

**GreenSquare Group Limited  
Residents' Scrutiny Panel  
Inquiry Report**

The Governance Changes: Report 1  
Do the proposed changes strengthen the position of Residents?

**(1) Summary**

In 2010 the management boards of GreenSquare, Westlea and OCHA agreed in principle to make a detailed business case for amalgamating the Group. Essentially this means that Westlea and OCHA would be replaced by one administration – that of GreenSquare, presently the parent company. By early 2011 a consultation programme was under way with all of the group's stakeholders and in March the Residents' Scrutiny Panel was invited to be actively involved in scrutinising the process on an on-going basis.

This is the first Residents' Scrutiny Panel report to the GreenSquare Board regarding the proposals for a new governance structure. In this report (studying a three month period March to May 2011) we look at the first stages of the consultation process with residents, the largest stakeholder group and look at the proposals for setting up three, new local area boards and ask if the proposed changes strengthen the position of residents and if so, how and where will residents influence the business.

**(2) Findings in brief**

⤴ (2:1) The proposed changes will strengthen the position of residents at the most important local level. Overall, residents' influence will increase.

⤴ (2:2) Approximately 11,724 residents have been contacted in the consultation process and 548 have responded.

⤴ (2:3) Residents have influenced the consultation process from the very start.

⤴ (2:4) Residents have been involved with all of the methods of communication to residents during this process.

⤴ (2:5) The Area Boards will have powers to make decisions about how their area is run within the overarching GreenSquare strategy and standards. Some budgets will be under their direct control.

⤴ (2:6) The additional professional support and training offered through the proposed Residents' Academy will enhance residents' skills and encourage greater confidence.

⤴ (2:7) Board members have a personal commitment to resident involvement above and beyond regulators' demands and corporate ethos.

**(3) Recommendations**

⤴ (3:1) That the consultation programme with residents continues and endeavours to be as wide-ranging and as far-reaching as possible (prior to and after any Board resolution relating to the proposed governance changes).

- ⤴ (3:2) That if the GreenSquare Board decide to implement their proposals, maximum effort and inducement is made to retain experienced and conscientious existing board members (independent as well as resident members) to oversee and encourage a smooth transition to the new governance structure.
- ⤴ (3:3) That the Board remains alert to possible delays or difficulties arising in the areas of Area Board recruitment of new resident board members and their retention after appointment. The RSP experienced many months of unfilled vacancies and three good members have left the Panel since its inception.

#### **(4) Findings in detail**

##### **(4:1) The proposed changes will strengthen the position of residents at the important local level**

The proposed changes will strengthen the position of residents at a level which is more important and more appealing to the individual resident, than ever before. Resident Board Members serving on the new Area Boards, will now be enabled to influence business planning and practice at the local level, engaging with the local community and dealing with local issues and needs – knowing that *they* can make a real difference. The Panel finds this new role for residents to be highly conducive to strengthening the 'resident voice'.

##### **(4:2) Residents contacted and response**

The research details referring to the number of residents contacted, are shown in appendices 1 and 2. To summarise, approximately 11,724 residents were contacted which means all households were sent the '*If three become one*' leaflet and reply card (over 10,500 households) and a total of around 78% of all residents (estimated of around 15,000 adults) have been contacted. In the same three month period (March to May 2011) 548 residents responded to the information which indicates a response rate of around 5% of all households or nearly 4% of the total adult resident population.

##### **(4:3) Residents have influenced the consultation process from the very start**

The suggestions and opinions from the group of residents involved at the very beginning of the consultation process, influenced the wording and appearance of the '*If three become one*' leaflet and reply card. This communication was important because it was the first announcement sent to every household (10,500) concerning the proposed changes. The message was concise and effective.

##### **(4:4) Residents have been involved with all of the methods of communication**

The continued regular meetings between this group of Westlea and OCHA residents and resident involvement staff, informed the type and style of questions put to a greater number of residents during the telephone and on-line surveys. Also, some residents were able to assist staff at the drop-in and community events held later, where more residents had the opportunity to ask questions and voice their opinions on the proposed changes.

The same working group of residents also chose the production company to make the video explaining the changes and they were influential regarding its contents and style.

Other residents have been chosen to take part in the film and have been invited to express their own views of the proposed changes.

#### (4:5) The Area Boards: their powers

The intention is to remove all the red tape from the new Area Boards. The legal side, main strategy, corporate finance and regulatory matters, will become the sole responsibility of the GreenSquare Board, leaving the new boards to focus on the co-management of their local area, working closely with their neighbourhood teams. Essentially, the Area Boards are to make decisions about how their area is run within the overarching GreenSquare strategies and standards. But they will be able to give greater concentration to a particular problem they want to tackle in their area and in general be responsive to local issues and needs, with some budgets under their direct control.

#### (4:6) The Area Boards: their agendas and budgets

Andrew Smith prepared for the Project Board, what typical Area Board agendas could consist of. This is a brief summary:

The Head of Neighbourhood would be the lead officer for the Board.

Depending on the agenda items, he/she, would be joined by the relevant Neighbourhood Manager, Customer Manager and/or asset management staff.

If neighbourhood team presentations involved representatives from local police, parish council or local authorities, from time to time, so much the better.

An agenda may consist of performance monitoring in the board's area, by looking at the balanced scorecard figures; there would be an income and expenditure account for the area and accounts for monitoring costs together with detailed accounts relating to the budgets they are fully accountable for, like equipment and adaptations, community investment funding, estate improvement funding, tenant welfare fund, gifts and donations.

There will be two Neighbourhood Teams for each area which will be required to present a six-monthly report to the Area Board twice a year so that information is gathered. There will be an annual development plan with drawings, models and sketches to illustrate the local schemes in progress and in the pipeline. There will be a tenant welfare fund review; an annual report from the Resident Scrutiny Panel; a bi-annual complaints review; an annual service charge and ASB review and the Area Board will need to make annual budget bids for their delegated budgets. Area Boards will also have opportunities to contribute to the strategic direction of the group of boards on away days and will be expected to produce a bi-annual report to residents which would be published in the relevant newsletter/magazine.

#### (4:7) The Area Boards: the vacancies

In total, there will be 18 vacancies for residents (5 on each of the Area Boards and 3 on the GreenSquare Board) and applications will be invited for each vacancy. Although a person specification has already been prepared, the Project Board rejected it at their April meeting in favour of a simplified and 'less wordy' document.

Also, although remuneration of around £1,000 per annum for around 12 hours work per month (£6.94 per hour), has been raised as a possible rate, this (or any other amount) was still subject to confirmation at the time of this report.

(4:8) The Area Boards: the areas

NT = Neighbourhood Team.

These boards may eventually be referred to by other titles, such as geographical ones, etc,  
or referred to as Neighbourhood Boards.

Area Board One

NT: Chippenham and villages.

NT: Melksham, Trowbridge, Corsham, Bradford-on-Avon.

Area Board Two

NT: Swindon, Malmesbury and villages, Cricklade, Purton and Wootton Bassett.

NT: Calne, Lyneham and villages.

Area Board Three

NT: West Oxford, Vale of White Horse, Cherwell, South Oxford.

NT: Oxford City.

(4:9) The additional support and training offered by the Residents' Academy

Although help and training support is already available from GreenSquare staff and from existing board members acting as mentors, the Panel welcomes the proposed Residents' Academy offering an additional, professional route to improve and validate residents' skills and abilities. The Panel will welcome the opportunity to look at the setting up of the academy and the courses on offer, at a later date when the project is under way.

(4:10) Board members have a personal commitment to resident involvement

When the Group Chief Executive Dave Ashmore, Board Members Angie Clapp and David Line and Governance Manager Mandy Arnold gave evidence to the inquiry on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2011, they answered our provocative questions robustly and convincingly. The Panel particularly appreciated their openness regarding their personal attachments to social housing and their commitment to the expansion of resident involvement and influence within GreenSquare. The presentation and answers given that evening gave clarification and re-assurance to the Panel by addressing many of their concerns.

**(5) Conclusion**

The Panel is pleased to report to the Board that in our opinion at this stage of an on-going inquiry, the consultation process is proceeding well and that the proposed governance changes do offer a realistic strengthening of the residents' voice and influence.

Although it may be disappointing that such a small percentage of residents have responded to the information about the proposed changes, it is not for the want of trying! The Panel has been impressed by the patient and enthusiastic efforts made by members of the resident involvement staff to encourage residents. However, the members of the working group set up at the outset, have more than made up for any short-fall in numbers. Their reliability, help and general thoughtfulness, has made a valuable contribution to

the consultation process.

### **Appendices**

1. Research contact with Residents about the proposed changes. (Page 6).
2. How many Residents have been contacted; How many Residents have responded. (Page 7).

### **Recommended further reading**

Resident Involvement staff and Governance staff have published an excellent series of notes in easy digest form, listing all of the questions raised by Residents and Shareholders during the consultation process and what GreenSquare's responses are. Although this information is not attached to this inquiry report, it is highly recommended further reading.

### **Sources of information for this report**

The information for this report arose from:

Notes and observations made by the Panel at the time of interviews with the Group Chief Executive and Board Members; access to notes, agendas, minutes and other papers published by the Governance Review Residents' Working Group and by the Governance Review Project Board; notes and observations made at some of the many meetings held; conversations and e-mails with colleagues and staff regarding particular viewpoints or when seeking specialist opinion or clarification.

### **The Inquiry Report**

Compiled by Keith Fellows, GreenSquare Residents' Scrutiny Panel (Governance Portfolio).

Report dated: 31<sup>st</sup> May 2011.

Contact person for this Inquiry: [Keith.Fellows@greensquaregroup.com](mailto:Keith.Fellows@greensquaregroup.com)

### **Acknowledgements**

This is the sixth Inquiry Report by the Residents' Scrutiny Panel. The Panel wishes to thank all of those who assisted the Panel and for their openness when answering the Panel's questions and enquiries.

#### **Panel Members:**

Arthur Diggle  
Keith Fellows  
Mike Forward  
Nick Fry  
Dorothy Giacomini  
Kerry Law (Chair)  
Janet Allen-Louden  
Gina Ravens  
Gerry Webb  
Ian Willmer

#### **Witnesses:**

Mandy Arnold                      Group Corporate Governance Manager  
Dave Ashmore                      Group Chief Executive  
Angie Clapp                        Westlea Board Member (Resident)  
David Line                         Westlea Board Member (Independent) and  
   Chair of the Group Audit Committee

#### **Governance**

#### **Support:**

Ashling Reid                        Corporate Governance Officer

Copies of the presentation submitted to the Inquiry and minutes of the RSP meetings are available from [Ashling.Reid@greensquaregroup.com](mailto:Ashling.Reid@greensquaregroup.com) .

**Appendix 1**

**Research contact with Residents about the proposed changes**

**Response**

By telephone, Westlea had a response of 178 residents out of 400 contacted. = 44.5% response.  
 Online, Westlea had a response of 44 residents out of 445 contacted = 10.0% response.

By telephone, e-mail and post, OCHA had a response of 66 residents out of 212 contacted = 31.0% response.

**Overall** 288 residents out of 1,057 contacted = 27.0% response

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**Answers from those 288 residents**

(? = Unsure or no response)

<u>Proposed changes</u>	179 (62%) Yes	31 (11%) No	78 (27%) ?
<u>Interested in joining an Area Board</u>	85 (29.5%) Yes	168 (58%) No	35 (12.5%) ?
<u>More information on joining the Res.Academy</u>	143 (50%) Yes	132 (46%) No	13 (4.0%) ?

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**Supplementary question**

In the research, a supplementary question was asked: "If you are not interested in joining an Area Board, why?" Unfortunately, the results are ambiguous. The total negative response amounts to 288 (based on the statistics supplied to the Panel.) Yet we are told that 85 residents have said that they are interested in joining!

<u>Don't know enough about it</u>	28 (10%)
<u>Lack of time or work/family Commitments</u>	131 (45%)
<u>Not interested or no response</u>	129 (45%)
	<b>288</b>

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**Westlea and OCHA feedback cards** (attached to the "If three become one" leaflet.)

Cards were sent to every household, totalling approximately 10,500. Results from governance surveys show that 93 cards have been received requesting more information, intention of attending a drop-in session, or containing questions or comments. This produces a response return rate of 0.9%. However, the two associations house around 15,000 adults in total which produces a lower return rate of 0.6%. (Adults meaning husbands and wives or partners – not older children).

**Appendix 2**

**Key Inquiry question**

**How many residents have been contacted in the consultation process so far?**

		<u>Total</u>	
Residents involved initially from OCHA and Westlea:	8	8	
Average attendance at four OCHA drop-in or community events:	22		88
Average attendance at two Westlea events:	23	45	
Leaflet with reply card to each household:	10,500	10,500	
Telephone, on-line, by post, research:	1,057	1,057	
Up to around 16 residents may feature in the film:	16	16	
Members of Resident Scrutiny Panel:	10	<u>10</u>	
		<b>11,724</b>	

Therefore, we can assume that all households have been contacted and around a total of 78% of all residents (estimated of around 15,000) have been contacted.

**How many residents have responded to the consultation process so far ?**

Residents involved initially:	8	
OCHA drop-in/community events:	88	
Westlea events:	45	
Leaflet reply card response:	93	
Telephone, on-line, by post, research:	288	
Residents featuring in film:	16	
Members of Resident Scrutiny Panel:	<u>10</u>	
	<b>548</b>	

This figure indicates a response rate of around 5% of all households or around 4% of the total resident population.

