

# The Gateway Story



The creation & development of  
Community Gateway Association

## Who we are

**Community Gateway Association** is a large-scale voluntary transfer organisation created by the transfer of Preston City Council's 6,500 properties on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2005.

**We were the second transfer** Housing Association to receive an allocation of gap funding, with the government planning to provide £48m over 10 years. Combined with a loan facility from Barclays bank and the income from rents, this will enable us to deliver the investment programme which will bring all our homes to Gateway Homes standard by 2012.

**Our uniqueness** centres on the fact that we were the first housing organisation based on the Community Gateway Model.

**The Gateway model** is about putting tenants and residents at the heart of the organisation. The model requires us to write community empowerment into our rules.

## Why did Preston decide on the Gateway Model?

The City Council had some of the usual opposition to transfer that you might expect of a 'traditional' Labour Council. Some tenant activists were also wary of the transfer. However the Director of Housing at the time was aware of the very poor condition of the properties and the unsustainability of the Housing Revenue Account. He heard initial presentations of the idea and became involved in a steering group developing the Community Gateway Model. The 'opposed' stakeholders united behind the idea of a transfer to an organisation based on the model and it became the Council's only way forward to achieving Decent Homes Standard for the stock, with the added incentive of being 'the first'.



Tenants voted in favour of transfer in December 2004

## Community empowerment

What this means is a twin track approach to resident involvement.

On one side is provision of opportunities to influence the CGA.

Structurally this is aimed at giving tenants the maximum involvement in the strategic and operational management of the organisation

We have a membership, like all RSLs – but the difference to the vast majority of RSLs is that our full (voting) membership is exclusively for tenants and leaseholders – no council membership, no independent membership.

Our Gateway Tenants' Committee, which is known as the GTC, is the major sub-committee of the association and the Board. It is elected from the membership in a method aimed at providing the widest possible representation from our estates and has up to 30 members. Their meetings take place 10 days prior to every Board meeting so that they can consider the same issues that the Board are about to.

We have a 15-person board, 3 councillors, 5 independents and 7 tenants. When this was first muted back in 2003/04 it was 'challenging', nowadays it is getting less so in some quarters. But it's still not the norm.

What is important to us is that there is a "route" for tenants. They don't have to be members – it's not automatic that they become members when they sign up as tenants. They have to make a conscious decision to join. Having made that decision they can stand for election to the GTC and then, if they wish, as part of the GTC they can stand for election to the Board.

For those who don't want a formal role within the governance structure of the CGA they still have opportunities to influence the organisation by taking part in surveys, meetings and workshops.



Customer Care workshop

The other track is to provide opportunities for local empowerment.

Our stock is divided into 10 Local Community Areas (LCAs) which are actually 50 sub-areas put together for ease of administration reasons. The sub-areas were originally identified by local people saying what they considered to be their local community.

In each LCA community representatives from the sub-areas, CGA staff and other local stakeholders form a multi-agency taskforce to look at the area's issues.

The CGA aims to align its services with the LCAs by allotting members of our different service teams to specific LCAs. All staff are included in this - from front line services such as rent recovery, community development, property services, tenancy enforcement and allocations to finance, IT, admin and HR.

We have a programme of Community Options Studies. These are opportunities for communities to look at what is important for them and to put forward proposals for improving the housing conditions for those living within their communities.

It is from these that a community of our tenants may start on the menu of management options – from simple involvement to, management or even ownership. The right for our tenants to do this is written into our rules.

As we give associate membership to people who live within the LCAs but who are not our tenants, the CGA will also look at wider options for community improvement such as community safety or the environment.



Porter Street Community Options Study

**The Community Empowerment Strategy** is as much part of the business as having satisfactory accounts and the Chief Executive has to report on progress against the strategy at the AGM. Delivering the strategy is hard work and resource intensive. Although CGA has a team of 6 staff dedicated to community empowerment all staff must play their part in making sure that residents are kept up to date with information and have opportunities to take part in decision making within the organisation.

**The budget for community empowerment** is over £400k per year. This is to pay for things such as newsletters, membership meetings, workshops, community options studies, support to community groups, setting up tenant management organisations, grants and sponsorship, salaries, tenant expenses, training and, crucially, to support all other staff to empower their communities.

**We expect all our teams** to contribute to empowerment; whether that's property services supporting resident involvement in delivering the improvement programme via local scheme panels; or our community services staff working with residents on environmental issues; or our internal admin team helping to organise and support a community event.

**Recruitment interviews** include 'community gateway' questions and candidates are assessed for attitude as well as ability. A core competency for all staff is 'Living the Gateway Brand'.

**All our policies and procedures** are at least 'looked at' by the Gateway Tenant Committee but for those that are customer facing we try to involve residents in 'blank paper' exercises.

**We stage workshops** where the residents will tell us what they want in or from a policy or procedure before we have committed anything to paper – the document is then drafted and taken to the GTC before final confirmation by Board or Management Team.

**Managers are required to clearly demonstrate** which parts of their draft document have been influenced by the members.

**All staff are required to assess the impact** of the involvement activities they organise. This process can help us to assess the impact of resident involvement.



**Howarth Road demolition**

We also encourage involvement through membership of a number of standing and ad-hoc groups. Currently there are 15 groups.

The following are just some examples of the kind of work that these groups undertake. A communications group works with our Business Improvement team on everything from Gateway News and information leaflets to CGA branding and marketing. Another group looks at the work of our rent recovery team and tenants have been key members of groups working on the supported housing review and the development of our equality and diversity strategy.

There are also a number of groups that work with our property services staff on the investment programme, repairs policies and the procurement of services from contractors. The investment group was heavily involved in the selection process for our contractor partners and took part in site visits and interviewing candidates.

It is also a regular occurrence for GTC representatives to be involved in the recruitment and selection of front line staff as members of the interview panels.

## Opening doors to a lasting, richer life

All CGA staff must be signed up to provide opportunities for empowerment as they often will be called on to think laterally about how they communicate and involve their set of customers.

CGA must answer the 'so what' question – does empowerment equal better lives and better estates? To do that all staff need to play their part in measuring the impact of involvement.

Staff and tenants need to develop a mutual respect which will enable them to successfully work together and in partnership with other local stakeholders to deliver more than anticipated in terms of decent homes, decent environments and decent lives.

### OUR VISION

To be the leader in opening doors to a lasting, richer life

### OUR VALUES

We do what we say

We are open & honest

We put our diverse communities at the heart of all we do

We promote empowerment

We passionately promote Gateway

We value & support all our people

