



# Engage Magazine Scrutiny Report

August 2021

Magnify Scrutiny Group  
On behalf of Tuntum Housing Association



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## **1. Who are we and what do we do?**

We are Magnify, the resident Scrutiny Group for Tuntum Housing Association. We were formed in 2015 to make the voice of the resident heard. We are residents who volunteer our time to help Tuntum to improve and best serve us. We are:

Mr Norman Broady  
Mrs Barbara Douglas  
Miss Dorothy Ellis  
Mr Colin Gunter  
Mr Erwin Nisbett

We have completed several scrutiny reviews in the past on things like the turnaround time of void properties, Tuntum's website, and the repairs service. Our reviews are presented to our CEO and board for consideration. They have led to significant changes in the way Tuntum works, like the changes to the website and the introduction of an online portal to log repairs and pay rent.

The main purpose of the group is to:

- Be a critical friend to Tuntum Housing Association.
- Take an independent look at Tuntum Housing Association's services, plans and performance.
- Assess and challenge Tuntum Housing Association's performance against expected standards.
- Hold the Board and management team to account for performance and standards.

## **2. Why resident involvement is important to Tuntum.**

The values of Tuntum have always meant that there is a focus on listening to the voice of the resident to drive the direction of the company.

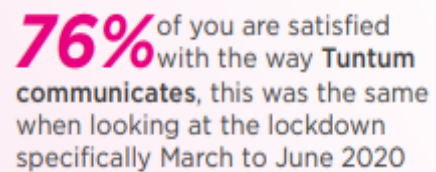
In November 2020 the government published a [Social Housing White Paper –The Charter for Social Housing Residents](#). One of the aims of the charter is to champion the voice of the resident, by empowering them to hold their landlords to account and drive delivery of higher quality services that are focused on their needs.

By having Magnify in place we have a group that are able to hold Tuntum to account and help to improve the service we receive as residents.

### 3. Why did we choose to review the Engage Magazine?

We know as members of the scrutiny group that Tuntum Housing Association wants their residents to be involved. They aim to offer different ways of being involved, from taking part in Zoom sessions, completing the resident survey, and reviewing documents. Reaching out to residents can be difficult as we all have busy lives, however, currently the one way they are able to reach all of their residents is the Engage magazine.

Engage magazine has been published since 2014 and as the primary consistent contact with all of Tuntum's residents it is important that it serves us all. Our resident engagement survey, during the COVID-19 pandemic, showed us that Tuntum had room to improve in the way that they communicate with their residents, with 76% of residents reporting that they were satisfied with how Tuntum communicated with them.

A rectangular box with a blue border containing a statistic. The text is in pink and blue. It reads: '76% of you are satisfied with the way Tuntum communicates, this was the same when looking at the lockdown specifically March to June 2020'.

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With a view to ensuring that Engage is fit for purpose we thought it would be a good idea to complete a thorough review and present our findings.

### 4. The aim of the review

- ❖ To gain an understanding from staff on how the Engage magazine is created.
- ❖ To compare Engage to resident newsletters / magazines of other organisations.
- ❖ To ensure residents get what they need from Engage.

### 5. What we did and how we carried out our review

In order to carry out a review Magnify wanted to fully understand the process of producing the Engage magazine. To gain this understanding Tuntum's Executive Assistant to the CEO, Becky Henry, was asked to present to the group and answer questions on how Engage is produced.

We learnt from Becky's presentation that the articles in the magazine are provided by Tuntum's staff. Leaders from the different areas of the business are asked to provide updates on their areas and an article for Engage. These include:

**Head of Asset Management and Development;** who will report on new developments, repair related issues, and health and safety updates.

**Head of Specialist Housing and Community Affairs;** who provides information on our specialist housing schemes and our work with refugees.

**Head of Housing and Customer Experience;** who reports on rents, our void turnover, and our neighbourhood team.

**Customer Excellence Leader;** who provides an update on our complaint handling performance, resident engagement survey, the Magnify Scrutiny Group along with all other resident engagement activities.

They are asked for their contributions a month prior to the print date, and then expected to submit articles a two weeks prior. This is so that Becky has the time to proof read the articles. In addition to this Becky includes any current Tuntum news, and keeps a schedule of re-occurring issues that Tuntum want to keep residents informed of, for example condensation, how to bleed radiators, and topping up your boiler pressure.

Once all articles are provided to Becky she sends them to a design consultancy company, called Astwood, who use the copy text provided to create a draft version of the Engage magazine. With the draft version Becky then reviews the layout and proof reads the stories in their new format. Becky will then arrange for any amendments to be made by Astwood.

Our CEO, Richard Renwick, then has final say on the final draft of the Engage magazine. Once he is completely happy with how it all looks, Becky then confirms to Astwood that they are happy for them to start printing. Tuntum provide them with the details of all residents, and the magazine is posted out to our general needs and sheltered residents as well as being hand delivered to our Specialist housing residents.

Becky explained to Magnify that she would love to see contributions from our residents, but we currently do not receive any input from residents regarding stories for the magazine. In the Spring issue of Engage, Tuntum tried to encourage resident participation by offering a free plant pot to anyone that wanted to take part in the Summer Garden Competition. Despite the offer, Tuntum only received one request for a plant pot from a resident. In addition to this Tuntum placed a Spring word search on the back page, hoping that residents would get involved and send in photos of themselves with their completed word searches, however they only had two residents get in touch.

We discovered the costs involved in producing the magazine are around £2.00 per issue, so approximately £8.00 per household per year. These costs are all paid to Astwood as the consultancy designs the magazine for around £600, then prints them at a cost of around £900 and finally posts the magazine to all residents at a cost of around £1450.

After we had heard from Becky, we took some time to review resident magazines from other organisations. We looked at magazines from local authorities and housing associations to gain some insight into what others are producing. We looked at a wide range of organisations from similar sized organisations to Tuntum and much larger organisations to see how we compared.

**Resident magazine 1:**

A Midlands based Housing Association

Over 3000 properties

**What we liked about it**

- We liked the bright colours in this magazine that really grabbed your attention.
- The contents page made it easy to see the different articles that were featured.
- It was good to read the foreword from the Chief Executive which gave a summary on how the organisation has been doing.
- There was a good balance of resident stories along with hints, tips and helpful advice for all residents.

**Resident magazine 2:**

A Housing Association that is based across the country.

Over 53,000 properties.

**What we liked about it**

- We thought this one felt brief and more like a newsletter.
- The association tailored their stories to the different areas of the country that they covered. This meant that if you live in the Midlands you only read stories that were relevant to you
- It advertised local youth projects along with mental health first aid courses which were accessible to residents of the association.
- There was a page dedicated to support and advice for residents, like help getting a job and money advice.

**Resident magazine 3:**

An arms-length management organisation that manages a Nottinghamshire council's housing.

Over 25,000 properties

**What we liked about it**

- It felt quite chunky, and had a lot of information we felt related to council services.
- They run a responsible tenant reward which encourages people to pay their rent on time, register to vote, and be a good neighbour.
- There was a focus on health and safety, specifically in their high rise properties.
- We thought their feature on condensation was informative and helpful.

**Resident magazine 4:**

A community housing association based in Nottingham.

Over 5000 properties

**What we liked about it**

- It featured inspiring stories from their residents.
- There were positive stories about their staff members' achievements.
- Residents sent in their art work which was featured on a dedicated page.
- It promoted schemes to help residents be more energy efficient in their homes.

We then set about applying a critical eye over our own Engage magazine. We looked over the last years' worth of issues and compared them to the other organisations we had seen. We looked at three areas of Engage; the design of the magazine, the content and stories within it, and the way in which it invites residents to be involved.

### **Design**

- Each magazine has consistently had 12 pages, including the front cover.
- Tuntum pack in a lot of smaller stories rather than big features.
- When there are bigger features, there tends to be a lot of smaller photos.
- The contents page is listed as three items on the front page rather than a dedicated page.
- The associations contact details are on the back page.

### **Content**

- Whilst we learnt the CEO edits the magazine, there is no comment or foreword from him.
- Tuntum offers support in Engage, but it is not often made a feature of it. The support comes in smaller stories that could easily be missed.
- We liked the "Ask Debbie" feature as it gave residents the opportunity to raise questions or concerns and have them answered publicly. This could then help others in a similar situation.
- It is good to see the names and faces of staff members as residents will mostly interact with them over the phone.

### **Resident Involvement**

- We thought the inclusion of a puzzle or game was a good idea and something which could be built on.
- Engage seems to vary significantly with the amount of resident featured stories.
- We really like it when residents are featured on the front page.
- We think the incentives to get residents involved are a positive idea and should be made more of. We learnt that Tuntum has around 1500 residents and so if you knew that you had a chance of winning you may be more likely to enter.

We then discussed whether Engage is being read in its current format. We felt that when you first move in as a resident you take more interest in what Tuntum are doing as you want to know how you go about reporting issues and are keen to get an understanding about who your landlord is. However, residents who have been with Tuntum sometime will become accustomed to the Engage magazine coming through their door in the white envelope. We felt we knew what to expect from it and so this could disengage residents from opening the envelope and reading what is inside.

We considered whether residents would use Engage as a source of information should they need to contact Tuntum. After some discussion we decided that most people would look at the website should they need a contact number for Tuntum.

## 6. Our key findings

- We found that Tuntum Housing Association aims to provide a rounded view of how the organisation is performing by gaining input from all areas of the business.
- We were able to review our offering over the last year and review the design, content and degree of resident involvement.
- When comparing Tuntum to other organisations we felt that Engage stood up to the test, with no major changes needed to improve the offer to our residents.

## 7. Conclusion

Overall we felt that Engage compared really well to other organisations, with just some small tweaks it could be a magazine that grabs the attention of all residents.

A foreword from the CEO alongside a contents feature would help set the tone of the magazine, helping residents to see what is featured at a glance.

After reviewing the publications of other organisations we came to the thinking that large pictures with residents featured were the stories that grabbed our attention. Making the resident key to the story made us want to read it more.

We were pleased to see that Tuntum try to encourage residents to get involved in contributing to the magazine, but we felt like there could be more in the form of incentives to support this endeavour. We think having a monetary incentive behind involvement will encourage others to get involved.

We recognised that many of our fellow residents will be families with young children and it could be a good idea to get them involved. We thought a children's page with either a colouring or art work competition may bring in contributions from those who may not usually get involved.

We would like to see Engage be a source of information for Tuntum, alongside signposting and support information for residents. We felt this was an area that could be improved on and made more of to help their residents get into work and direct them to where they can get help and support.

With the UK government setting a target to bring all its greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050, we have to do our bit to help achieve. We would like to see a focus on how Tuntum are working on being energy efficient, and how they can help their residents to run their homes in the most energy efficient ways.



## 8. Recommendations

From Magnify's scrutiny review we would like to recommend that Tuntum consider implementing the following:

- Source compostable transparent envelopes or packaging to send Engage in so that residents are enticed to open it and to help with Tuntum's carbon footprint.
- Start each magazine with a message or foreword from the CEO, alongside a contents page. This will provide some consistency between the issues and some context around Tuntum's current performance.
- Make resident stories the large images and features of the magazine, tying them together with current topics.
- Offer an incentive for residents to submit their own stories, this will provide more resident lead content.
- Publicise how many residents we have around the competitions so that it is clear that should someone enter, they stand a good chance of winning. Along with providing a monetary incentive for competition submissions.
- Recognise we have tenants of all ages by creating a children's page.
- Consistently use half the magazine to feature resident lead stories and the other half to signpost and direct residents to support in their area. This could be foodbanks, mental health support, help finding work, or organisations that are seeking volunteers.
- Focus on energy efficiency helping residents to save money in their homes whilst we all work towards net zero emissions.

We look forward to our findings being presented to senior management and the board, and feel positive that these recommendations will improve Tuntum's offer to their residents.