

Member Spotlight

January 2024





Member Spotlight - Red Kite Community Housing

We asked Jon Upchurch from Red Kite Community Housing to share what they are up to.

If you'd like to contact Jon Upchurch about any of the below, click [here](#)

Give us a little known fact about your organisation.

We pride ourselves on being tenant-led. Our tenants influence us at every level of the organisation, from the Red Kite Champions inspecting the work of our grounds maintenance contractor, to our tenant Board members, interacting at the highest level.

To show we're serious about our tenant-led culture, every colleague meets one of our volunteers before they even start work with us: it's a little known fact that a volunteer sits in on every job interview that Red Kite carries out so they get to have their say on every team member we recruit. Since April 2023 our tenant volunteers have helped with over 175 interviews, helping to recruit 75 new colleagues: being tenant-led starts at the beginning!

Tell us about a time that engagement has made a difference to your services or communities?

In the Spring of 2023 Red Kite's strategic influencing group, the Resident Representative Team, decided to investigate a recently introduced new approach to dealing with damp, mould and condensation. Apart from simply reviewing whether the new approach was effective, they wanted to see if it was meeting the requirements set out by the Regulator and the recommendations of the Housing Ombudsman in its recent spotlight report on damp and mould.

We reached out to all our tenants who had recently received service from us around damp, mould and condensation and 21 of them attended a scrutiny 'bootcamp' event in July 2023. The event was hosted by Tpas associate Sam Goodwin. Our tenants were able to share their experiences with our damp and mould service as well as look at opportunities to improve and enhance this area of our work.

The bootcamp session resulted in a 7-point recommendation list compiled by the tenants. These recommendations have now been developed into an action plan and sent out to all Resident Representative Team members and tenants who attended the scrutiny event. The action plan included all 7 recommendations from the event with completion dates and named service leads taking responsibilities for their action areas.

Red Kite's Head of Property regularly updates the Resident Representative Team on implementation of the action plan, most recently in January 2024 to provide a status update and an overview of what phase two of implementation will look like, and this progress is reported to all the tenants who attended the scrutiny bootcamp.



What are you currently working on when it comes to engagement?

We've just rolled out a digital skills training course, co-created with our volunteer tenants and digital services company, Rock. Our tenants have fed back to us that a lack of digital skills has increasingly impacted their lives over the last few years. This is particularly true of some older tenants who sometimes feel held back by their lack of confidence in today's online world. This got us thinking about practical ways we could help. We approached Rock, who supply digital support services to Red Kite, and they were very keen to work with us to leverage their expertise to create significant social value for our tenants.

The project resulted in a bespoke digital skills training course that can be delivered in one day or broken down into separate lessons to deliver across multiple sessions. It's targeted at tenants with very limited digital skills and aims to enable them to fully take part and engage in the modern world.



Everyone in the sector is acutely aware of the need to ensure their engagement practice is 'regulation ready' - we try to view all our work through this lens when evaluating what we're currently doing and deciding on new projects. With that in mind, this summer we'll be refocusing our community engagement work, investigating ways to find our silence.

Why did you decide to join Tpas?

For us – and for our volunteers - it's all about Tpas' friendly, knowledgeable team, the sensible, real-world advice, and the opportunities to network and swap ideas with our peers in the sector. Our work as engagement professionals is becoming more and more high profile and there's always the danger we'll overthink things. Tpas' no-nonsense approach cuts through all the chatter.

What is your top engagement tip?

It's really difficult to pick out one thing as our top tip. Putting our heads together we came up with:

Engagement is everyone's job, it has to be in the culture of your organisation; every interaction with your tenants is a chance to learn what they think; go to where your tenants are, make engagement effortless; communicate in their language, they don't care about your jargon; listen – really listen –



to what your tenants say, drill down, check your understanding; prove how engagement has made a difference by using the tried and trusted 'You said/We did' technique. Yes, it's old...but to make it gold, add the 'So what?' – show the evidence that what you did made things better for your tenants: satisfaction scores, case studies.

But the one we've opted to go for as our top, top tip is this: Times are hard. Be serious about what you do, but have fun while you're doing it! Make it fun, make it enjoyable, and everyone will want to engage!

What is the one thing you are really proud of when it comes to engagement?

At Red Kite we use an approach that centres our amazing volunteers. We've existed since 2011 - we were formed by the community, for the community, and we never lose sight of this important message. Our volunteers play a crucial role in making sure we remain tenant-led by making a positive difference in the community through influencing and shaping the services we provide.

They're an amazing bunch of people, doggedly turning up to lend their views on every aspect of our work through our network of engagement groups. Some have been with us since the beginning. They helped set us up as a housing association and they're part of the Red Kite family, bringing amazing experience and expertise. They're a diverse bunch who bring a diverse range of views and challenge our thinking. We wouldn't be where we are today without them.