

Resident involvement in procurement: A resident's perspective

Written by Michael Campbell

I was born in September 1940 during an air raid, I survived. Until 2005 I have lived in local authority houses or flats. Initially with my parents and in 1988 I took over the tenancy from my mother. In early 2005, just before I retired, I transferred to a Southern Housing Group (the group) tenancy. It was a new build, one bedroom first floor flat and I have lived there ever since.

After attending a secondary modern school, I started work in 1957. Due to a skin allergy I had to give up my position in a paint factory laboratory after two years. I then turned to my second love – mathematics and spent forty-five years in Management Accounting.

I have been employed by roofing and flooring contractors, bathroom fitting manufacturers and ship repairers. Also, spectacle manufactures (work including lenses) and lead refiners. I also worked in the Metropolitan Police Service safeguarding stolen and lost property. Finally, with the Public Carriage Office in London licencing both Black Cabs and Private Hire drivers and vehicle and as complaints officer.

My roles included estimating, costing, invoicing, wage preparation and licence fee collection. Also understanding and gaining information from bills of quantity. My various roles meant I had to liaise with colleagues, suppliers, members of the public, government, and local authority officials.

Soon after retiring I along with other residents of the old Thames Gateway Region of Southern Housing Group were invited to a resident's function at the old West Ham ground. This was to meet the groups personnel and representatives of various contractors. Presentations were made followed by Q&A sessions. Following this I was invited onto various focus groups where I scrutinised anything from pets in flats to service charges.

The next step was becoming a member and later chairman of the Thames Gateway Residents Service Panel and its previous incarnations. This meant attending quarterly meetings and scrutinising the services the group provided to its residents. Including all tenures (social to private ownership)

As Chairperson I was invited to sit on the group's Customer Services Committee. This brought together the Chairs of the five regions and senior personnel. There was also an independent chair and two independent members. All aspects of the Group's activities were scrutinised, and recommendations made to the main board.

Around 2010 I became a reviewer for The Thames Gateway Region Repairs and Maintenance Contractor. This involved monthly meetings and visits to sites. Discussing resident's satisfaction and how this could be improved. We also discussed whether the contractor was meeting their targets and if not, why and how to there could be improvements.

I have since been involved in major works, which the group calls Investment but I prefer refurbishment. This involves visiting sites where new kitchens, bathrooms, roofs, lifts, and other major works are being or about to be undertaken.

I liaise with residents over timetables, finishes, and colours where appropriate. Make further visits during the contract to discuss with residents' their satisfaction with the work being carried out, operative's behaviour, cleanliness, and punctuality. Also, if they were kept informed of any unforeseen developments which could cause delays.

I have recently been recruited to assist in the procurement of contracts and /or services for the group. Mainly sitting on selection panels ensuring the resident's needs and views were taken into consideration.

During all meetings it is essential that one listens to all opinions and be open minded before coming to any conclusions. One must not be repetitive. If what you wanted to say has already been said just say 'I have no more to add'.

Do not be afraid to put forward your views even if they appear to be contrary to the way the meeting is going. They could change the minds of others at the meeting.

I now eagerly await what Residents Involvement will achieve in the future.