

Key facts

- Community Gateway Association is a 6,000 home housing association in Preston, owned by tenant and resident members, and with a member elected Gateway Tenant Committee (GTC) integral to decision-making
- GTC members participated in making decisions to bring CGA's repairs service in house, resulting in annual savings of £1m; tenant scrutiny has also led to the grounds maintenance service being brought in house which will lead to further savings
- scrutiny exercises have particularly led to improvements in developing a right first time repairs service and in welfare benefits communications
- with the GTC integral to decision-making, CGA considers that tenants have had an impact on increases in tenant satisfaction
- CGA considers that tenants have made other contributions, including creating a family culture, inspiring staff and Board members, participating in developing a community minibus service, a youth inclusion strategy, and developing new community-led homes

Community Gateway Association is a stock transfer housing association set up in November 2005 to take ownership of the 6,000 homes formerly owned by Preston City Council. It was the first housing organisation based on the membership based Community Gateway model, through which only its tenants and leaseholder members own the organisation and have legal control over its rules and structure (currently there are 2,537 tenants and leaseholders members). Other residents over 16 can register for associate membership (currently there are 1,313 associate members) and anyone under 16 eligible for Under 16s membership (currently there are 183), which entitles them to participate but not vote.

"There is a huge cultural effect of having tenants around all the time and working closely with staff at all levels in the organisation. It contributes to a *family* culture where everyone sees each others' point of view. Staff are very aware of resident expectations and this leads to higher resident satisfaction but also to higher staff satisfaction with us as an employer."

Background

The decision to use the Community Gateway model was integral to ensuring tenant support for Preston City Council's proposals. How it would operate in practice was developed and agreed between Preston tenants and staff from 2004 until the transfer in 2005.



Under the model, full members can stand for election to the Gateway Tenant Committee (GTC) which has up to 30 members and is the main committee under the Gateway Board. GTC members can stand for election to the Board,

which has 11 members of whom five are tenants. The GTC meets formally ten days in advance of every Board meeting (and informally as necessary) and receives the majority of Board reports. Any issues or recommendations members make are highlighted to Board. The 25 GTC members who aren't Board members form CGA's scrutiny panel which looks in detail at key service areas. Scrutiny is also carried out through service specific groups where tenants and staff monitor performance and make service improvements.

"Having tenants as such a significant part of our Board and governance brings a different feel to the Board room with Board members really focusing on resident satisfaction and Value for Money. Some of our independent Board members with experience on other boards have confirmed this using the word *inspiring* to describe the tenant contribution."

The model and CGA's rules also requires CGA to have a community empowerment strategy which details how it involves residents, both in governance and in ten local community areas where residents are supported to form community groups or to run projects, activities or events that will produce positive social, economic or environmental outcomes.

Financial benefits

CGA has particularly identified £1m savings made through the transfer of its repairs service to an in-house Gateway Property Care (GPC). Whilst CGA does not claim that this decision was solely because of tenant involvement, concerns raised and discussions in the GTC about the repairs service were major contributory factors to CGA's decision in 2011 to transfer the repairs service in-house.

Savings have been made in GPC's first year of operations (it is too soon for them to be able to predict future annual savings) and are detailed in the CGA's VFM statement and budget and consist of savings on VAT and some structural/performance savings. Through their monitoring and scrutiny roles in the GTC, action groups, and the corporate planning process, CGA tenants had long been expressing concerns about the performance, flexibility, consistency and VFM of CGA's former repairs arrangements.

CGA has more detailed information from scrutiny reports to demonstrate the link between tenant involvement and the more recent decision to bring the grounds maintenance service in house. This decision came from the GTC's scrutiny arm carrying out an Estate Environment exercise which led them to propose that grounds maintenance should also be taken in-house, which has led to a Board decision to set up Gateway Green Care in 2014. CGA considers that cost savings will also result from this decision, but it is too soon to quantify them.

A CGA Board report says "initial investment required to bring the service in-house is anticipated to be offset by future savings in landscaping and other estate works which will be delivered using additional capacity within the new team. Value for money will also be achieved by VAT savings. We also expect that customers will receive a higher level of service without any additional expenditure and we expect to utilise the new skills, within the team, to provide services to other departments, such as landscape design, which will reduce the costs we currently pay external landscaping consultants."

CGA has also supported local groups to obtain external grant funding. The Ingol Youth Forum, developed through local community action, was successful in obtaining £85k of external funding from Biffa, Lancashire Environmental Fund and Lancashire Housing Partnership to create a new play park for their local community.



Service benefits

CGA's tenant scrutiny arrangements have particularly resulted in service benefits. Examples of benefits include:

- a VFM scrutiny review in 2012 made particular right first time recommendations to reduce expenditure and inconvenience of repeat visits. Updates to the scrutiny group and Audit and Risk Committee in late 2014 refer to significant progress in that 99.5% of all repairs were completed within timescale and the restructured GPC resulted in a reduction of follow-on jobs. The service improvement is also reflected in increases in satisfaction with the repairs service (from 85.0% in 2012 to 87.1% in 2014).
- a 2013 Welfare Reform scrutiny review made recommendations about communications with tenants and specifically requested that CGA ask, through the STAR survey, how effective tenants considered CGA had been in providing information about welfare benefits. These recommendations contributed to increasing satisfaction with information, advice and support received regarding claiming benefits (from 74.6% in 2012 to 85.3% in 2014); regarding managing finances and paying rent (70.7% in 2012 to 81.8% in 2014); and with regard welfare reform changes (from 57.7% in 2013 to 69% in 2014). Another outcome has been securing additional benefits of over £1.8m for tenants "helping to sustain tenancies and contributing to tenants' continued financial and social wellbeing" – and an increase on assumed CGA income collection (from 96.5% to 99.7% rent debit).

Tenant satisfaction

CGA reports increases in tenant satisfaction as follows:

Satisfaction rating	2014	2013	2012
Overall satisfaction with services	90.0	90.2	88.6
Satisfaction with quality of home	90.3	88.4	85.2
Satisfaction with neighbourhood	86.4	86.2	81.1
Satisfaction with value for money for rent	84.5	83.3	81.3
Satisfaction with repairs	87.1	85.2	85.0
Satisfaction that views are taken into account	76.1	72.0	70.9

Overall satisfaction has risen from 76.9% in 2006 to 90.0% in 2014. CGA reflected that "we can't prove that satisfaction levels are as result of tenant involvement, but we work in a co-regulatory way. The GTC in particular is integral to our day to day decision making processes and we are also accountable to our members".

Other benefits

CGA also records other social and community benefits:

- in 2005, the GTC was instrumental in CGA setting up a community minibus service. A social value assessment of this service carried out in 2014 reported a social value return of £6 for each £1 invested in the service. Feedback from some of the users of the service included that it had helped to build new friendships, to improve confidence, it had been a lifesaver, it had enabled access to outdoor events and social outings, and it had led to greater trust and more freedom.
- the GTC were instrumental in working with CGA to set up Purple Pathways – training and development opportunities for tenants, staff, and board members. Two CGA tenant board members have completed ILM governance training – “having involved residents means we have a significant responsibility to help develop their skills and knowledge. I have achieved qualifications through Gateway that I never thought I would have the opportunity to do”.
- the GTC particularly promoted the introduction of CGA membership for under 16s and ensured that the CGA developed a Youth Inclusion Strategy which they approved in early 2014. Since it was introduced in 2012, U16 membership has grown to 183, partly from existing youth groups – the Ingol Youth Forum, Moor Nook Young Voice and Acorn Community Group. A Young Gateway Action Group has also been established for people aged between 16 and 25, which is working on a supported housing project to kit out a new home on a limited budget; an It’s a Knockout Event for young people; a project to advise the Museum of Lancashire on how to improve their offer for young people and on presentations. Work to help young residents with employability skills has led to 9 young people becoming employed, 1 going into further education and 2 into job search.



- a joint resident and staff group the Employment and Skills Action Group has overseen projects that have created several jobs, placements, apprenticeships and work experience within CGA, arranged job clubs and provided interview support, provided IT drop in sessions, and ensured training and development support through Purple Pathways. Overall this programme has benefitted several hundred adults and young people, with several people helped into work, and many more helped to build their confidence and self worth.
- the welfare reform scrutiny exercise also recommended that CGA should offer tenants greater financial education and help with digital inclusion. This has led to the setting up of tenant and staff digital buddies – helping people to access the internet and social media and to provide advice at CGA jobclubs on e-mail and internet skills. Outcomes from this work have included increased employability, improved wellbeing and less social isolation.
- CGA used a new homes development opportunity to build a new community on a derelict garage site in the Larches area of Preston. The Overton Road Group, made up of local residents, was developed as part of the community-led development – they discussed the scheme at an early stage with the Homes & Communities Agency and local Councillors; they engaged with the planning process; they worked with the scheme architects and contractors to develop the plans; held open events to promote what they were doing and are now working on the lettings process for the new homes – to be let in early 2015. The scheme has generally increased local skills and knowledge of the development process and has and will increase community cohesion.

