

8 Homes for Change Housing Co-operative



Homes for Change Housing Co-operative demonstrates how local people are able to come together to improve local housing and employment opportunities with a shared sense of vision. The Co-operative has developed a number of techniques and approaches to enhance participatory governance by members.

What it Does

Homes for Change Housing Co-operative offers housing and workspace facilities for local people, close to the city centre of Manchester. The co-operative has a number of aims, one of which is based on the premise that local people should be able to live and work in affordable accommodation on the basis of communal benefit rather than individual profit.

The Co-operative aims to operate a fair and open procedure for allocating properties and priority is given to those with greatest housing need, who are willing to become members of the Co-operative and accept the responsibilities of membership.

How it Came About

Homes for Change was set up by people living in the old council properties in the Hulme area of Manchester. Residents wanted to collectively manage the development of their new homes and create a community controlled asset.

The Co-operative began life in 1986, registering with the Housing Corporation in 1989. The new build scheme, completed in 1996, and designed by the Co-operative members working with a local architect, has been a considerable success and resulted in a striking new building. The Co-operative also houses Work for Change, which incorporates a number of on-site work spaces with 26 small businesses, employing over 75 people, helping to create a more

vibrant and active mixed use building.

The workspace includes a theatre (used for general meetings), café, artists studios, workshops and offices.

Governance Structure

The Co-operative is fully mutual, all tenants must be members and all members are tenants. Unlike many housing co-operatives there is no management committee. All members of the Co-operative are part of the governing body.

The Co-operative has monthly general meetings with all responsibilities for running the organisation carried out by members with the support of a part-time paid worker.

There are a number of working groups, with delegated levels of responsibility for the Co-operative's work. The majority of members are actively involved with these groups on a daily basis, providing hands-on experience of practical housing management issues. The working groups have delegated responsibility between general meetings for designated tasks, and report back at general meetings to all members.

Each working group has its own manual which details its tasks, and those responsible for them and defines the delegated responsibility. The manuals are approved by the general meeting. There is also a co-ordinating committee which meets between general meetings to ensure the work of the groups is co-ordinated, and also draws up the agenda for general meetings.

The Co-operative has a series of written standing orders which complement the governing document, providing further details of general meetings, working groups, and voting procedures for the Co-operative.

Facts & Figures

- Organisational Type – Housing ownership co-operative
- Legal Form – Industrial & Provident Society
- Date Established – 1987
- Location – Hulme, Manchester
- Number of Workers – One part-time worker



Establishing working groups with delegated decision-making within agreed terms, ensures the Co-operative is able to effectively function on a day-to-day basis.

Although the governance of the Co-operative currently rests with all members, the governing document (the primary rules), enables Homes for Change to set up a committee to manage the Co-operative, by passing a resolution carried by two-thirds of the members present at a special general meeting.

Overall, the governance arrangements of the Co-operative are clearly stated and defined in the secondary rules (or standing orders), which complement the primary rules. This enhances the quality of governance by providing transparent guidance to existing and new members of the Co-operative, and providing direction for general meetings, membership, and responsibilities of the chair.

Participatory Practice

All new tenants of the housing Co-operative are nominated to become members.

As prospective members, tenants must attend three general meetings, participate in a working group, and attend an induction session before they can be nominated for membership.

Only on the recommendation of the Membership Officer, may these terms be waived, or reviewed at a later date. In this way, the Co-operative retains a degree of flexibility for tenants, who are unable to fully participate on grounds of medical/health circumstances.

The induction training for prospective members provides tenants with an overview of the Co-operative and includes the following:

- Induction 1 – Co-operative history, Homes for Change background, what is a co-operative?
- Induction 2 – Working groups, co-operative structure, overview of work areas within the Co-operative
- Induction 3 – ‘Working co-operatively’, different working situations and skills required.
- Interview/Skills Audit – completion of basic skills audit and questionnaire
- Working Group expression of interest

In addition to the general induction training, the Co-operative also offers work group training and general skills training around specific issues, including chairing meetings, participation in meetings, effective planning, managing volunteers and IT skills.

Providing such resources and commitment to training for new members, the Co-operative is more able to recruit and support new people into membership and active participation in the governance of the organisation.

In addition, the focus on skills audits and training further ensures that the Co-operative is better able to harness the expertise and abilities of its members to effectively manage and govern the Co-operative.

The participation in the Co-operative is overall greatly enhanced by the comprehensive and transparent written standing orders and policies and procedures of the Co-operative.

Not only do these written policies and standing orders provide clarity during times of uncertainty and disagreement, but also provide clear boundaries and systems of



accountability between general meetings, working groups and the wider membership.

Stakeholder Engagement

Homes for Change considers its member tenants as its primary and only stakeholders, and actively engages with members, who own and control the Co-operative.

Homes for Changes states:

“On a wider scale, the Co-operative endeavours to ensure its representation at a strategic position values the human community as a whole, and promotes itself to ensure successful community engagement enables subsequent control by the community. In creating workspace opportunities, the development recognises that it is greater than just housing, and providing for the community involves creating opportunities for employment, also.”

Measures of Success

Homes for Change has numerous members with young children, many of whom were born after members moved in, providing testimony to the safe and mutually supportive environment that the Co-operative offers.

There have been no break-ins in a formerly high crime neighbourhood, and despite the close proximity of the flats to each other, no neighbour disputes in the first six years.

Relations with the Guinness Trust – which managed the construction of the scheme with the aim that the Co-operative would purchase the building from them – have been strained at times, but this has only served to galvanise the members into a stronger group

Key to Success

Once purchase of the building is completed it remains the long-term aim of the Co-operative to expand to serve a wider community where there is clear demand for an alternative to mainstream housing associations and home ownership.