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New Ways of Working

As many of you will know the Spectrum Housing Group was formed in 2007 by the merger of Spinnaker Housing Group and Signpost Housing Group. The new group has over 17,000 homes and more than 800 staff working in about 20 places mostly in the South and South West of England.

There is a parent organisation called Spectrum Housing Group. It doesn't own any homes but exists to provide strategic direction and control of the group's activities. It provides a range of central services to other members of the group.

There are four social landlords within Spectrum called: Medina Housing Association, Signpost Housing Association, Signpost Care Partnerships, and Western Challenge Housing Association. They own most of the homes and provide most of the services to our residents.



We also have two commercial organisations in the group called Signpost Services Limited and Signpost Homes Limited. Signpost Services provides repairs to three of the four landlords above, and Signpost Homes specialises in open market housing for rent and sale. There is also a very small charity in the group called the Foyer for the Island.

Our Mission

Spectrum has a mission which sums up why it exists and what it is trying to achieve: to be recognised and respected for providing quality homes and services; and empowering people, supporting active communities and building better futures. It also has agreed three big ideas which it is focusing on now as it works towards achieving its mission. They are:

- 'One Organisation' - working together so that consistent high quality services are provided to all our customers.

- 'Tenants at the Heart' - giving tenants and residents a strong and meaningful voice, to help us with our plans and be involved in local decisions.
- 'Working Communities' – bringing our resources together to help support communities and the people who live there.



What the group is now proposing to do will make some of these ideas work in practice. We want your views on what we are proposing and you will find out how to let us know what you think at the end of this newsletter.

When the merger took place in 2007 to form Spectrum, it was planned to look at how the four landlords in the new group could work much more closely together possibly as one organisation. We thought this would help us to be much more efficient and make savings we could invest in new homes and better services. For reasons due to the current economic climate we cannot do that right now but we want to try making some improvements in the way the organisations are governed (through their boards), and importantly how residents are involved and how the group is more accountable to its customers.

Our Plans for the Boards

The plan is to reshape the boards of Medina HA, Signpost HA, Signpost Care Partnerships and Western Challenge HA. It does not affect the two commercial organisations or the Foyer for the Island.

The main parts of the plan are:

- All four boards would get smaller in size and would each have ten board members
- Each of the four boards would share eight of their ten board members
- Each of the four boards would have two other board members who are not shared - one of which would be the chair, and in the case of Signpost HA and Medina HA one of which would be a council appointed board member.
- Three of the shared board members would be residents – one each from Medina, Signpost CP/Signpost HA and Western Challenge HA.

The four boards will meet together and will try and work as 'one organisation' when agreeing strategies, policies and standards for the way that services are delivered to residents. When the four boards meet together the meetings will be overseen by one of the shared board members who will be called the moderator (as there are four chairs already in the room). They will also be a group board member.

Each organisation has a written constitution (known as the rules) which sets out the size of the board, how it is made up and how board members are appointed, so they will need to be changed before this can happen. The plan is that the changes will be agreed in the summer and come into effect in October 2010.

As part of these changes we also intend to alter the way that the group board is set up. It will have between nine and twelve board members and there will no longer be nominations to the group board from the six main subsidiaries. There will also for the first time be a place reserved on the group board for a resident.

Existing board members will have to reapply for places on the boards as there will be fewer places available in the new structures. We want to make sure that we have the right balance of people with the essential mix of skills, knowledge and experience on all the boards. We expect some board members may chose not to apply and there may well be some gaps in the skills we need. We would then advertise for new board members to fill up all the places at the end of the summer.

We plan to look at a new process for selecting resident board members and to do that over the next 12 months with the Spectrum Residents Group. We will consult with all residents in due course. In the meantime the three new places will be open to the existing resident board members to apply for until we get the new process up and running.

As we are making these changes we will also look at all of the roles and responsibilities of boards, committees and board members to make sure they are right for the new structures.

Payment of Board Members

We are also planning as part of these changes to pay all board members within the group other than those on the board of our registered charity, the Foyer for the Island. At the moment only the group board members are paid and not those who sit on the subsidiaries, including your landlord's board. We have looked carefully at what is happening in other organisations and have found that most groups of a similar size and complexity as Spectrum are paying their board members.



Board members in all sorts of other public bodies are also paid, such as those on NHS Trusts, the Police, and Fire Service as indeed are local councillors. We are competing for the best board members and so we feel not to pay would put us at a disadvantage. We have also put in place a major plan to improve the way that the group is governed and we will be able to measure that improvements are made. We have put together a business case which has been agreed by the group board. If you want a copy then we can send you one on request.

The plans involve all board members receiving a base fee of between £3,000 and £4,000 a year. They could get extra fees of £1,000 if they also sit on a committee. Those board members who hold a position of office would get an extra fee, the chair for example would get an extra £3,000 a year. These payments are in line with the average levels of payments for organisations similar to Spectrum. We have allowed for the full costs of these payments within our new business plan and they do not have any negative effects on our important service delivery commitments to residents. We feel that this flexible system means that people are paid for what they do and the responsibilities they have rather than just having a fixed fee for

turning up. There will be strong arrangements in place to judge board members' performance over the year and if necessary to remove them if they are not effective in their role.

In making the case for payment we did look carefully at the impacts that it might have on some board members. For some board members who receive benefits or tax credits or other allowances, then payment for being a board member might mean they lose some or all of those benefits and for some they could be worse off. It could be the same if they did any other work paid at the same level. Some people choose to be a board member because it is voluntary and for some the fact it doesn't then affect their benefits is important. Declining the payment doesn't help as it is still taken into account whether the payment is received or not.

We know that it may affect some of our resident board members, or those who might have wanted to become a board member in the future. But with the smaller number of board members in our new structures we feel the impact will be less and we hope we can attract others such as those who are already on low paid work who might be less affected by changes in benefits. We hope that with the changes proposed to our resident involvement structures that there will be other opportunities to get involved for those who feel unable to apply to be a paid board member.

More Accountability to Local People

The adoption of the new ways of working for our boards depends upon the development of new local accountability structures for our residents. We have developed a new structure in partnership with a group of residents, board members and staff. The project group met three times during January and February this year. The findings were discussed at the Spectrum residents' seminar on 31 March and they were supported by everyone there.



The project's aim was to develop a resident involvement structure which could link into our board structures to help us develop our plans in line with residents' priorities. It should also be able to check and make sure that the services we deliver locally are appropriate and are delivered to a high standard. They should also be able to challenge the boards and ask them to account for their decisions and the way that they impact on residents, their homes and communities.

The new structures will include a number of community forums. They will fit with our operational structures so that all regions where we have homes are adequately covered. They will, if not to start with, be resident led and could potentially involve other people who may bring other skills to the forums, council representatives and or other interested community groups.

Each community forum will have between eight and twelve members. The residents on the forums will initially be recruited from within the existing resident involvement structures. The forums will be able to set their own agendas and their meetings will be open to anyone to attend but only forum members will take decisions. The aim is to have things on the agenda

which reflect both the business of the forum and the board. There could also be question and answer items for residents within the geographical area.



Existing local resident associations and groups will remain in place and we want them to link into the new community forums.

We have proposed that the role of these new community forums will be:

- To ensure our local services are delivered to a high standard, identify where things are not and to take them up with local managers.
- To identify and develop local variations to our service standards.
- To ensure that all our strategies, policies and standards adequately reflect local needs and priorities.
- To ensure that improvement action plans are delivered.
- To have a say on how local budgets are made up and monitor how they are spent.
- To actually manage some budgets such as community funds.
- To be involved in deciding what sort of jobs are needed to deliver our services and to play a role in selecting contractors.
- To have a say on our plans for how homes are let at a local level.
- To have a say on our plans to build new homes in the local area.
- To champion the involvement of residents at a local level and make sure that we communicate effectively with everyone, particularly those who are harder to reach.

We have other ideas as well which the community forums could take on in time. If there is the appetite from residents for greater powers and influence it is possible that these could all grow and form a structure ensuring real local accountability for Spectrum and all its members.

The new community forums will link into the Spectrum Residents Group which started life last year and is already making a difference on the bigger issues affecting the whole group.

What Happens Next & How to Have a Say

All of these plans are working their way through our boards over the next few months. There is a lot to do, lots of paperwork and lots of discussion. We are interested in what you think of these plans.



There are a number of ways you can have a say:

Telephone: 0800 783 7837 - Our call centre will take your details and someone will call you back.

Email: new.ways@spectrumhousing.co.uk

Write to: Rob Webber
Group Director of Operations
Spinnaker House
Grange Rd
Christchurch
Dorset, BH23 3JE

All comments must be received by noon on Friday 4 June 2010

