will be needed to meet the changing expectations of the baby boomer generation and their successors. Leasehold Retirement Housing could continue to provide an attractive option but only if it moves away from standardised models and allows consumers to make decisions about key aspects of service design.

Housing & Care 21 manages nearly 19,000 properties across a national portfolio of Retirement Housing, leasehold flats and bungalows and Extra Care Housing. One of the leasehold schemes, Ashfields, had experienced over 10 years of conflict over how services were procured and managed by Housing & Care 21 for residents. It was recognised by the incoming Chief Executive that Ashfields “was a square peg and we only had round holes.”

Residents’ concerns included the opportunity to influence decisions, and the appropriateness and quality of the service. Despite many attempts to respond to residents’ concerns, the only real change had been agreement to remove the on-site Court Manager service and a change of name from Ashfields Court to Ashfields.

Housing & Care 21 is subject to the Right to Manage legislation for purpose built apartment blocks, but bungalows are not included in this legislation. However, the organisation decided to pilot a voluntary process of transfer to a Resident Management Company for the bungalows at Ashfields.

Change

Process In less than 18 months the entire process of transfer to the Resident Management Company was completed:

Figure 1: Co-producing the Change



The research found that in order to enable the change, three factors were needed:

- A change of attitude and approach among senior management at Housing & Care 21, with a willingness to try something new;
- Changing expectations and capacity of new residents who had the skills, capabilities and willingness to challenge the status quo;
- A willingness to collaborate between both parties, to co-produce change in a cooperative and non-adversarial way.

Results

While this study took place only a few months after the Resident Management Company took over, there were high expectations among residents confirmed by survey results and interviews. Figure 2 summarises some of the survey results.

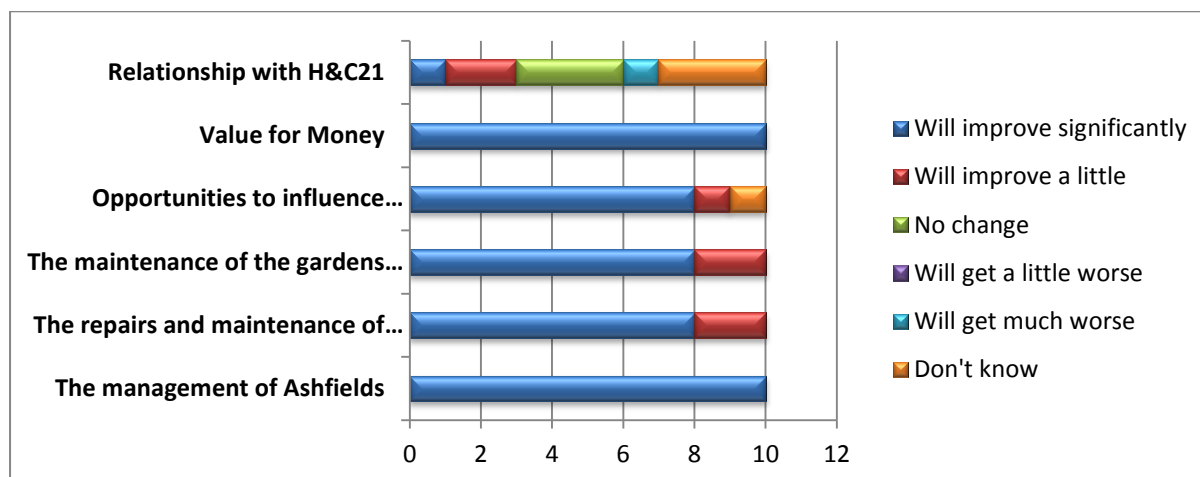


Figure 2: Expectations of the future under Ashfields Resident Management Company

Quick wins included lower service charges, free central heating installation for all residents which was accessed through the Residents Management Company, and swiftly arranged tree surgery after the Autumn gales. Residents also felt there was a better social atmosphere on the scheme and better use of the community hall. From Housing & Care 21's point of view, residents now have a better fit model which reduces dissatisfaction and increases choice. Although this model is bespoke to Ashfields, it has demonstrated that large organisations can move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach. In addition, the relationship between Housing & Care 21 and residents has dramatically improved.

Wider implications

The successful experience of the Ashfields Residents Management Company is already influencing debate in the wider retirement housing sector with the Ashfields residents contributing to the *Housing Our Ageing Population: Positive Ideas inquiry* in March 2016. This inquiry is known as HAPPI 3 and follows on from earlier inquiries in 2009 and 2012 (HAPPI1 and 2) and it is due to report in June 2016.

About Housing and Communities Research Group



Led by Professor David Mullins, the Housing and Communities Research Group undertakes leading edge research and teaching as part of the School of Social Policy at the University of Birmingham. Housing and Communities has long been a key area of interest of research and teaching at the University of Birmingham, both in the School of Social Policy, and building on the 40-year tradition of housing research in the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies.

Housing and Communities is an important arena for current policy and practice challenges in relation to housing policy, welfare reform, public expenditure reductions, homelessness, housing supply shortages, financial inclusion, Localism, the 'Big Society' and the role of third sector in service delivery. Research and knowledge transfer on these topics plays a key role in the University's civic engagement agenda.

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