

An annual report to residents for 2021-22 from Kevin Williamson, Independent Chair of the Resident Scrutiny Group



Abri Resident Scrutiny Group (RSG) came into being in April 2021. It was the result of a collaboration of members of the former scrutiny panels at Radian and Yarlington.

Together, residents designed a new scrutiny model, drawing on the best bits from what had gone before and making sure the new approach would be fit for the purpose of overseeing the new larger organisation.

This involved lots of steps. Recruiting an independent Chair (me). Recruiting more residents to become involved in scrutiny. And providing everyone with training. After this, the new group agreed its purpose and objectives and what we thought was important about how we would work together and with people across the organisation.

RSG is an independent body of residents, with membership of between 10-18 people at any given time. It scrutinises the services that Abri provides. Think of what we do as providing constructive criticism. The group is responsible for holding the organisation to account for its decisions and actions. Working together in project teams we review Abri's services and policies, generate insights and make recommendations for improvement.

We live in challenging times. But a fundamental truth remains - everyone needs the security, warmth and refuge of a decent home in a safe community. We know the basic building blocks of resident satisfaction are a great, well-maintained home, backed up with an effective housing management and repairs service. Together with clear communication and knowledgeable people on the ground who are empowered to make decisions that always have the best interests of residents at heart. These things are in our minds as we scrutinise Abri's performance.

This year RSG has produced two scrutiny review reports focused on what residents told us were their priorities:

- Repairs - this considered time to carry out a repair; the efficiency of the repairs service; the use of subcontractors; and communications with residents.
- Sustainability - this considered fuel poverty; short-term fixes; and longer-term cost implications for residents.

Both reports were published earlier this year, you can read the repairs report [here](#) and the sustainability report [here](#). Our recommendations were accepted and the lead directors at Abri will be responsible for delivery. RSG's attention in these areas will now turn to monitoring progress against the agreed timetables for implementing improvements.

Our next scrutiny review report will be published in the next few weeks, it's looking at how anti-social behaviour is managed by Abri. Look out for this by checking our [news section](#) on the Abri website.

RSG meets monthly and this provides an opportunity for residents to discuss Abri's performance in key areas with responsible directors and managers. In the past year we have considered complaints handling, where there was a need for urgent action to improve performance of the service. And we have looked into all aspects of resident safety - a topic we expect to be an area of ongoing interest for the Group.

Members of RSG met with the Group Board and Executive team in November. This was an opportunity to discuss decision making at Abri over the previous year. Themes included improving the experience of residents of service delivery; organisational development; the importance of social rented accommodation; and complaints handling. It was a really positive event and RSG plans to look more regularly at decision making at Abri in the coming year.

The Chair of RSG has a seat on two of Abri's most important governance bodies - the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) and the Customer Services and Performance Committee (CSPC). This provides an opportunity for RSG to ensure its views are regularly transmitted to members of the Board. In the coming year we will look to strengthen the links between these important committees and RSG.

As Abri completes its internal transformation, the RSG welcomes the necessary renewed focus on service delivery. A new approach that re-establishes local ownership and accountability for improving services to customers and neighbourhoods will be critical to success here. Putting Abri's operational staff back at the centre of this effort will help reconnect it with residents and wider communities.

Many residents are facing a challenge to their living standards that is without recent precedent. As a 'critical friend', RSG will continue to provide customers with real influence over how Abri develops, delivers, learns and improves; so that where it can, it can lean into these headwinds together.

Our reviews and scrutiny activity are led and delivered by residents. Every spring we consult all Abri's customers about what they want their scrutiny group to review in the coming year. This year we had around 800 responses, which identified programmed maintenance, value-for-money, communications and complaints handling as top priorities. Watch this space, because we'll be sharing our full plan for 2022-23 shortly, as well as regular progress reports in the coming months.

As well as the 'core' RSG team, we also have other residents involved in scrutiny activity at Abri. Some people might only be able to offer a limited amount of time, might want to work flexibly or even just focus on a specific topic they are passionate about. The Scrutiny Sounding Board (SSB) provides this opportunity for over 100 people. We want to strengthen how we engage with and develop SSB in the coming year.

Over the next month we will be bringing more residents onto RSG and the SSB as we reach out to those who in our recent consultation, expressed an interest in getting involved. There's an open door - so just drop us a message at scrutiny@abri.co.uk if you'd like to find out more.

In ending my first annual report to residents, I need to thank two groups of people.

RSG's experience of Abri staff, the Executive Team and Board Members has been very positive. They value the work that we do, and the progress we are making. They have made resources available to us. And they have ensured a fair hearing and influence for our work. We look forward to deepening these relationships in the coming year.

Finally, my biggest thanks go to members of the RSG, past and present. They have given up their time to bring great insight, passion and impact to improving services at Abri for all residents. It's a pleasure and a privilege to work for such a committed and talented team. I'm looking forward to another productive year together.

Kevin Williamson

Independent Chair of the Resident Scrutiny Group