



# Success, Satisfaction and Scrutiny:

## The Business Benefits of Involving Residents

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Prepared by: Tony Manzi | Ian Simpson | Nick Bailey  
Co-ordinated by: Charles Glover-Short

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# The Business Benefits of Involving Residents

The University of Westminster has drawn upon six years of rich data from AmicusHorizon, a large London and South East based housing association, to establish a strong and intensifying correlation between involving residents and improved performance. Key Performance Indicators and financial accounts backed up by interviews with residents and staff have revealed properly embedded resident involvement delivers cost efficiencies and satisfaction.



## Overview

This document summarises work to develop a compelling business case for landlord investment in resident involvement. Its key argument is involvement not only assists in improving satisfaction and service delivery, but also provides value for money.

*“AmicusHorizon became one of the Tenant Services Authority’s ten inaugural ‘co-regulatory champions’ in 2010.*

*Six years of involving residents in all aspects of governance means it’s uniquely positioned as a case study organisation.”*

## Context & Background

Now is an especially apt time to look into the benefits of involving residents given:

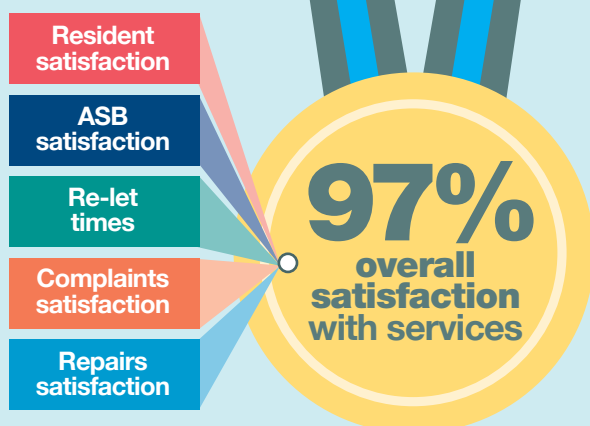
- **Increasing imperatives to demonstrate value for money.** Landlords may therefore be tempted to view resident engagement as subsidiary to their core business;
- **Reduced regulatory imperatives** as Tenant Involvement and Empowerment is seen as a consumer rather than economic standard, with intervention only in cases of ‘serious detriment’; and
- Emerging concerns that **commercial pressures** may lead to the marginalisation of the resident voice in decision making.

The benefits of resident involvement from a landlord perspective therefore need to be assessed. What does it offer landlords? Do the benefits outweigh the costs?

## Key Findings

- 1 The benefits of engagement far outweigh the costs.** Case studies from just two areas (procurement and complaints & the customer experience) identified estimated resource savings of at least £2.7m p.a., attributable in large part to resident involvement in co-regulation. This is set against costs across the organisation that have been estimated to be £950,000 in 2013/14.
- 2** AmicusHorizon has achieved the **highest levels of satisfaction** of any large social landlord in the UK (97% overall satisfaction with services), largely due to its effectiveness in designing and refining services on the basis of resident input.
- 3** AmicusHorizon's commitment to involvement means it has a constant **feedback loop** of resident input. Residents are seen as consultants and co-producers, designing, testing and feeding back directly on services. They ensure the association delivers high-quality customer services giving excellent value for money, neither over- nor under-serving residents.
- 4** Staff, Board members and residents have embedded a **'One Team' culture** by undertaking identical training and working towards a clearly defined set of goals. The notion of 'One Team', all working together, underpins everything the association does.
- 5** Resident engagement in governance has created a **more productive working environment**. Resident meetings were widely described as effective with 'difficult conversations' conducted within an atmosphere of openness and trust.

AmicusHorizon has achieved the **highest levels of satisfaction** of any large social landlord in the UK

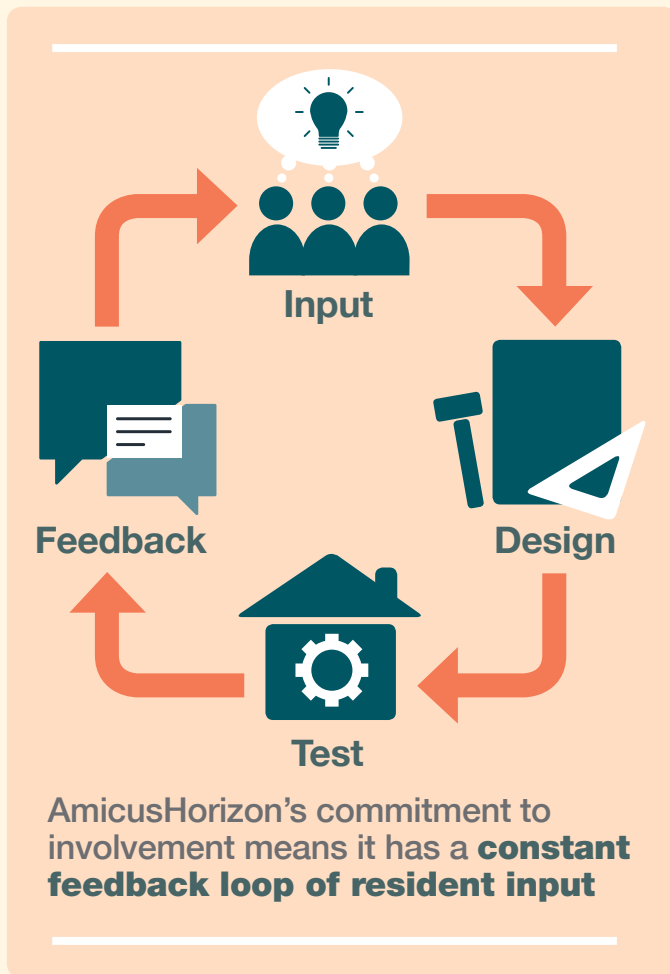


## Aims

- This study was supported by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG; who have a longstanding commitment to tenant involvement and empowerment) and commissioned by AmicusHorizon (a 'co-regulatory champion' with six years of experience of co-regulation).
- The University of Westminster was asked to independently test the hypothesis involvement can simultaneously deliver improved services, higher satisfaction and better value for money.
- The report aims to identify in-depth lessons from the experience of AmicusHorizon and to provide useful insights and tools for the wider sector.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>This work builds on findings from the National Tenant Organisations and University of Birmingham study, 'An Investment not a Cost', by providing an in-depth organisational review.





## Methods

The work used a combination of desk-based review and primary data, including:

- **analysis of qualitative and quantitative data** including KPIs, financial accounts and records of customer contact;
- **semi-structured interviews** with key stakeholders including residents and staff within AmicusHorizon and external stakeholders such as the Tenant Participation Advisory Service and Chartered Institute of Housing;
- **focus groups** with resident representatives; and
- **case study analysis** of three areas of service delivery.

## Case Studies

The study examined three specific areas of service provision (considered in detail in the main report).

### 1. Embedding Involvement and Aligning Goals

The most effective practices included:

- a. Creating a Resident Governance Structure providing varied and effective channels for involvement aligned to the overall business structure.
- b. Establishing a 'One Team' culture between residents, staff and Board reinforced by requiring Board member attendance at resident Area Panels.
- c. Aligning the association behind five 'Gold Medal' KPIs used to assess whether AmicusHorizon has reached its ambition of being the best large social landlord in the UK by 2016.

**A revised complaints policy** following widespread consultation resulted in **savings estimated at over £180,000 p.a.**



## 2. Complaints & Customer Experience

Residents designed a new complaints policy in 2009 resulting in savings estimated at £181,000 p.a. with key improvements including:

- a. A more solution-focused approach with the emphasis on dealing with complaints at the first contact.
- b. The creation of a central Customer Experience Team to improve consistency and ownership.
- c. Resident representatives chairing Stage 3 panels to make the complaints process more transparent and collaborative.



## 3. Procurement

Resident involvement has helped produce annual efficiency savings of around £2.3m since 2012.

### Changes have included:

- a. Resident engagement in recruitment and selection of contractors;
- b. Empowering residents to identify value for money improvements; and
- c. The appointment of Resident Monitors to carry out post-work inspections and challenge performance.



## Conclusions

The benefits of resident involvement are clear. It has simultaneously delivered improved services, higher satisfaction and improved value for money. AmicusHorizon has been highly successful in utilising a range of formal and informal methods, which have placed engagement at the centre of the business. In particular:

- **Acknowledgement** that ‘customers are smart’ and ‘want you to succeed’;
- **Enabling customer insights** to identify ‘ways of doing it better for less’;
- **Developing trust and confidence** and ensuring ‘a level of engagement from top to bottom’.

The above approach has ensured that organisational change is enduring and resilient; in the words of the Chief Executive ‘the genie is out of the bottle’.

To help other landlords in the sector use involvement to unlock these benefits, an online toolkit will be launched containing practical tips and recommendations on securing effective resident engagement.

# Introduction

*“Successful businesses in all sectors have a common theme – they know, understand and respond to their current and future customers. They do this by developing approaches and mechanisms to engage with service users. These approaches are closely aligned to the organisation’s strategy and there is a clear recognition of a business case for it (CIH, 2014, p.3).”*

## Aims of the study

This study has been supported by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and led by AmicusHorizon housing association. Both have a longstanding commitment to encouraging resident involvement. Since April 2012 DCLG has run the Government’s Tenant Empowerment Programme spending up to £2 million annually to give all social housing tenants the power to ensure their landlord provides the services they want.

AmicusHorizon, meanwhile, became one of the Tenant Services Authority’s ten inaugural ‘co-regulatory champions’ in 2010. Its six years of co-regulatory experience means it is uniquely positioned as a case study organisation with a wealth of quantitative and qualitative information upon which to draw. The University of Westminster was invited to independently test the hypothesis that involvement can simultaneously deliver improved services, satisfaction and value for money.

The report aims to identify lessons learnt from the example of AmicusHorizon and to provide useful insights for the wider housing sector. It will be followed by a practical toolkit comprising frequently asked questions and recommendations for effectively involving residents.

## Background and Literature Review

The growth of resident<sup>2</sup> involvement initiatives within housing practice has been the most significant and far-reaching change to governance and service delivery within the sector.

Originally conceived as a reaction against paternalistic, bureaucratic and hierarchical local authority landlords, resident involvement now constitutes a new orthodoxy within the housing sector. Often criticised as a purely symbolic, tokenistic response to resident dissatisfaction, over the last twenty years these initiatives have become a fundamental part of housing service delivery. However, whilst resident involvement has become a central focus of housing practice, registered social landlords (RSLs) have historically been relatively slow to adopt many of the key aspects of resident engagement (Cooper and Hawtin, 1998) and there has been a low level of awareness of the costs and benefits of involvement (Audit Commission, 2004). However, this neglect of collective rights has been transformed.

Residents are no longer ‘consulted’ according to the preference of landlords but are now seen as essential to the establishment of an efficient and effective housing business. Initiatives have therefore been introduced to develop strategies for resident empowerment through ensuring that stakeholders are fully involved in all aspects of housing organisations’ decision making processes, that they play an effective role in the governance of housing organisations and that their participation is both genuine and wide-ranging. It is therefore essential that resident empowerment should be inclusive, that decision making should lead to exercising genuine influence, that communication strategies must be thorough and that residents have sufficient capacity for their involvement to be meaningful (Wilson and Wilde, 2003).

<sup>2</sup>The term ‘resident’ rather than ‘tenant’ is preferred throughout the report to indicate the range of tenures within the housing sector.



Under the Coalition government the principle that landlords should be accountable to their residents (rather than to a government regulator) has been developed under the Localism Act 2011, with resident scrutiny seen as a key tool in tackling a range of issues within housing management and development. The idea of co-regulation has been developed, referring to 'the principle by which provider governing bodies self-regulate in a transparent manner, subject to tenant scrutiny and challenge, thereby enabling a reduction in direct, central regulation' (Smedley, 2012, p.3).

Co-regulation was designed to provide locally-based standards which met locally-defined needs and priorities, with the role of a central regulator limited to intervention in cases of failure. Co-regulation is now seen as a consumer rather

than regulatory standard. The 'Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard' states:

Tenants should have opportunities to shape service delivery and to hold the responsible board and councillors to account. Providers are expected to engage meaningfully with their tenants and offer them opportunities to shape the tailoring of services to reflect local priorities. Tenants should have the ability to scrutinise their provider's performance, identify areas for improvement and influence future delivery (HCA, 2012, p.9).

More specifically, this standard, which remains unchanged in the Homes and Community Agency's 2015 regulatory framework, specifies that tenants should be involved in:





- Formulating landlord housing related policies and strategic priorities;
- Making decisions about how housing related services are delivered, including setting service standards;
- Scrutinising landlord performance and recommending improvements;
- Managing repair and maintenance services and sharing in savings made; and
- Agreeing local offers for service delivery.

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*“Tenants should have opportunities to shape service delivery and to hold the responsible board and councillors to account. Providers are expected to engage meaningfully with their tenants and offer them opportunities to shape the tailoring of services to reflect local priorities. Tenants should have the ability to scrutinise their provider’s performance, identify areas for improvement and influence future delivery”*

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These ideas have been widely accepted by practitioners and are strongly endorsed by the Chartered Institute of Housing who have supported the idea of resident-led self-regulation: ‘Making services and decisions accountable to, and contestable by, residents, and responding to the resident voice’ are vital to ‘achieving and maintaining excellence in housing’ (Warrington and Davies, 2007, p.11). In particular, resident scrutiny was held to be a key strategy to ensure that housing organisations remain accountable to their main stakeholders (i.e. resident groups). As a consequence organisations have developed increasingly robust mechanisms to ensure that resident oversight is meaningful and effective. At the same time, housing organisations are being increasingly driven by value for money and commercial imperatives and in this context it is important to demonstrate the specific benefits for social housing providers of increased resident scrutiny. It has been claimed that co-regulation will result in improved services and increased accountability and in addition it will:

- Deliver services tailored towards resident requirements and reflecting local needs and priorities;
- Offer better value for money and more effective targeting of resources;
- Improve customer satisfaction; and
- Improve organisational performance (see TPAS/HouseMark/CIH, undated).

Further benefits have also been claimed for increasing resident scrutiny, for example that it can:

- Provide direct feedback mechanisms from residents to landlords;
- Ensure input from a wide variety of residents;
- Encourage a thorough analysis of policies to ensure they meet resident needs;
- Remove the need for external consultants;
- Improve relationships between residents and staff;
- Improve staff confidence; and
- Secure wider public benefit (CfPS, 2012).

However, there is little hard data available on the extent to which resident involvement can not only improve satisfaction but also aid in promoting excellence and value for money. Within an environment of increasing commercialisation, resource constraint and emphasis on value for money as the overriding priority, resident involvement is sometimes assumed to be an expensive ‘luxury’. Some therefore remain unconvinced of the wider organisational benefits for increased resident involvement. Studies (for example the Audit Commission, 2004) have commented on a range of difficulties in engaging residents including widespread paternalism amongst staff about the benefits of involvement; cynicism from residents that their decisions will have any influence and an unwillingness to become involved in what can be onerous and demanding tasks. Writing in the late 1990s, Cooper and Hawtin (1998) identified a number of key barriers to effective resident involvement:



- Insufficient resources for social housing in general and resident involvement in particular;
- Reluctance of landlords to make decision making processes transparent and accountable;
- Lack of skills and experiences within communities; and
- Lack of collaboration and co-operation within and between communities and service providers.

As regulatory requirements have been reduced for the sector, these barriers have become increasingly important to consider and traditionally housing associations have been seen as less effective than local authorities in ensuring effective resident engagement. To what extent has this changed and how have these problems been overcome? The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) has presented the business case for increasing resident engagement in the following way:

- It provides a valuable reality check about the quality of services;

- It ensures tenants' experiences are routinely considered alongside other forms of performance data;
- It provides a mechanism to ensure that landlords are delivering the services tenants want, which means they can tailor their services to reflect local needs and priorities;
- Tenants can be powerful advocates for efficiency and value for money (CIH, 2014).

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*“As regulatory requirements have been reduced for the sector, these barriers have become increasingly important to consider and traditionally housing associations have been seen as less effective than local authorities in ensuring effective resident engagement.”*

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The business benefits of resident scrutiny emerge where engagement with users is aligned with organisational strategy (Hood, 2010) and lead to:



“service improvements, efficiency savings, enhanced satisfaction and staff confidence, tenant input into self-assessments; and a high level of challenge as to how landlords operate. Tenant scrutiny is intrinsically linked to the delivery of value for money services that meet local needs with transparency about how investment is made” (TPAS/HouseMark/CIH, undated, p.6).

This study therefore tests such claims and considers the evidence to which they can be observed within the social housing sector.

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*“Tenant scrutiny is intrinsically linked to the delivery of value for money services that meet local needs with transparency about how investment is made”*

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## Methods

The report used a combination of desk-based review and primary data, including:

- **Analysis of qualitative and quantitative data** including KPIs, financial accounts and records of customer contact;
- **Semi-structured interviews** with key stakeholders including residents and staff within AmicusHorizon and external stakeholders, such as the Department for Communities and Local Government, Tenant Participation Advisory Service, National Housing Federation and local authority representatives. A total of 19 interviews were conducted;
- **Three focus groups** involving a total of 18 resident representatives; and
- **Case study analysis** of three areas of service delivery: embedding involvement and aligning goals; complaints and the customer experience and procurement.





## Background to AmicusHorizon

With assets of £1.25bn, almost 28,000 homes in management and an annual turnover of £157m, AmicusHorizon Ltd. is a member of the g15 group, which represents the fifteen largest housing associations in London. It is widely regarded as having an outstanding record of resident involvement and was selected as one of ten inaugural 'co-regulatory champions' by the Tenant Services Authority in 2010. It has won a range of awards. In 2014 it received thirteen industry awards including the National Housing Awards' Excellence in Customer Service and seven Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) awards, including its national Tenant of the Year and Young Tenant of the Year awards. In the same year it received Quality Assured Scrutiny accreditation from the Chartered Institute of Housing, TPAS and Housemark, and in 2015, for the second year running, an AmicusHorizon resident has won TPAS's regional Tenant of the Year award for the South-East.

AmicusHorizon Group Ltd. was formed in 2006 out of a merger between seven housing associations (South London Family Housing Association, Swale Housing, 1066 Housing Association, Rother Homes, Avenue, Crowebridge Housing and Southern Horizon). However, amalgamation resulted in significant difficulties and the organisation was placed in regulatory supervision in 2007 by the Housing Corporation on the basis of failings in governance and service delivery and a lack of engagement with residents. Difficulties were compounded by the attempt to integrate a number of different organisations, each with its own governance arrangements. The Housing Corporation specified that a new Board and Executive team should be appointed and these were in place in late 2008 and AmicusHorizon Ltd. was formed in 2009. A key principle of the new governance structure was that residents should be at the heart of decision making to ensure a strong local profile and to improve performance. Resident governance was integral to the goals of the organisation which set three key aims, to be:

top for customer satisfaction, top for performance amongst peers and a Sunday Times Top 100 Employer. An extensive training programme was developed to engender cultural change, focused around putting residents at the heart of the organisation.

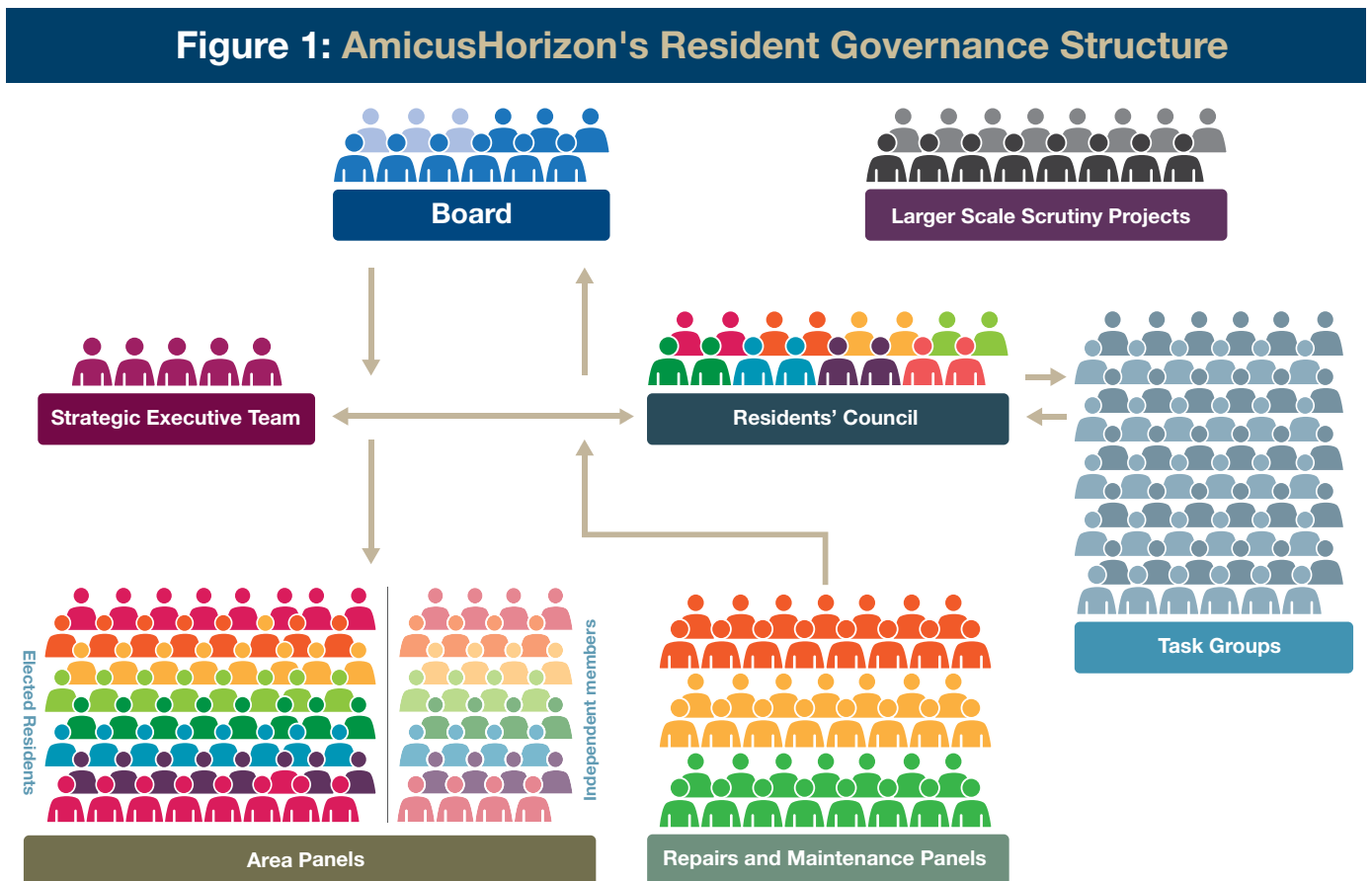
## Governance Structure

The current governance structure for AmicusHorizon is composed of:

- A **Strategic Board** (including four resident members out of twelve) which sets overall direction for the organisation. It is responsible for:
  - Good governance
  - Strategic direction and leadership
  - Service excellence
  - Financial wellbeing
- A **Residents' Council** comprising 16 members. All customer-facing processes are brought to the Residents' Council, whose role is to:
  - Reflect and bring together the views of Area Panels
  - Scrutinise service delivery
  - Hold the Board and Executive to account
  - Develop and approve strategies and policies and ensure they are resident-focused before they are presented at the Board.
- A system of **eight Area Panels** (each including eight elected resident members and four independent members), described as the 'cornerstone' of resident governance. They are aligned to AmicusHorizon's business structure such that each operating area has its own Area Panel. A distinctive feature of AmicusHorizon's approach is that a member of the Strategic Board is allocated to each Panel. The role of the Area Panels is to:
  - Hold the organisation to account for service delivery (facilitated by performance

- reporting at Area Panel level)
- Set local priorities
  - Shape local services
  - Agree local offers and budgets
  - Engage with residents in their area
- Residents are also involved in a variety of panels and forums looking at the needs of specific services and groups. These include:
- Three **Repairs and Maintenance Panels** (RAMP) (one in each Region) which meet to discuss the performance of repairs services and planned maintenance programmes;
  - A **Digital working party** and editorial panels to help improve digital inclusion;
  - A **Residents' Design and Quality Forum** for new build properties;
  - A **Homeowners forum** for homeowners and leaseholders to raise issues;
  - An **Equality and Diversity forum** to consider how services can be accessible to all;
  - An **Older Persons forum** to highlight needs of residents over 50 or those living in homes for older people; and
  - A **Youth forum** for residents under the age of 21 and led by young people. The purpose is to influence and lead on services provided for young people and communities.

**Figure 1** (below) illustrates the overall governance structure of AmicusHorizon (different colours indicating the different regional areas).



Task Groups (to monitor compliance with Homes and Communities Agency regulatory standards) have been established in a number of areas including:



Residents can choose to become mystery shoppers, 'green ambassadors' or resident monitors, or to be involved in estate inspections. Residents are encouraged to provide feedback through regular surveys, comment cards in local offices, frequent events held in local areas and Annual Regional Residents' Assemblies. More informal forms of engagement are held through family activities and focus group sessions. Joint training is also held with staff members, for example in mediation accreditation and negotiation skills.

Other free training and development opportunities are provided in areas such as:

- Financial skills
- Newsletter writing skills
- Influencing your landlord
- Money management/understanding benefits
- Fundraising for projects/groups
- DIY
- Understanding repairs and maintenance
- Mystery shopping
- Basic First Aid

AmicusHorizon collects a wealth of regular data on residents' views, collecting over 11,000 surveys annually in 2012/13 and 2013/14. The data received from these studies complements the work of the formal governance structure and helps to influence decision making. As one Board member commented 'the more you can enroll the customer in a range of ways, the better quality your data and the better quality your insight'. AmicusHorizon received Quality Assured Scrutiny (QAS) accreditation in 2014 with the assessor commenting that resident engagement was 'embedded in virtually every aspect' of the organisation's operation (HouseMark, 2014). The following sections provide case study material on specific aspects of AmicusHorizon's operations to demonstrate how resident engagement can improve performance and produce service excellence. Three areas have been selected: Embedding Involvement and Aligning Goals, Complaints and the Customer Experience and Procurement.

## Embedding Involvement and Aligning Goals

As Hood (2010) has stated, for resident engagement to be effective, the governance structure needs to be aligned with the direction of the organisation. AmicusHorizon's approach is to be an 'outwards-facing organisation' with



a unity of purpose between staff, the Board and residents. A core principle of its resident engagement strategy is for the process to be central to decision making, rather than a marginal activity. In this way resident involvement is part of providing excellent services and ‘making a difference to communities’ (Interview Board member). The amalgamation of AmicusHorizon from seven disparate housing associations meant there was initially little sense of shared vision. Service delivery was fragmented, with governance identified as a specific weakness. Following the establishment of the new governance structure in 2009, the objective was for ‘priorities to be developed by residents in their area, reflecting the needs, views and feelings of local people. Those would be the basic building blocks of our corporate planning approach’ (Interview, Chief Executive).

### Developing a strategic focus

The establishment of a new structure and co-regulation directorate in 2012 demonstrated that AmicusHorizon viewed resident engagement as central rather than marginal to their core business. Several respondents commented that the biggest challenge was building on low levels of trust and confidence. A key process in building trust was the fact that the residents themselves were included in the process of change. Hence ‘the way to develop that shared understanding and language – that insight from involved residents has been very helpful’ (Interview, Chief Executive).

An important aspect of AmicusHorizon’s approach to governance has been the development of a ‘One Team’ ethos to demonstrate common goals and purposes. This idea was repeatedly emphasised by residents, staff and Board members in interviews, which provided a strong sense of individuals and groups working together – like a ‘stick of [Blackpool] rock’ as one Board member phrased it. Having residents engaged in the decision

making process offered a number of strategic benefits, not least that resident engagement was perceived as investment rather than cost.

A significant change was a decision to allocate Board members to Area Panels. Whilst initially many residents felt intimidated and lacked confidence in speaking to the Board, ‘now residents are really confident contributors and even coming into the room, it isn’t always obvious who is an independent Board member, who is a resident and who is a staff member’ (Interview, Chief Executive). The One Team ethos was also seen as particularly successful. In the words of one resident:

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*“If we’re going to make a difference, then there’s got to be some compromise, you’ve got to have a conclusive team decision otherwise nothing is going to work... You’re actually getting voluntary people interested in value-for-money giving their honest opinion – and I think that really does make a massive difference (Resident, Focus Group).”*

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Crucially this customer engagement (which required more than simply consultation) was seen as good, practical business sense. In the words of one Board member:


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*“If all you did was send questionnaires and do a bit of mystery shopping you would get some information, but you’re not going to get the full picture. This is consultancy... the more you coach and train them, the better they are at it. They can tell you what’s not working, they can shape how to do it better, but really importantly they will tell you what matters to them.”*

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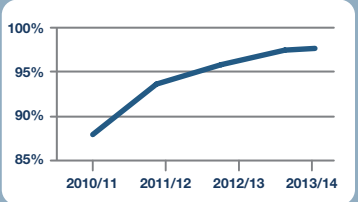
A central insight was that residents had a vested interest in improving service delivery: ‘The customers, the residents, want AmicusHorizon to succeed. The trick is to recognise that it’s a gift, that it has value and (a) not be defensive and (b) realise that because they want you to succeed they are going to come up with ideas, which will work’ (Interview, Board member).

# AmicusHorizon's 5 Gold Medals




### Overall resident satisfaction

Percentage of residents very or fairly satisfied with the **overall service** provided by AmicusHorizon.

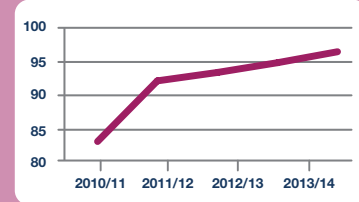


Year	Satisfaction (%)
2010/11	88
2011/12	94
2012/13	96
2013/14	98




### Satisfaction with ASB handling

Percentage of ASB complainants very or fairly satisfied with the **handling of their case**.

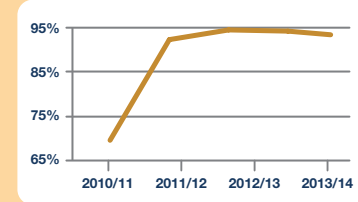


Year	Satisfaction (%)
2010/11	83
2011/12	92
2012/13	94
2013/14	96




### Satisfaction with Complaints Handling

Percentage of residents very or fairly satisfied with the **handling of their complaint**.

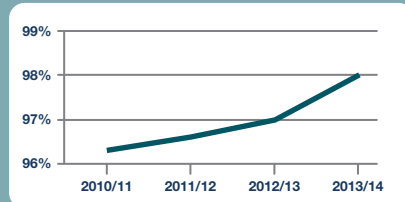


Year	Satisfaction (%)
2010/11	70
2011/12	90
2012/13	94
2013/14	94


### Repair Satisfaction

Percentage of residents very or fairly satisfied with **the most recent repair to their home**.



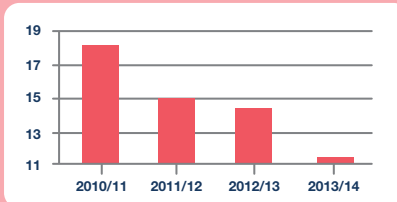
Year	Satisfaction (%)
2010/11	96.5
2011/12	97.0
2012/13	97.5
2013/14	98.0

- 2015
- 2014
- 2013
- 2012
- 2011
- 2010



### Average re-let time

Average **calendar days to re-let vacant homes** requiring only minor repairs.



Year	Average re-let time (days)
2010/11	18
2011/12	15
2012/13	14.5
2013/14	11.5

## Sustaining performance improvements

Residents have been heavily involved in setting and monitoring key performance indicators, identified as ‘going for gold’ targets, in five specific areas:

- Resident satisfaction
- Relet times
- Satisfaction with handling antisocial behaviour
- Satisfaction with repairs
- Satisfaction with complaints handling

These ‘five gold medals’ are linked to an ambition to be the best performing large (i.e. managing over 10,000 homes) social landlord in the UK by 2016. It should be noted that four out of five of these medals relate to satisfaction measures and these targets were not only selected with residents, but performance is also determined by them; residents are therefore central to judging AmicusHorizon’s success.

The tables below show changes in performance between 2010-2015. These satisfaction levels are the highest of the immediate g15 peer group and the level of resources invested in resident engagement and scrutiny has contributed to these impressive figures.

**Table 1: Resident Satisfaction, 2010-2015 (%)**

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15 (to Jan)
Overall landlord services	87.4	93.1	95.3	96.9	97.4
Anti-Social Behaviour	82.9	92.1	93.4	94.9	96.4
Repairs	96.3	96.6	97.0	98.0	98.0
Complaints	69.6	92.5	94.7	94.3	93.5

**Table 2: Average re-let times, 2010-2015 (days)**

2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15 (to Jan)
18.1	15.0	14.4	11.4	12.5

Resident satisfaction with overall services in 2013/14 was 97%, compared with a g15 median of 77%. Table 2 illustrates the changing performance in average relet times over the same period, with the figure of 11.4 days the lowest of the g15 peer group.

Anti-social behaviour is a perennial difficulty for residents and landlords and is a significant factor in resident dissatisfaction.

But AmicusHorizon’s performance in this area has demonstrated significant improvement (table 1): 96.4% satisfaction with the handling of anti-social behaviour is exceptionally high.

Such figures could not have been achieved without a substantial input from resident groups, which have been closely involved in the redesign of policies to ensure a response within twenty-four hours, assisting in



managing expectations and helping to build confidence and trust (Interview, Chief Executive). Performance has been assisted by clarity about what constitutes ASB and how the organisation will respond. A specialist team deals with high-level cases and provides guidance on less serious incidents.



A separate section will look at the handling of complaints processes, the figures again show impressive performance with a figure of 94% satisfaction. On all main priorities set by residents, AmicusHorizon has made impressive progress compared to similar organisations. Their goal to be the best large landlord in the UK is a highly ambitious one, but the data shows it to be more than simply aspiration. Respondents strongly believe that these improvements have only been possible through a governance structure with residents at the heart and a commitment to shared values throughout the organisation.

Resident input has had a strong influence in developing and sustaining these service improvements. As one respondent commented: 'They acquire a confidence to not just answer the questions you are asking but actually to identify things that we are not thinking about' (Interview,

Board member). As the Director of Co-regulation explained: 'our residents effectively have become our consultants' (Interview, Director of Co-regulation).

This approach is underpinned by the notion of respect for residents, acknowledging that 'customers are smart'. It involves a strategy of seeing residents as 'co-producers', enabling them to determine improvements in service provision and establishing value for money savings. Examples included:

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*"Direct reporting and monitoring of repairs (expert to expert, i.e. resident to contractor); more residents accessing services digitally and online giving them flexibility and freedom; taking out risk of failure...you are getting a better service, better VFM if you do more for yourself."* (Interview, Chief Executive)

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Residents were proud to be unpaid volunteers, rejecting suggestions that they should be paid for their efforts as 'this would make us employees' and compromise their independence. The Chief Executive explained:

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*"there is an enormous power from having, as we have, 100 plus super-users or super-consumers out there on our estates, in our neighbourhoods, in our communities who can explain to their neighbours who are not involved why we are doing things the way we are."*

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Residents were keen to identify cost savings, for example in one area 'we've done away with elections [for Area Panels], they weren't cost effective, it wasn't value for money' (Resident, Focus Group) and further cost savings were being identified through a three year 'Ways of Working' programme with a target to reduce costs by £7.5m. Residents' suggestions have included producing fewer editions of newsletters and reports and reductions to a 'local improvement fund' which was not being fully used. 'It's about them telling us where to make savings, as opposed to us imposing it on them' (Executive Director Finance and Resources).

## Embedding cultural change

One of the most important themes that emerged from this study was the extent to which respondents saw themselves as being engaged in a process of radical and transformative change. This has been echoed in other independent evaluations. For example HouseMark have commented that ‘the cultural shift at AmicusHorizon is not just about a commitment from the leadership team, but also resulted from the active involvement of resident scrutiny in all aspects of the business (above and beyond housing management)’ (HouseMark, 2014). This cultural change is driven by the senior leadership team and sustained through the resident engagement process, a reminder that sustainable change needs to be driven by a combination of top-down and bottom-up processes. Decision making is therefore driven by resident involvement; as one resident commented ‘it wouldn’t be a decision if we didn’t agree to it’.

Resident engagement has been embedded within organisational processes, rather than simply added on to existing practices. One of the Strategic Executive Team commented:

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*“I think there is a genuine change in the way we have reengineered our processes to make lots of strategic decisions. We now ask residents first and build up a strategy or policy from that consultation [and] the day-to-day drip-drip has helped everybody to see how that has brought about improvements and has created the groundswell of our successful business. The cultural change and attitude underpins all of that.”*

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This comment illustrates the way in which the cultural change that has been embedded throughout AmicusHorizon places great emphasis upon respect for resident views and preferences. This involved a role at the strategic level or ‘the important big decisions where it becomes policy, that’s where we have a big influence’ (Resident, Focus Group).

The ‘Ways of Working’ strategy incorporates Board, staff and residents as ‘One Team’ working to identify savings through a common approach to value for money, which is crucial in today’s constrained environment. While difficult choices are likely, the rigorous process taken to identify these savings means decisions will be both better and more resilient, and ‘a group [of residents] that is well-resourced and sensible will often have far more impact and will do a lot of the work for you that staff were doing and free them up to do other stuff’ (Interview, TPAS).

This cultural change was generally cited as the reason why AmicusHorizon had been the most successful organisation in both recruiting and retaining resident representatives and creating a positive process of resident engagement. As one Director suggested:

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*“There is an endless problem in the wider sector with retention and recruitment and with burnout. We don’t seem to have had those kinds of issues here. I think it might be that residents are able to see something come from it.”*

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This view of the value of engagement was reinforced by residents, for example one commented: ‘when you see all these residents sitting here voluntarily, would you do that unless you were convinced that it was actually working and worth doing?’ (Resident, Focus Group). The success of the process was linked to the idea that this model is both resilient and enduring, hence: ‘You can see and feel the tangible benefits – it’s a positive experience working with customers in a way that it may not be for some other social landlords, where staff run to the bunkers rather than actually engage with customers’ (Interview, Chief Executive). The idea of a common culture was widely commented upon, for example:

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*“Now if we see a problem emerge it is much easier to deal with it. There is now a common language...and it gives you a framework to fall back on if you are dealing with difficult topics (Interview, Director of Co-Regulation).”*

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Residents, staff and Board members all undertook the same training programmes and staff were required to attend Area Panels, developing mutual respect. Meetings, even when discussing difficult topics, were described as more productive, less antagonistic and more rewarding than in the past. These changes were also seen as beneficial in facilitating relationships with other agencies. As one local authority partner commented: 'they have become a much more efficient and stronger organisation, they are more responsive and open to suggestions. We can engage in a grown up discussion' (Interview).

Customers were treated with respect, seen as a valued asset; change was no longer viewed as a threat and this positive approach to resident engagement - 'a relationship that drives success' (Board member) - was widely seen as underpinning service excellence. In many respects AmicusHorizon has been the pioneer of co-regulation strategies within the housing association sector. It has embraced co-regulation, with confidence in the value added by residents increasing in line with improvements in performance. As an independent observer commented, resident involvement 'is absolutely in their DNA' (Interview, TPAS).

At the same time, staff were keen to stress that whilst they are resident-influenced, they are not entirely resident-led ('we are not a housing cooperative' as one respondent commented). The organisation has taken impressive steps and led the way for other organisations to adopt similar approaches. At times this can be a difficult furrow to plough – there is no blueprint for success and the process can seem like a trial and error approach (although a subsequent toolkit will help to provide some guidance in this regard).

Much has been achieved in a relatively short period of time; the challenge in the future will be to sustain the momentum and to continually review and refine the procedures, and not least to ensure a steady turnover of active residents. It is understandable that some organisations may be reluctant to engage in full co-regulation processes in an environment where the risks of failure are high and where specialist expertise is often sorely lacking. But the experience of AmicusHorizon demonstrates how an effective alignment of goals allows resident engagement to be developed, underpinning effective business strategy.

## Key Findings

AmicusHorizon's approach to resident involvement has been effective for a number of reasons:

- 1** An acknowledgement that cultural change requires a clear strategic focus.
- 2** Alignment not only of corporate goals, but also operating structures. Area Panels are aligned with the operating structure, creating clear lines of accountability and facilitating local performance management.
- 3** Staff, Board members and residents have played an essential role in governance at central and local levels.
- 4** Cultural change has been sustained by progressive performance improvement and underpinned by extensive data collection and analysis.
- 5** Insights offered by resident groups have been incorporated into the decision making process to assist in service delivery and value for money.



## Resident involvement in the complaints process



A restructuring of the complaints process was undertaken in 2009, following an internal report involving residents. A Complaints Task Group with residents was established and a new policy included an annual complaints scrutiny programme. The aim was to change a process perceived as officer-led to one where customers play a central role in resolving disputes between landlord and residents. To this purpose all staff were compelled to undergo customer service training programmes with the message that complaints are key to improving service delivery.

The main outcome of the review was that the most serious (Stage 3) complaints are managed by residents, who are also involved in preventing problems escalating beyond Stage 2. In the latter cases, complainants are visited by staff and resident panel members to assess the problem. The aim is to create a more positive dynamic: 'we try to find a solution before it gets to Stage 3 [review panel]' (Interview). In this way, the complaints process has become a collaborative rather than confrontational process. As a senior

manager explained: 'it is not a trial, it is not a hearing. We all sit round a table and we are all on their side. It is all of us together against the problem'.

A resident member noted 'the eventual decision is made by the residents, and it is accepted by AmicusHorizon'.

Cultural change was engendered in the notion that complaints are tools for change. The establishment of a centralised Customer Experience Team ensured a stronger focus on the resolution of complaints as a collaborative process in conjunction with residents that would not have been possible under the previous (officer-led) structure. In addition all staff are empowered to resolve issues and a budget has been agreed (with resident support) to address complaints quickly and efficiently. Residents also assist in drafting a quarterly 'lessons learned paper' which drives continuous improvement and AmicusHorizon has instituted a bi-annual complaints summit.

Since the review in 2009 AmicusHorizon has seen a dramatic reduction in overall complaints with resolution of problems at an informal level and a considerable reduction in escalation of disputes. These changes have resulted in a range of benefits including savings in costs and staff time and improved relationships with residents. It has made a major contribution to overall resident satisfaction. Figure 2 overleaf illustrates the change in formal complaints since 2009.

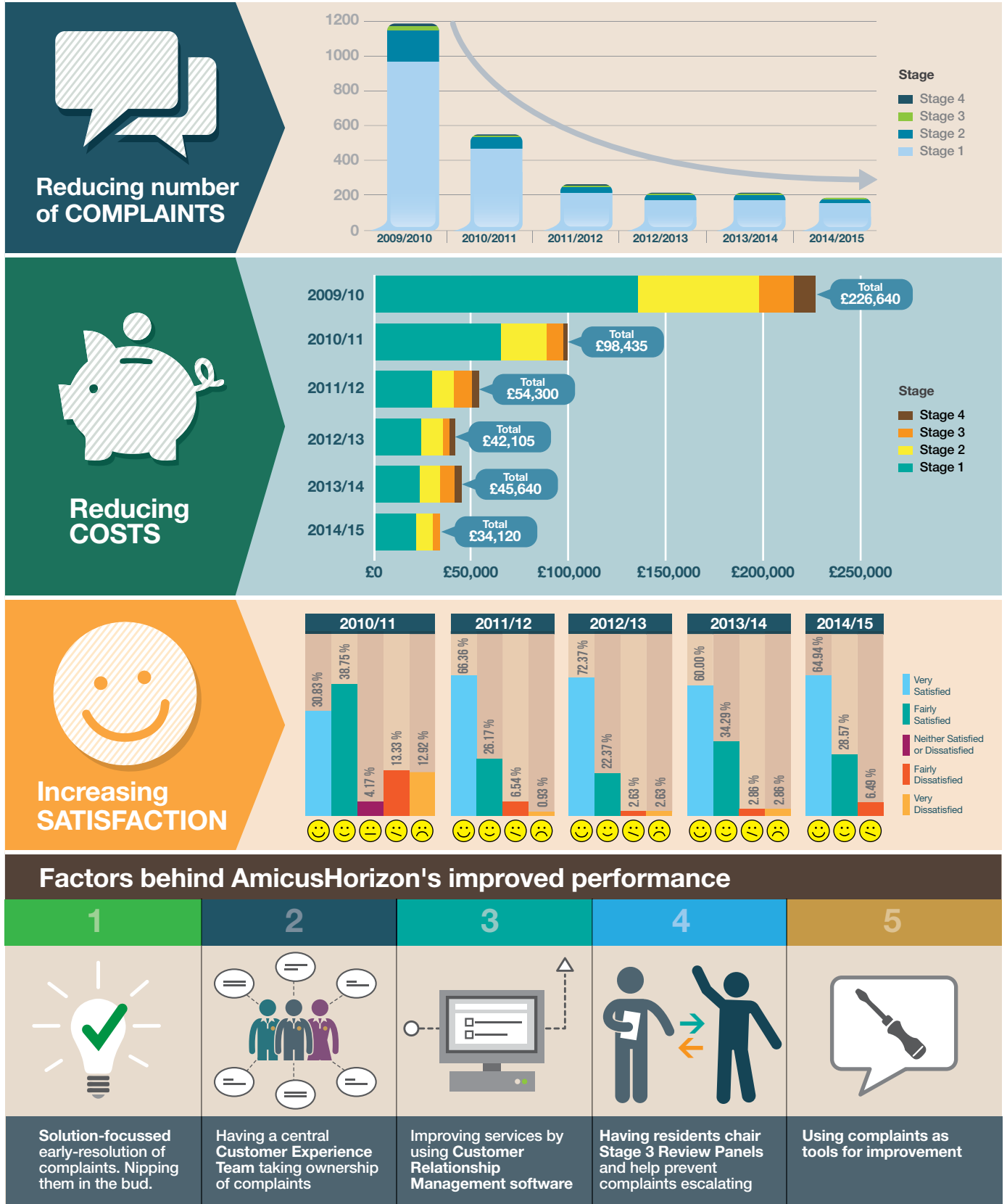
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*"A Complaints Task Group with residents was established and a new policy included an annual complaints scrutiny programme. The aim was to change a process perceived as officer-led to one where customers play a central role in resolving disputes between landlord and residents."*

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Figure 2  
**Complaints**



It is calculated that the reduction in complaints is now generating annual savings of £181,000 comparing 2013/14 to 2009/10. Using engaged residents where a Stage 2 complaint may escalate has helped to halve the number of Stage 3 complaints over a two-year period. Involving residents has not only reduced the costs of complaints dramatically, but also raised resident satisfaction with the complaints process so it is now the highest in the g15 group. HouseMark benchmarking for 2013/4 shows 94% of residents satisfied with complaints handling, compared to a g15 median of 42%. A further benefit of the complaints process was that it can identify potential panel members: 'we have got success stories of people who have got involved because they came to us as a complainant. They got to a Stage 3 hearing and they are now on an Area Panel' (Interview Director of Customer Experience). This was echoed by a resident panel member:

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*"We all turned around (after the complaint hearing) and said "we want him [the complainant] on our Area Panel". We invited him and his wife to the panel and said "we need people like you who aren't afraid to speak up".*

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The process was explained as follows: 'You introduce yourself to the complainant as a resident, you understand some of their problems and you empathise. And the decision is accepted by AmicusHorizon' (Focus Group). Engaging residents in the complaints process was seen as an effective way of ensuring positive change. As another resident suggested: 'It's a lot better to be changing things inside, rather than constantly be outside sniping, because that doesn't get anywhere, it doesn't bring change' (Focus Group).

One of the costs of this process is the length of time for decisions to be agreed, which can be frustrating for staff and residents. However, as the Director of Co-Regulation explained 'if they don't go through resident scrutiny, you will end up



with more complaints, social media campaigns, meetings to explain unpopular decisions that may well have to be changed in any case'. The benefits of taking time to ensure a rigorous process were explained by the Chief Executive:

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*"You may spend a couple of extra months getting your complaints process right, but you save a massive amount of staff time by having fewer complaints and by dealing with them in a more efficient way. Enlisting residents to help with our Stage 3 process... makes very good business sense" (Interview, Chief Executive).*

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In addition the benefit of truly valuing complaints was that these could be seen as a learning opportunity and residents felt comfortable in contacting the organisation to express dissatisfaction. The benefit of resident involvement in the complaints process was explained well by one respondent:

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*"We can see the other side of the coin when some residents are making demands. Being an involved resident you can see it differently, you get a bigger picture and you can understand sometimes why [AmicusHorizon] aren't able to do it. So it's important being an involved resident because you can see both sides of the picture."*

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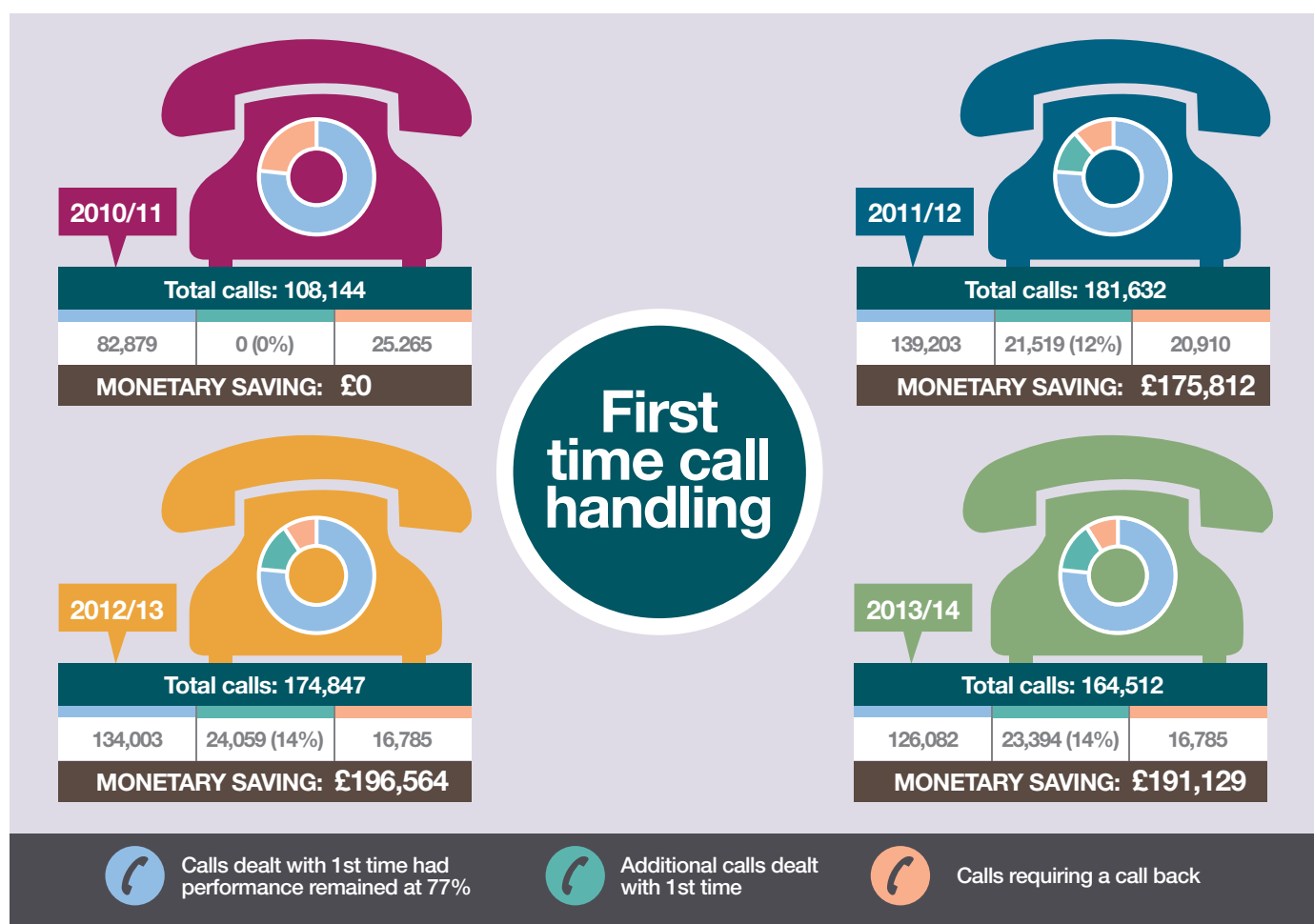
## The customer experience

AmicusHorizon have implemented a Customer Experience Strategy, which ensures a strong resident input into defining the customer experience and the use of customer insight to understand why customers call. This strategy includes mystery shopping exercises, residents shadowing call centre staff and improving access to relevant services over the phone. For example telephone hold messages have been altered to ensure that callers are no longer compelled to listen to a full range of options when contacting the organisation. Resident insights also informed a process whereby customers were able to verify their identity in more approachable ways.

Interactions with customers are monitored through a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, providing a database of all previous contact with the organisation. This system can identify when

and why residents have contacted AmicusHorizon, enabling efficient targeting of help to customers. In the words of one member of staff 'we know why they are calling. The left hand knows what the right hand is doing...our advisors are able to deal with customers at the first call' and 'our advisors are able to give what customers have told us they want'. Staff are empowered by being provided with up to date information, which facilitates consistency and reduces the need to transfer calls.

The improvement in dealing with issues at the first call (defined as calls where no call back is required by another member of staff) is shown in table 6 below, showing an increase from 77% to 91% over a four year period. Savings can be identified on the assumption that second calls would have used half an hour of officer time at £16.34 per hour. Had the number of enquiries requiring a second call remained at 76.64%, an additional cost of £191,129 (in 2013/14) would have been incurred.



While the quantity of calls has fluctuated, the quality of interactions is felt to have shown a significant improvement assisted by resident mystery shopping exercises: ‘our customers can tell if people sound genuinely interested when they answer the phone’ (Interview, Director of Customer Experience). ‘One of the most satisfactory results was a change of attitude’ as one resident commented. An improvement in working relationships is reflected in lower levels of staff turnover, the lowest in the g15 peer group at 11% (compared to a 17.8% median), indicating a satisfied workforce who do not want to leave. AmicusHorizon also has a markedly low number of days lost to sickness and absenteeism.

As the Director of Customer Experience commented, ‘the way we are headed is to try and ensure that every person’s working day has as much value in it as possible’. AmicusHorizon has an effective database of customer information to enable staff to respond to enquiries as soon as they arrive. The result has therefore been:

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*“There’s been a lot of work finding out what customers want and designing our offer around that, but there’s been an equivalent amount of work giving our staff the tools and skills to deliver the service.... it’s not a chore for me to sit down with customers and help them. When they do need us we react quickly”*(Director of Customer Experience).

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AmicusHorizon has undertaken substantial research in an attempt to improve the customer experience. This work looked at the key drivers of resident satisfaction and indicated that helpfulness and reliability are often more important than speed when responding to customer enquiries. The introduction of the co-regulatory structure provides a clear example of resident engagement assisting business improvements within AmicusHorizon. Resident involvement has assisted in reducing overall complaints and prevented an escalation of disputes. As a consequence of the shift to an outward-facing organisation, improved relations between staff and residents can be identified and have assisted in cost reductions over time.

## Key Findings

The dramatic reductions in complaints and significant improvements in the customer experience have been underpinned by the following factors:

- 1** Training programmes have emphasised that complaints should be valued and seen as an opportunity to learn.
- 2** Residents have played a key role in the resolution of complaints.
- 3** AmicusHorizon acknowledges that taking time to ensure policies and procedures are robust should be seen as an investment although efficiencies can be identified.
- 4** Residents are seen as best placed to provide insight into the customer experience and can suggest important areas of improvement that can otherwise be overlooked.
- 5** AmicusHorizon has effectively utilised data management systems to monitor complaints, to analyse why they occur and how they can be prevented.



## Resident involvement in procurement

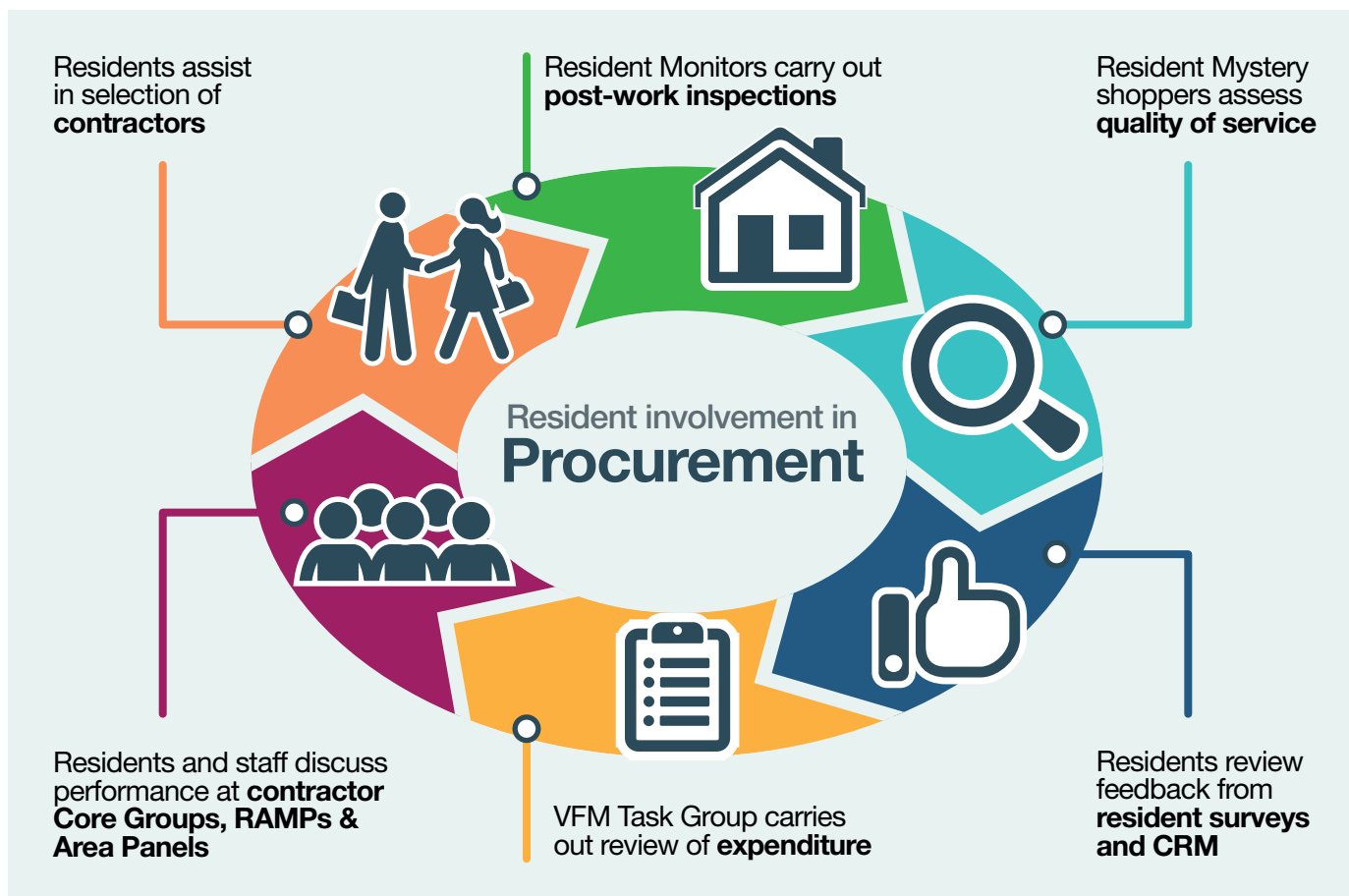
AmicusHorizon's Strategic Board approved the current Procurement Strategy in May 2012. It embeds resident involvement in the procurement and monitoring of contracts through ensuring:

- resident membership of procurement selection panels that short-list bidders and select contractors;
- the appointment of Resident Monitors who carry out post-work inspections and challenge performance on existing contracts, and
- a Value for Money Task Group of residents and staff which carries out regular reviews of expenditure for each supplier.

In addition staff report on procurement issues to the Area Panels, and the Repairs and Maintenance Panels regularly monitor the performance of repairs contractors in their region.

Less formal types of resident engagement such as local forums, residents' events and outreach, such as door-knocking provide early warning of issues with current contracts. The role of residents on Procurement Panels was described as 'we want a company that's going to do the job, do it properly but also be resident-friendly and value-for-money' (Resident, Focus Group).

AmicusHorizon recruits residents to its Procurement Panel, and aims to engage at least fifty residents willing to take part in some aspects of the procurement process (at the moment the panel has around thirty residents). The level of engagement can vary with the individual resident's available time and areas of interest, with some residents simply completing surveys on the specification of new contracts or the performance of existing ones. Other residents will devote several days to the selection of a new contractor:



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*“Three of us did the bathroom contractor procurement process. We sat down for two weeks straight nearly, with the staff and we went through all the procurement to get to the new contractor” (Procurement Panel member).*

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Many Procurement Panel members also take part in the monthly contract meetings with individual contractors, and some residents sit on several different meetings each month. Since many of these residents were also members of an Area Panel and/or a RAMP, they were making a commitment of many hours each month to monitor and improve services. They stressed that they were willing to make such a large commitment of time because they knew their views could make a difference:

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*“We changed the decorating contract, and then we went through procurement to get a new contract. And that is now a success because the new decorating contractors have performed far above where we were before. [Q: That was directly due to residents?] Yes, there were too many complaints.” (Area Panel Chair, Kent)*

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The ability for resident engagement to influence performance was reflected in comments from other stakeholders. For example the Chief Executive of the Tenant Participation Advisory Service commented that having residents on the Procurement Panel makes contractors behave in a different way. Hence:

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*“We get contractors coming to us all the time and asking “what are tenants going to ask us? How should we behave?”. They are trying to modify their behaviour. Having tenants on panels adds a dimension around social and community value. They are much more exacting on extracting value for money.”*

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However, the residents we interviewed pointed out that involvement on its own was not sufficient to bring about improvement. They stressed a need to compromise and achieve consensus. Residents and staff therefore had to work as an effective team to ensure cost-effective procurement:

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*“I think it’s very important that we understand that it’s not just residents who do this. The staff has to have the “One Team” approach and have to believe in what we do, and also we have to believe in what they do for it to work. If we didn’t work together the way we do, then it wouldn’t work” (Resident at the Kent focus group).*

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## Outcomes

We focused on three recent examples of procurement where residents had a marked impact on the outcome of the process: the gas safety and boiler replacement contract, the kitchen and bathroom replacement contract and the grounds maintenance contract.

### Gas safety and boiler replacement

Residents were members of the Gas Contract Project Team that drew up the specification for contracts for maintenance and replacement of boilers in 2012. They suggested two specific questions for the framework tender (collectively worth 10% of the total score):

1. How will you engage with residents to achieve and maintain customer satisfaction?
2. How will you give something back to the local community through the delivery of the services?

The company awarded the contract in Kent provides a good example of the way that contractors responded to the residents’ criteria. All of its operatives now undertake customer excellence training, and it sets aside more than £100,000 of cash and support for AmicusHorizon’s ‘Contractor Give Back Scheme’ for community initiatives and training.

The contracts procured under the new framework are estimated to provide savings of 30%, factoring in both servicing and replacement, compared with previous providers. With the Sussex contract, servicing costs have fallen from £128 per property to £98, while in the Kent region unit costs fell from £143 to £110.

**Table 7: Savings on the Gas Servicing and Boiler Replacement contracts**

Region	Length of contract	Total savings (including VAT)	Annual savings (including VAT)
Sussex	4 years	£2,321,827	£580,457
Kent	4 years	£994,803	£248,701
London	2 1/4 years	£1,037,915	£461,296
<b>Total</b>		<b>£4,354,545</b>	<b>£1,290,453</b>

In the London region feedback from residents, coupled with a mystery shopping exercise carried out by engaged residents, led to the early conclusion of its gas and boiler contract in 2014. The new contractor is not only achieving higher satisfaction, but the re-procurement will allow estimated savings of £864,929 excluding VAT over the remaining twenty-seven months.

It could be argued that the expertise and insight of the procurement staff might have produced some of these efficiencies, even if residents had not been directly involved in the tendering process. In addition the procurement exercise was part of a wider framework initiative with other members of the South East Consortium.

However, resident involvement has undoubtedly added hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of extra value to these contracts, as well as driving up the standards of work.

### Kitchen and bathroom replacement

Resident involvement also led to significant changes in the way the kitchen and bathroom replacement contracts will now be procured. Following suggestions made at the Repairs and Maintenance Panels and by Resident Monitors, efficiency savings will be produced by directly managing the installation contractor, removing a main contractor from the chain, and bringing resident liaison in-house rather than leaving it to the contractor.

The new approach, using smaller contractors and in-house liaison officers will go live in April 2015. The annual savings in the Sussex region are estimated at around £395,000. While in-house costs will rise due to recruitment of new resident liaison staff, this is more than compensated for by savings achieved by adopting the residents' suggestions to use smaller contractors.

**Table 8: Savings on new kitchen & bathroom replacement contract (Sussex)**

	Current approach	New Approach	Savings
Contractor costs	£2,960,000	£2,293,000	£667,000
AmicusHorizon costs	£94,000	£366,000	£272,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£3,054,000</b>	<b>£2,659,000</b>	<b>£395,000</b>

## Grounds maintenance

The grounds maintenance contract was a joint procurement exercise with two local authorities (Rother District and Hastings Borough Councils). Residents from the Sussex region worked with staff to design the tender. They also evaluated the bids along with representatives of the two councils, requiring them to consider value for money for all three organisations as the same supplier would work for all three landlords. Residents played an important role in this example, as they were acting in a wider capacity. As a member of AmicusHorizon's procurement team pointed out, they were 'representing not only our residents – but also [acting as] public citizens of the Council partners'.

The two resident representatives took part in the quality evaluation and ensured that each submission was scored against the criteria they had agreed. The single supplier they selected will provide AmicusHorizon with savings of £1 million over the ten year contract (as well as an additional £4 million of savings for the other two Councils).

Of course residents contribute towards the overarching procurement and contract process, as well as individual contacts. For example they drew up the Code of Conduct for staff working in residents' homes, which added value by improving resident satisfaction with services:

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*"It was residents from the RAMPs' away days and things like that who developed the Code of Conduct that our contractors have to adhere to when they're going into residents' homes" (Focus Group resident).*

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Engaged residents were able to provide an important customer perspective on service delivery and in this regard their role in providing scrutiny of the process was seen as a key safeguard:

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*"If residents weren't involved in procurement, who would have been checking [who was] driving the agenda? Who would have been challenging...[or] doing things differently?" (Interview, Director of Procurement).*

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At the same time it is important to note that resident engagement plays a key element not only in identifying potential problems with contracts, but engaged residents also highlight good practice, providing assurance where contracts are working well, highlighting quality and improving satisfaction. For example residents at one of the focus groups commented:

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**Resident 1:** *"We complemented the contractors. The paintwork was superb, the best I've seen in 20-odd years."*

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**Resident 2:** *"I mean we know there's always someone who is never satisfied, but if you've got 99% satisfaction then you're not getting the aftermath of repairs costs, surveyors going out looking three or four times, you're actually getting voluntary people interested in value-for-money giving their honest opinion – and I think that really does make a massive difference."*

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**Resident 3:** *"It has made a massive difference. We know, we go out and we talk to the other residents, so it's not just boxes ticked."*

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As the Director of Procurement recalled, 'people pressure fundamentally changed the planned process that we were going to adopt', through resident insight and debate.

We have concentrated on the procurement exercises described above because residents had clearly exerted a significant impact both in alerting the organisation to potential inefficiencies in existing arrangements and shaping new



contracts that created better quality and value for money. We also identified other examples where residents' suggestions had produced improvements.

For example we observed residents making impromptu suggestions, e.g. to save travel costs through video-conferencing, when we attended a RAMP as part of our research.

While some of these savings might have been identified by experienced professional staff in due course, there is no doubt that residents' experiences and views directly played a key role in changes that have produced significant annual savings and insights from residents have assisted in quality improvements. What was clearly evident from the information gathered was that there was an essential 'feedback loop' which enabled learning to be undertaken and both service improvement and cost savings to be identified and implemented. In the next section we attempt to estimate some of the financial benefits that can accrue from the co-regulatory process.

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*“The grounds maintenance contract was a joint procurement exercise with two local authorities (Rother District and Hastings Borough Councils). Residents from the Sussex region worked with staff to design the tender. They also evaluated the bids along with representatives of the two councils, requiring them to consider value for money for all three organisations as the same supplier would work for all three landlords. Residents played an important role in this example, as they were acting in a wider capacity. As a member of AmicusHorizon’s procurement team pointed out, they were ‘representing not only our residents – but also [acting as] public citizens of the Council partners’.”*

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## Key Findings

Resident involvement in the procurement process has been highly effective because:

- 1** Residents care about both the quality and the cost of work to their homes. Their experience and insight have been essential in driving value for money and cost savings.

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- 2** Residents have extensive experience dealing with contractors and they can provide early warnings when there are problems on an existing contract.

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- 3** Monitoring by residents can improve the performance of failing contractors and prevent complacency among others.

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- 4** Resident involvement in procurement helps to ensure the selected contractor will meet the needs of the organisation and its customers, including the need to maximise value for money.

## The cost of resident involvement

We estimate that the overall cost of providing resident involvement and governance services at AmicusHorizon in 2013/14 was £944,134. This total comprised two elements:

- i. **Traditional resident engagement** by Resident Involvement Managers including the local forums, consultation events, outreach and resident associations. The total budget for this work during 2013/14 was £790,924, including staff costs. During the year these resident engagement staff recorded engagement with 2,629 residents through informal events and outreach and 4,190 individual instances of involvement.
- ii. **Resident governance**, including the Area Panels, Repairs and Maintenance Panels and the Residents' Council. The total cost of this work was £153,210, including resident training and development, travel costs, expenses and the employment of three full-time Resident Governance Officers who co-ordinate the governance structure in their region. At

the moment there are 75 residents and 20 independent members who serve on one or more of the governance-level panels, and all of them are unpaid volunteers.

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*“At the moment there are 75 residents and 20 independent members who serve on one or more of the governance-level panels, and all of them are unpaid volunteers.”*

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In 2013/14, AmicusHorizon managed 26,790 properties, making the unit costs for this direct resident engagement around £35.24 per property. For benchmarking purposes, AmicusHorizon also adds a proportion of other staff time to the total resident engagement costs (e.g. 5% of housing officers' time and costs and 20% of Head of Area time and costs). This increases the final figure to £95.03 per property, which is high compared with other g15 comparators, where the median cost of resident engagement during 2013/14 was £57.94 per property. In other words, AmicusHorizon's resident engagement work appears to cost £37.09 more per property than an 'average' comparable housing association (although this figure should fall as the budget for 2015/16 has been reduced – see opposite).

On a calculation of 26,790 properties, it might seem reasonable to estimate the extra annual costs of its approach to resident involvement, compared to an equivalent-sized housing association, as  $£37.09 \times 26,790 = £993,641$ . In fact, we think this is likely to be an over-

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*“The costs of resident engagement and governance have fallen since 2013/14. The budget for this service fell to £912,820 in 2014/15 and for 2015/16 it has been set at £860,343. This means that costs are projected to reduce by 9% from 2013/14 without any reduction in staff resources.”*

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estimate, as in practice social landlords allocate their engagement and governance costs in different ways. But as a 'worst case' example, this does give an indication of the potential extra costs of embedding resident engagement across an entire organisation, and since we have chosen to overestimate costs and underestimate benefits, we have used this figure.

The costs of resident engagement and governance have fallen since 2013/14. The budget for this service fell to £912,820 in 2014/15 and for 2015/16 it has been set at £860,343. This means that costs are projected to reduce by 9% from 2013/14 without any reduction in staff resources.



# The benefits of resident involvement

### PROCUREMENT

<b>Gas Servicing &amp; Boiler Replacement</b>  <b>Annual efficiency savings</b> ▶ <b>£1,291,000</b>	<b>Kitchens &amp; Bathrooms</b>  <b>Annual efficiency savings</b> ▶ <b>£1,000,000</b>	<b>Grounds Maintenance</b>  <b>Annual efficiency savings</b> ▶ <b>£100,000</b>
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### CUSTOMER SERVICE

Reduction in Call Backs 

**Annual efficiency savings**  
▶ **£191,000**

### COMPLAINTS

Reduction in Formal Complaints 

**Annual efficiency savings**  
▶ **£181,000**

**Total Savings**  
**£2,763,000**





We have been able to calculate the savings of the five examples examined in our complaints and procurement case studies, and these are summarised in Table 9 below.

Residents were at the centre of all three procurement exercises (as well as other contracts that we did not examine), and they have been central to the revised complaints process. Because they are so integral to all these changes, it can be argued that they have played a significant part in all the savings that have been achieved in these areas. If we assume that just one third of the benefits can be directly attributed to residents' input and engagement, that would mean combined annual savings of £900,000 for the five areas in Table 9. Of course there are several other

areas where savings can be connected with resident engagement and governance.

One is staffing, where AmicusHorizon has the lowest rates of staff sickness and turnover in the g15 group. We have conservatively estimated the savings relative to an average housing association as:

- a lower staff turnover (6.8% below g15 median, 54 fewer staff than expected): estimated savings in job searches, interviewing and induction (calculated at £700 per member of staff) = £37,800, and
- b lower sickness and absenteeism (1.2 days per person below median, 793 FTE staff) = £78,000.

**Table 9: Cost savings from procurement and complaints**

Area of work	Estimated annual efficiency savings	Notable resident contributions
Procurement – gas servicing and boiler replacement	£1,291,000	Co-wrote specification and scored bids; insisted on measures for resident engagement and community contributions.
Procurement – kitchen & bathrooms	£1,000,000 <sup>3</sup>	Removed sub-contractors from delivery chain; brought resident liaison in-house; triggered early re-tendering of under-performing contract.
Procurement – grounds maintenance	£100,000	Resident involvement in selection was vital to ensure that bias could not creep into the award of this multi-landlord contract.
Complaints – reduced formal complaints	£181,000	Served on the Complaints Task Group; Stage 3 complaints now managed by residents; prevent problems escalating beyond Stage 2.
Calls – first time call handling	£191,000	Critical friend listening exercises at call centre.
<b>Total savings</b>	<b>£2,763,000</b>	

<sup>3</sup> Figure extrapolated from savings identified in the Sussex region.

We are convinced that some of these staff efficiencies are a result of the reduced conflict and better working environment produced by a partnership rather than antagonistic relationship with residents. Of course other factors (the One Team approach, good staff management, working for a successful and improving organisation) will also have contributed. As a cautious estimate we consider one-quarter of the savings should be linked with resident engagement, representing annual savings of £29,000.

It was certainly possible to identify savings that residents had produced within the resident engagement and governance budgets; as one Resident Involvement Manager noted, 'residents spot things that we just take for granted'. Examples during 2014 included:

- Training the trainer: residents training colleagues on Area Panels on financial topics;
- 50 residents volunteered as Digital Champions to facilitate online benefit claims, reducing the need to contact individual staff;
- Greater use of IT for resident engagement - one manager estimated that this had allowed him to triple the number of residents that were involved in his region;
- Residents postponed a meeting to find a venue providing better value for money;
- Video conferencing to reduce RAMP members' travel costs to distant meetings (estimated £300 savings per meeting);
- Resident engagement in the development of new homes. AmicusHorizon residents currently have satisfaction rates of 96.5% in their new homes. Residents contribute to savings and increased satisfaction levels through the Residents' Design Quality Forum which inspects a sample of properties and feeds back their findings to the 'Grand Designs' Standards Manual which provides guidance to designers of future projects;
- Ending postal ballots for Area Panels because low uptake represented poor value for money;

- Kent Area Panel replaced a poorly-attended Christmas event with personal visits from panel members to residents (bearing small gifts and information on local services). This reduced costs by two-thirds, while doubling the level of engagement.

We have no doubt that the financial savings that have been produced by AmicusHorizon's approach to resident engagement more than cover the extra costs generated. However, this analysis of costs and benefits fails to capture the much broader impact that resident engagement has had upon the organisation, including:

- Playing a central role in improved services and higher customer satisfaction;
- Enabling greater trust and reduced conflict between staff and residents;
- Scrutinising policies and procedures to ensure more robust decision making and lessening susceptibility to failure;
- Offering wider reputational benefits, including greater regulator confidence in the strength of the organisation's governance arrangements, and
- Increasing individual benefits of engagement for residents. Trotter et al (2014) estimate the social value of an engaged resident at £8,116, so the 75 engaged residents would produce a wider social value of around £610,000)

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*"We are convinced that some of these staff efficiencies are a result of the reduced conflict and better working environment produced by a partnership rather than antagonistic relationship with residents. Of course other factors (the One Team approach, good staff management, working for a successful and improving organisation) will also have contributed."*

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Figure 3: Resident satisfaction and operating margins, 2009/10 to 2013/14

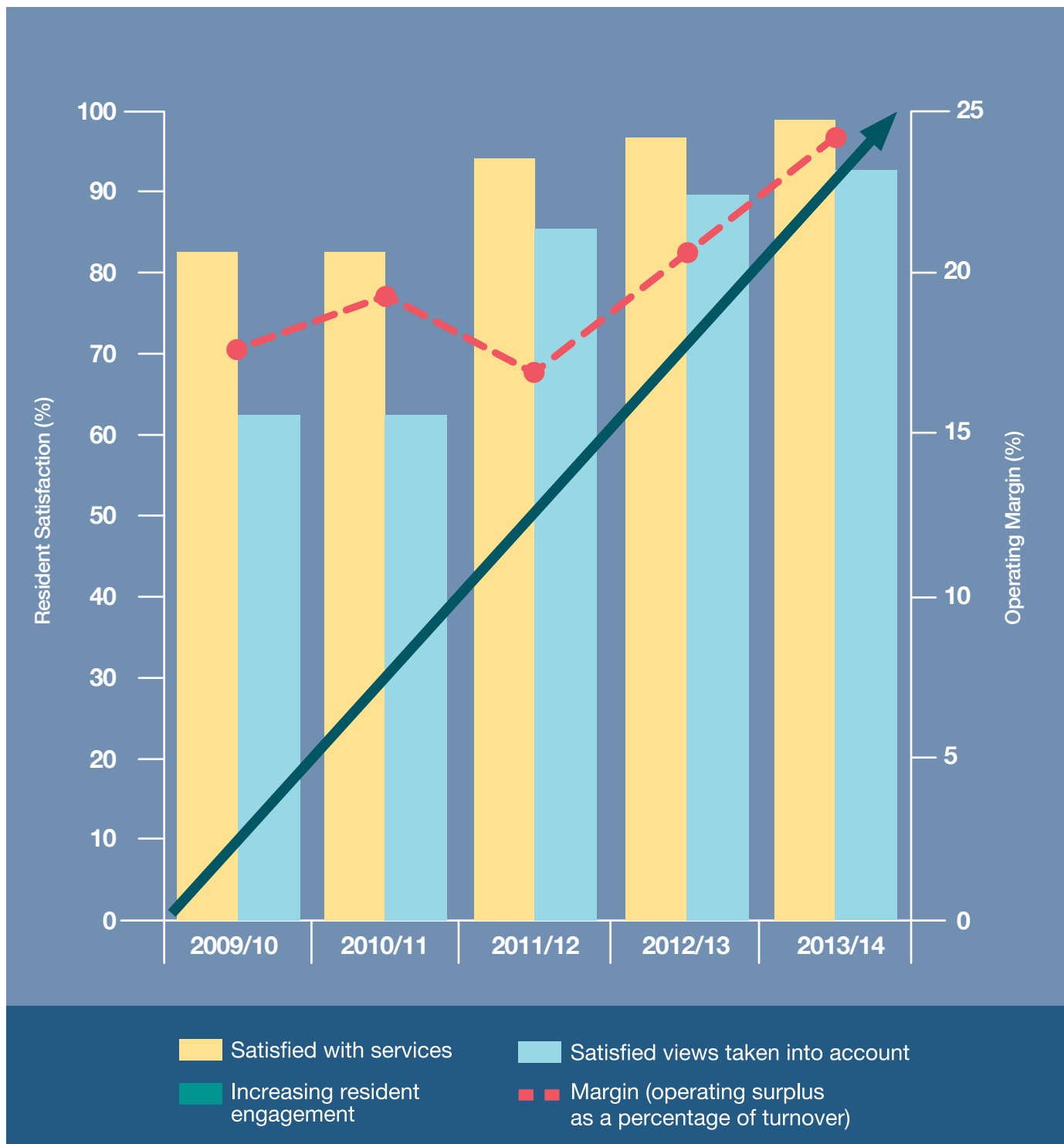


Figure 2 illustrates the increase in both resident satisfaction (showing levels of satisfaction with overall services and with resident engagement) and financial performance (illustrated here by the operating margin; since turnover has been relatively steady in recent years, the operating

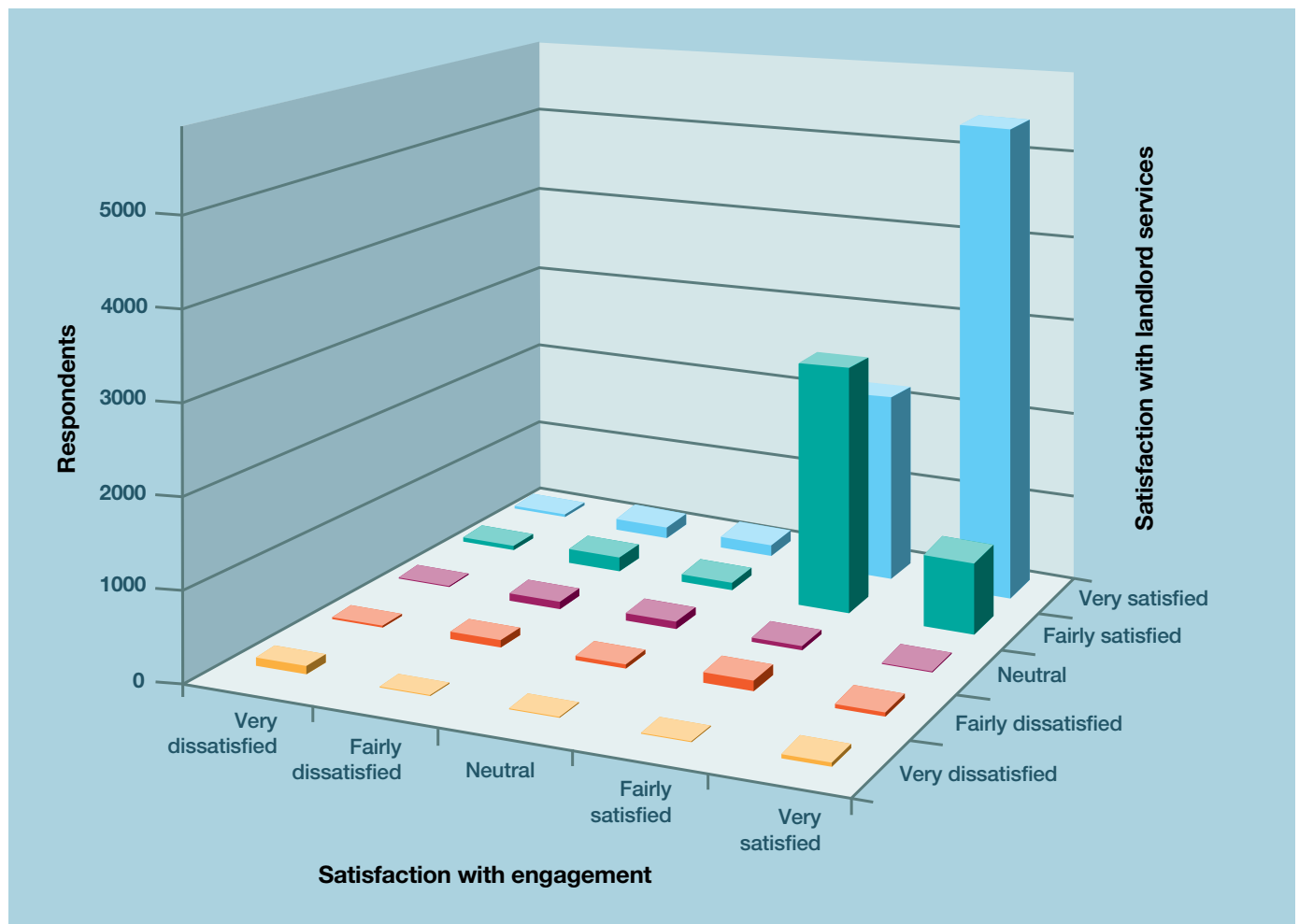
surplus shows a similar increase). Of course a correlation does not demonstrate causality, but it is our contention that increased resident satisfaction with engagement will in part have driven both increased customer satisfaction and business efficiencies.

## Correlation between engagement and satisfaction

We found a strong positive correlation between individual residents' satisfaction that AmicusHorizon was taking their views into account and their satisfaction with the services

provided by the landlord. Across the 15,285 respondents in our sample, the correlation between respondents' scores on these two measures was +0.537 (Pearson's r). In other words, residents who were satisfied with opportunities to give their views also tended to be satisfied with the services they received.

**Figure 4: Correlation between resident satisfaction and engagement/services**



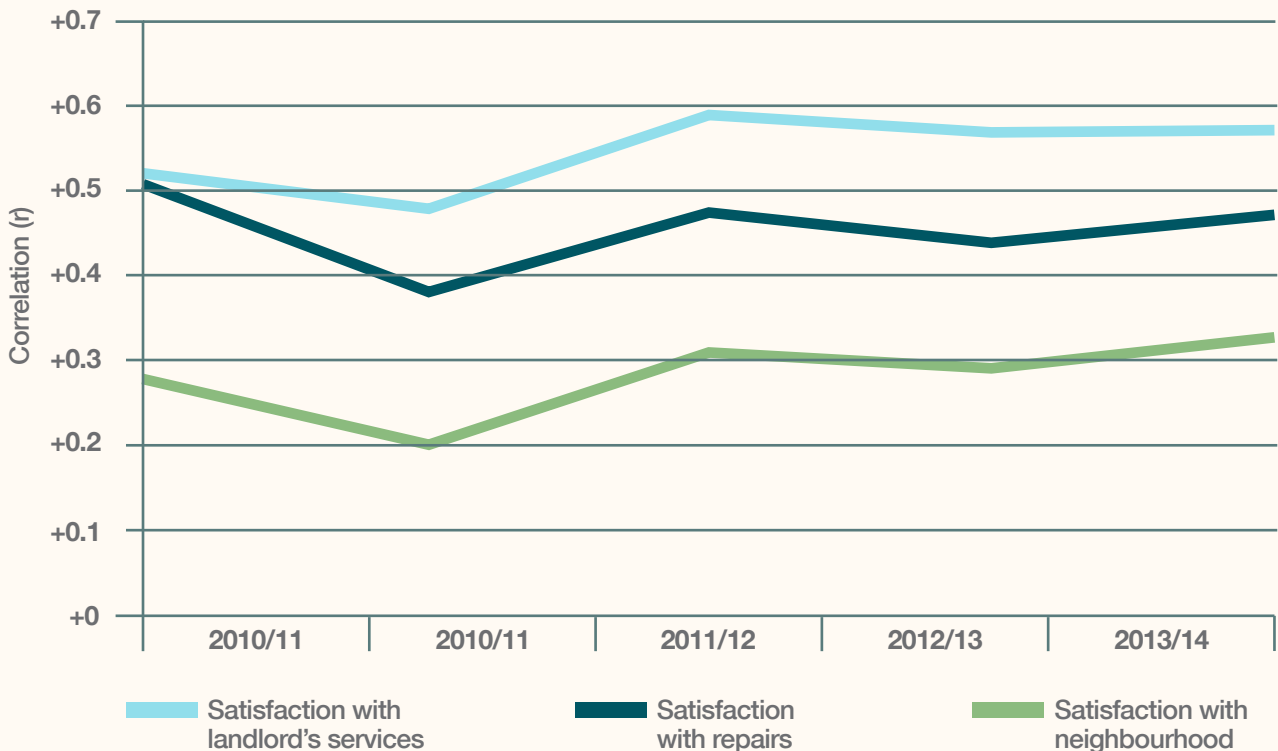
Correlations always need to be treated with a degree of caution. Firstly, correlation cannot prove causality. It is impossible to state that high satisfaction with resident engagement produces the high satisfaction with services as other factors such as the sums that AmicusHorizon spends on its services or the impact of the more responsive One Team approach across all parts of the organisation, might be contributing to the phenomenon. Part of this difficulty is that the

changes are essentially cultural, complex and in many respects intangible.

Secondly AmicusHorizon, like other housing associations, uses a five point scale in its satisfaction surveys, and the vast majority of the respondents were in the top two categories on both scales (see figure 3 above). So we did not have a significant number of dissatisfied residents to feed into the analysis.



**Figure 5: Correlations between resident satisfaction with engagement and satisfaction with other services, 2010/11 to 2014/15 (part year)**



The level of correlation between residents' satisfaction that their views are taken into account and their satisfaction with services has remained reasonably consistent, but does show

signs of intensifying since 2010/11, suggesting that engaged residents are likely to be more satisfied customers than disengaged residents over time.

## Key Findings

The business case for resident involvement is based on a number of benefits including:

- 1** Residents can provide insights and ideas about service improvements that are not apparent to housing professionals.
- 2** In addition to the significant efficiencies identified in our case studies, cost savings are observable across other services including training and the development of new homes.
- 3** The savings produced through resident involvement more than justify any extra expenditure on resident governance and engagement.
- 4** Resident involvement leads to more robust decision making, increased customer satisfaction, an enhanced landlord reputation and can reduce organisational risk.

## Conclusions

This report has shown that AmicusHorizon has been highly successful in utilising a range of formal and informal methods of engaging with residents. The formal processes have involved the establishment of a co-regulation Directorate and resident representation on Boards and governance panels, whilst informal methods have included monitoring of procedures, mystery shopping by residents, property inspections and attendance at social events (all transactions are recorded and analysed). Whilst many of these practices are applied across the housing sector, the fact that **resident engagement has become embedded within the culture of AmicusHorizon** has enabled the distinctive improvements in satisfaction, service delivery and value for money. This 'level of engagement from top to bottom' provides convincing evidence of the strong link between resident involvement and business improvement. As one resident commented 'if we influence a policy everyone has to follow it, even the Chief Executive. It's very satisfactory that we have established that ability, that opportunity, to have that influence'.

A number of conclusions can be identified from this study. First, it is clear that the benefits of engagement far outweigh the costs. The report identifies a spectrum of costs and benefits, both tangible and intangible. Whilst difficult to prove exact causation between resident involvement and service delivery, it is clear that there is a strong correlation with performance improvement; case studies from just two areas (procurement and complaints and customer experience) identified estimated resource savings of at least £2.7m p.a., attributable in large part to co-regulation. Whilst many of the advantages are not measurable in quantitative terms, there is sufficient evidence of both short-term efficiency gains and longer-term benefits of resident engagement.

A second conclusion is that performance has been consistently positive across the organisation. AmicusHorizon has achieved the

highest levels of satisfaction of any large social landlord in the UK (97% overall satisfaction with services compared with the g15 average of 77%), largely due to their effectiveness in designing and refining services on the basis of resident input. A strong culture of respect for residents has enabled them to become instrumental in identifying 'ways of doing it better for less'. Having over 100 engaged residents to advocate for their communities has helped to improve relationships between residents and landlord, building respect, trust and confidence and offering opportunities to make further cost savings over time, demonstrating the impact of the 'One Team' approach. Residents themselves benefitted not only in terms of helping to improve organisational performance but building confidence, skills and engaging with their wider communities. In this way resident participation can be depicted in terms of a virtuous circle, enabling continuous improvement and wide-scale cultural change in order to make a difference to communities.

A third important point is that AmicusHorizon's commitment to involvement means it has a constant feedback loop of resident input. Residents are seen as consultants and co-producers, designing, testing and feeding back directly on services. They ensure the association delivers high-quality customer services giving excellent value for money, neither over- nor under-serving residents. As a Board member stated, 'if you're a private sector company you use that sort of technique all the time'.

Additionally, staff, Board members and residents have embedded a shared culture by undertaking identical training and working towards a clearly defined set of goals. The notion of 'One Team', all working together, underpins everything the association does. Overall, resident engagement in governance has created a more productive working environment. Resident meetings were widely described as effective with 'difficult conversations' conducted within an atmosphere of openness and trust.

AmicusHorizon (like all housing organisations) faces considerable challenges in sustaining and enhancing performance within a difficult resource environment. Housing associations operate in a constantly changing policy environment and therefore there is a need to keep governance and engagement arrangements under regular review. In addition, there is a need to ensure that there is a 'succession strategy' for residents in place to ensure a steady flow of new recruits, fully representative of the diversity of the resident population, trained to play a full and active role without suffering 'burn out' or being over dependent on a limited number of 'active residents'. However, embedding resident engagement as part of the formal governance structure, ensuring it is central to the decision making process and facilitating residents in acting as 'co-producers' offers great opportunities for further service improvements. It is hoped that this report can point to some ways in which resident engagement can be developed, not simply because it is the 'right thing to do' but because it produces sound business outcomes. From the perspective of a respondent from the National Housing Federation: 'There are huge business benefits from involving residents in streamlining services...An organisation needs to be certain that it is providing the right services in the best way' (Interview). Giving residents greater control is not only desirable but necessary to ensure the sector can rest on firm foundations going into the twenty-first century. As the Chief Executive of TPAS commented:

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*"the good organisations have done lots of work in asking tenants to make the difficult decisions. That's not passing the buck – it's asking them to take responsibility. They understand the difficult choices to be made and they make the best ones" (Interview).*

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### Lessons for the sector:

- Successful organisations understand co-regulation requires cultural change. Increasing resident participation requires policies, procedures and practices that can be directed towards the goals of increasing involvement, improving customer satisfaction and service delivery and providing value for money.
- The case study on complaints and the customer experience shows how effective data collection is crucial to understanding potential problems and generating cost-effective solutions.
- Residents need to be convinced that their decisions have an influence. In order for them to be encouraged to put time and effort into the process they have to see the benefits of their input.
- Organisations should acknowledge that respect for residents is paramount, recognising that residents want the organisation to succeed and using their insights effectively.
- Participation involves a range of processes, not merely formal Board and Panel meetings. Residents should be encouraged to engage with the organisation in a wide variety of ways. Formal Board membership should be seen as a cumulative step, requiring training and the development of skills.
- The benefits of involvement are multifaceted and include: personal benefits for residents, value for money savings, safer and more effective decision-making and increased customer satisfaction.



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## Appendix:

### List of interviews and focus groups

Focus Groups	Number of attendees
Kent Area Panel	4 residents
London Area Panel	6 residents
Sussex Repairs and Maintenance Panel residents	8 residents

AmicusHorizon	Position
Steve Douglas	Vice Chair Strategic Board
Neil Robertson	Strategic Board Member
Paul Hackett	Chief Executive
Sarah Smith	Executive Director (Finance & Resources)
Mark Miles-Lea	Executive Director (Commercial)
Alison Wignall	Head of Governance
Jo Robinson	Director of Co-Regulation
Mike Judd	Director of Planning & Performance
John Barr	Director of Customer Experience
David Newsome	Head of Resident Involvement
Bunmi Atta	Regional Development Director (London)
Neill Tickell	Regional Development Director (Counties)
Zoe Jones	Resident Involvement Manager (Kent)
Graham Morrow	Resident Involvement Manager (Sussex)
Alma Haq	Resident Involvement Manager (London)

Other Stakeholders	Position
Nicola Croden	Project Manager (Department of Communities and Local Government)
Peter Holly	Project Official (Department of Communities and Local Government)
Andrew Palmer	Head of Housing (Hastings Borough Council)
Jenny Osbourne	Chief Executive (Tenant Participation Advisory Service)
Sara Cunningham	Policy Officer (National Housing Federation)



## Contact details

If you would like to know more about this study please contact either:

**Dr. Tony Manzi**

Principal Lecturer at the University of Westminster

**email:** [manzit@westminster.ac.uk](mailto:manzit@westminster.ac.uk)

**Kate Dodsworth**

Executive Director, People and Strategy, AmicusHorizon

**email:** [kate.dodsworth@amicushorizon.org.uk](mailto:kate.dodsworth@amicushorizon.org.uk)