



Bromford Housing Group: Colleague Sounding Board

Representative employee involvement at Bromford Housing Group has developed organically out of existing practices, but plays an increasingly important role in ensuring that employees are engaged and customers satisfied.

Bromford Housing Group provides affordable housing and associated care and support services. It currently manages or provides support to over 15,000 rented, shared ownership and other homes across Central England, the South Midlands and surrounding counties.

The Group has a clear business objective to create communities in which people want to live and delight its customers. This is being achieved as a result of a conscious decision to become an employer of choice and create a workplace where people can thrive and do their best work.

Bromford involve all its customers in a direct feedback forum called VIEWpoint. Regular 'big breakfast' meetings also bring together estate managers and other staff in small groups to tackle issues and plan the improvement of estates.

Customer survey information confirms that 84% of customers are 'delighted' or 'pleased' with the service they receive and these initiatives have contributed to the Group winning Management Today / Unisys Service Excellence Awards in 2004 and 2005.

*"The CSB plays a key role in us achieving our ambition to be leaders in our field by engaging all our colleagues",
Marianne Skelcher,
Director of HR*

Business information

Company:	Bromford Housing Group
Business description:	Housing association
UK Headquarters:	Wolverhampton
Staff:	750 by December 2005
Sites:	Central England, South Midlands and surrounding counties

Such initiatives require positive colleague engagement. Team briefings encourage shared learning and managers are trained to delegate responsibly to the front line. The VIEWpoint forum also inspired the Group to establish an employee forum. Known as the Colleague Sounding Board (CSB), the forum gives all colleagues the opportunity to have their views taken into account in the development and delivery of business level policies and decisions that affect them.

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Consultation arrangements

Structure:	A single-tier arrangement of un-elected volunteers. Management review the representativeness of the members annually against function, location and diversity criteria
Union role:	No recognised unions
Frequency of meetings:	Formal meetings are held approximately four times a year. Informal consultation is ongoing
Representatives:	16 colleague representatives from four business regions. Typically, two management colleagues, including the director of HR (chair) complete the attendees. The Chief executive and financial director do not normally attend, though they would if that was required by the agenda. Formal constituency elections are planned for 2007.

The Colleague Sounding Board (CSB)

The CSB is run as an advisory forum to keep colleagues informed of developments in the Group's business activities, inform and consult colleagues, and improve communication processes and feedback mechanisms. It also monitors and advises on colleague morale, recognition and satisfaction, to ensure that Bromford continues to be a great place to work.

The CSB is an organic development out of existing direct employee involvement mechanisms. Membership is reviewed annually against the workforce profile and where gaps are identified new members are encouraged. Meetings take place approximately four times a year and are jointly chaired by the director of HR and a colleague side chair elected by the colleague reps. Formal constituency elections are planned for 2007.

Making it work

Consultation: The CSB provides an important opportunity for senior managers to deliver on their commitment to listen to colleagues. The representatives also inform the decisions managers make about how to maximise engagement by offering their own interpretation of what drives different groups of colleagues.

While the core agenda of the CSB is primarily driven from the top-down, the scope of representatives' involvement also continues to grow. The representatives have for instance played an important role as ambassadors for the Group in merger talks with another housing association. They have also influenced the introduction of new competency-based pay arrangements and the design of the staff survey, as well as helped to provide feedback and develop the Group's response.

Increased senior management participation has raised the profile of the Group, and the representatives are also beginning to develop informal relationships with managers and colleagues at a regional and local level. This is encouraging more consultative ways of working at the front line.

Measurement: Each year the HR team work with the CSB to carry out a review of its effectiveness including membership, achievements, the development of an annual work plan for the following year, training and personal development requirements.

The high performance workplace

This case study forms part of a project entitled 'Adaptable Enterprises'. The project includes educational and networking activities on: high performance working, healthy working and performance, the future of work and organisation, and intellectual capital.

The project is conducted by the UKWON, co-ordinated by the IPA and supported by the European Social Fund. Further information is available from juliet.webster@ipa-involve.com

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This case study was researched and written by Robert Stevens, Research and Information Manager, IPA. The views in this case study are those of the participants and may not reflect those of the IPA.

IPA support

Briefing management:

Information, examples and contacts to demonstrate the potential from consulting collectively

Colleague engagement:

Observation of a CSB meeting, followed by a short questionnaire to all colleagues and detailed interviews with senior management

Developing the new forum:

A review of the operation and effectiveness of CSB, including an evaluation and recommendations for its future development

Strengthening the arrangements:

One day facilitated workshop for the CSB representatives and directors. On-going access to a range of information and support for both management and employee representatives



Involvement & Participation Association

42 Colebrooke Row, London N1 8AF

Tel: 020 7354 8040 Fax: 020 7354 8041

E-mail: involve@ipa-involve.com Website: www.ipa-involve.com

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