

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: THURSDAY, 21 FEBRUARY 2013

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

SUBJECT: RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.01 This report provides the strategic context to the Council's approach to 'customer involvement'. It aims to share with members the results of the Welsh Government's assessment of the council's Customer Involvement Strategy (also known as the Local Tenant Participation Strategy). Members are asked to consider the areas for improvement, and the proposals by Council to address these, noting both existing activities and projects, and those planned for the future. Finally, the strategy will be due for a light touch review, and members are asked to consider what should be the priorities going forward.

2.00 BACKGROUND

- 2.01 Welsh Government has adopted a national tenant participation strategy for Wales. Since 2007, it has been a requirement for social landlords to produce a local tenant participation strategy and a plan for implementation. Since then all social landlords in Wales have submitted a Local Tenant Participation Strategy (LTPS) to Welsh Government and TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) Cymru have carried out an assessment of all LTPSs with an overview report and individual reports to landlords. The assessment of Flintshire County Council's LTPS is annexed to this report for ease of reference.
- 2.02 It is the intention of the Council to keep the LTPS under review, and a customer involvement strategy group has been established for many years. This group which is comprised of members, tenants and officers of the council work collaboratively to improve the council's approach to customer involvement.
- 2.03 It is also good practice for landlords to involve customers in designing services. This is because by involving a diverse range of customers in the design and improvement of housing services, the service will be better able to meet the diverse needs of the customers it serves.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

3.01 **LOCAL TENANT PARTICIPATION STRATEGY**

3.02 The Involvement Strategy Group has been able to consider the content of the assessment and has formulated an action plan to address the areas for improvement which have been highlighted.

3.03 The assessment considered 12 points in relation to the strategy and action plan and rated 10 of these as satisfactory or good, highlighting two areas for improvement.

The areas on which the council needs to improve are:

- Inclusion of measures and ways to evidence the outcomes which are achieved.
- Consideration of the ways in which resources and capacity will be prioritised in relation to the strategy and action plan.

3.04 In response to the assessment report highlighting these, an action plan has been produced. In reviewing the LTPS going forward, it is the aim to include the measures which will be adopted so that the council can evidence the outcomes from its customer involvement activities. In order to prioritise resources and capacity it is now intended that the development of any aspects of customer involvement will be included within the formal service plan.

3.05 **CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES, PROJECTS AND PRIORITIES**

3.06 The council offers both formal and informal ways for customers to be involved in housing services. Customers have different preferences in relation to being involved, and may only do so for example when they wish to express a view on a service they have received at the time, whereas others may wish to be part of a formal working group, or residents association. The following highlights the activities and projects that have been carried out, and those which are planned in the forthcoming financial year.

3.07 **FORMAL CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES**

3.08 Tenants' conferences were held in April 2012 (Civic Hall), October 2012 (The Beaufort Hotel) and January 2012 (Civic Hall). These were well attended but tenants from the north area were under-represented. It is therefore intended that the demand for a similar event in the north area be established, with a view to offering another event there. The conference is beneficial to the council as it enables the authority to consult on a wide range of issues, with a large number of people in a short space of time.

In January 2013, customers were consulted on anti-social behaviour, improvement works to their homes and the draft budget as well as

providing an opportunity to explain to customers the challenging economic environment in which services are currently being delivered. Additionally the council holds an annual customer awards ceremony. In order to make better use of resources, it is proposed that both of these events are combined in 2013.

- 3.09 A tenant inspection regime has been established to test the services within housing and to establish the reality of the customer experience. This approach is still in its infancy and the results of the first service to be tested have not yet been made available. However it is envisaged that the next service to be tested will be anti-social behaviour in order to provide a baseline position prior to the implementation of a revised antisocial behaviour policy, IT system and specialist team.
- 3.10 The council provides support and advice for tenants and residents groups and associations to become established. The authority has developed a positive working relationship with the Tenant's Federation and its members work closely with the council on a wide range of housing related issues. By working with the tenant's federation, the council is able to obtain valuable input in the design and improvement of a range of services. An example of this is a member of the Tenant's Federation sits on the Housing Antisocial Behaviour (ASB) Steering Group along with members, council officers, police and other agencies who provide input into the direction of the ASB service.
- 3.11 The council has supported and provided a range of training opportunities to facilitate groups and individuals who wish to be formally involved.

Training undertaken in 2012 included:

- Committee skills (**12 attendees**)
- Negotiating skills for groups (**11 attendees**)
- ASB policy session (**6 attendees**)
- Getting the best from your community house/centre (**15 attendees**)
- Interview skills (**8 attendees**) (1 tenant has gone onto participate in appointment of senior staff)

Training planned for 2013 includes:

- Basic food hygiene (January)
- Treasurer skills (February)
- Appointment of Contractors briefing session (March)
- Fundraising (April)
- Basic First Aid (June)
- Getting more of the community involved. (May)

- 3.12 Customers have also been involved in the appointment of contractors delivering the council's improvement works to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard. The input of tenants is positive in this respect and they have asked pressing and insightful questions of prospective contractors. Customers have told us that it is important to them to have an input into the appointment of contractors who will be working in their homes.
- 3.13 The authority has established a sheltered housing forum which arose from demand within sheltered housing. Customers have requested input into the issues which affect them directly, for example, the sheltered warden service, grass cutting and anti-social behaviour. The forum which currently has 26 members is still in its infancy. However, plans are being developed to involve the group in the development of services.
- 3.14 **INFORMAL CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES**
- 3.15 Housing Services hosts a 'family fun day' for customers. This is aimed at involving customers who may not participate in other more formal events. The 2012 event was held in Connah's Quay Community Centre, with over 250 attendees. The council and its contractors held information stalls incorporating an element of fun and provided bouncy castles, arts & crafts and face painters to attract young families to the free event. Community groups were also involved and were able to raise funds for their own groups or charities. Over £700 was raised for charity. In August 2013, a joint 'fun day' with Penyffordd Residents (North) Group is to be held on a Saturday and this is currently in the planning stage.
- 3.16 In line with the Strategy Assessment, it has already been identified that more focus needs to be given to understanding the profile of the attendees, and the outcomes from the event. This is necessary to understand whether the event provides value for money.
- 3.17 The Housing Service produces a Housing News magazine which has historically been published and delivered 4 times per year to all tenants. The publication has historically been A4 sized, and printed on high quality glossy paper. Whilst this makes the magazine an attractive publication, the council needs to be mindful of costs.
- 3.18 Some savings have already been made by having staff deliver the magazines, and reducing printing costs. In January 2013, teams of council officers, members and tenants came together to deliver the magazine, and to be a visible presence in the council's neighbourhoods. This was successful due to the amount of staff who volunteered to help which meant that the magazine was delivered in one single morning, and the council saved on postage costs, quoted at £5,300. Value was also added by familiarising officers with a variety of neighbourhoods, identifying estate management issues, such as

untidy gardens, and connecting with local residents.

3.19 The council is proposing to trial a 'newspaper' format for the Spring edition of Housing News which will cost £1300 to produce which will then be evaluated and customers asked for views. Further costs savings are being investigated, such as sharing costs with other organisations who may wish to publicise their stories or information and/or approaching external contractors or business for sponsorship. The total budget for housing news for 13/14 is £15,000 should 4 issues be produced in a similar format to recent years this would cost circa £1,800 for printing each issue; leaving a saving of £7,800 should the Council continue with hand delivery. Should the number of issues be reduced, or formatting changed this would achieve further efficiencies.

3.20 Members are asked to consider whether the number of publications should remain at 4 per year, or be reduced to 2 or 3 issues per year. Further consideration should be given to whether the Council continues to have the publication delivered to every property, or if any of the following options might be more appropriate:

- (a) Electronic editions of the publication which customers can opt-in to receive by email in lieu of a printed copy. With a choice of receiving either in Welsh or English.
- (b) Printed copies which are also delivered to key public locations for customers to collect if they wish, in lieu of a hand delivered copy.

3.21 The council, through its production of the Housing News, is using this as a vehicle to involve younger residents. As an alternative to the use of stock photographs for the front cover of the publication the Spring 2013 edition will use this space as an opportunity for a young local budding photographer to get their work published.

3.22 In the same issue two teenagers from the local community will be volunteering on the team; one as a photographer and the other as a junior journalist who will be shadowing a member of staff to write an article on "A day in the life of...." The purpose of this is to highlight the work carried out by the council, to introduce local young residents to the type of careers offered in housing, particularly in relation to entry level jobs, and to give young people valuable experience working with the council on the publication. It is then aimed to run competitions to give other local young people the chance to become involved and this will be enhanced by the provision of training.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

The council will be reviewing the Customer Involvement Strategy and will incorporate the learning from the Welsh Government Strategy Assessment. Members are asked to consider what the priorities

should be for the service to inform a revised strategy to be considered by Scrutiny later in the year.

Members are asked to consider the recommendation that the frequency of the Housing News publication be reduced from 4 to 2 or 3.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It is envisaged that efficiency savings will be achieved through the review of the Housing News magazine and measures will be put in place to assess value for money from customer involvement activities.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

No issues arising from this report.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

No issues arising from this report.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

The customer involvement strategy aims to improve equality of opportunity for customers to participate in the design and delivery of housing services.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

No issues arising from this reports

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

None at this stage

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

12.00 APPENDICES

Welsh Government/TPAS Strategy Assessment Document

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

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