

## **FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:**           **HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**DATE:**                 **8<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2015**

**REPORT BY:**         **CHIEF OFFICER COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE**

**SUBJECT:**           **CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT - COUNCIL HOUSING SERVICES**

### **1.00    PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.01    The purpose of the report is to provide assurance to the Overview and Scrutiny committee on the commitment and approach to Customer Involvement within the Council Housing Services. The report updates members of the committee on on-going activities and proposes further development of a number of measures to ensure effective Customer Involvement and Customer focused service outcomes.

### **2.00    BACKGROUND**

#### **Customer Involvement Activities, Projects and Priorities**

2.01    In order to ensure that the delivery of the Council Housing Service reflects the needs and priorities of customers, the Council offers a variety of formal and informal opportunities for customers to be involved. 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, or a particular community issue, whereas others may wish to be part of a formal working group, or residents association.

2.02    To ensure that the Council Housing Services are delivering high quality, customer focused services based on customer views, feedback and expectations the service has continued to build on involvement in the following areas:

- Tenant scrutiny and service improvement
- Delivering the Welsh Housing Quality Standards(WHQS)
- Local neighbourhood involvement
- Supporting customers to be involved
- Communication

## 2.03 **Tenant Scrutiny and Service Improvement**

2.03.1 Customers have been involved in shaping, scrutinising and holding services to account helping to drive forward service improvements. The Customer Reality Checker Group is the tenant inspection regime established in 2013, whose job is to test out the services being delivered and identify the reality of the customer experience. The approach has been effective in instigating change and service improvements. Outcomes include:

### 2.03.2 Responsive Repairs

- Identified customer care issues including the need to use dust sheets in tenant's homes
- The need for more repairs by appointment resulting in higher customer satisfaction
- Reduce time spent by operatives on call backs resulting in improved repairs performance

### 2.03.3 Anti-social Behaviour

- A baseline service assessment prior to the implementation of a revised antisocial behaviour policy, IT system and specialist team.
- Mystery shopping techniques using scenario based calls to staff to identify advice given, and information available to tenants.
- Additional training for staff, and the development of advice leaflets and record logs.

2.03.4 Tenant Federation Members have attended Overview and Scrutiny Committee to gain a greater insight in to the role of scrutiny and to provide feedback on various issues from the tenant's perspective.

## 2.04 **Delivering the Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS)**

2.04.1 During the summer of 2014 extensive tenant consultation took place on a revised programme to meet the WHQS by 2020. This started at the family fun day with over 50 tenants giving their views, followed by a questionnaire to all tenants resulting in 1600 questionnaires being completed. This was followed by a number of consultation events held at Connects offices which provided the opportunity for tenants to give their opinion and shape the new delivery programme.

2.04.2 In March 2015, six tenants received training and were actively engaged in the appointment of various contractors and will continue to be involved in monitoring contracts to ensure customer satisfaction remains high. For example, Members of the Federation have undertaken face to face satisfaction surveys with tenants who have received improvements during the delivery of the 2014/15 WHQS programme.

2.04.3 To further support the delivery of the Welsh Housing Quality Standards, two Tenant Liaison Officers have been appointed to work with communities, organise local consultation events and local 'choices' open days for tenants to discuss options and other issues relating to the kitchen/bathroom installations and to ensure there is good communication throughout the projects.

## 2.05 Local Neighbourhood Involvement

2.05.1 Tenants conferences were held on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2014 (Civic Hall), and 9<sup>th</sup> October 2014 (Theatre Clwyd) to enable consultation on a wide range of issues that are important to tenants and the wider community. The conferences were themed and provided valuable feedback on service improvement plans, budget planning and pressures, new anti-social behaviour legislation, and during 'what the customer wants' workshop sessions tenants have provided valuable insight into the services we deliver. Whilst attendance at the October event was low, new volunteers were recruited for the asset management group during workshop sessions.

2.05.2 In January 2015, a joint Elected Member and Tenant workshop was held with the main presentations being self-financing and service charges. The joint approach to such events was well received by both tenants and members alike, and we hope to plan similar events in the future. From this service charge information and consultation events are currently underway with all tenants who receive service charges to provide information and to gather their views on the quality of services being delivered.

2.05.3 For the last four years, a summer family fun day has been held, as an informal way of engaging with customers who may not wish to participate in more formal events or groups. This aims to promote the services and support available to both tenants and residents of the county and other visitors to the area. The events have been held in various locations including Mold, Connah's Quay, Penyffordd and Flint. Attendance at the local events has been approximately 300-400 people with the exception of the 2014 event at Flint Castle where over 1000 people attended.

2.05.4 Some of the outcomes include:

- The capital works team held their first consultation session on area based works, type of works to be completed with the staff speaking to over 50 tenants.
- Advertising the Housing Facebook site
- Neighborhood management and housing support services offered advice and information to current and prospective tenants along with policy information.
- The repairs service gained an insight into website content based on customer expectations, experience of other websites and views. Contact was made with approximately 80 people,

and their views have been used to develop website.

- NEW (North East Wales) Homes used the opportunity to advertise the company and the services it provides.

2.05.5 This year the event was held as part of the Flint festival on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> July and has been funded solely by sponsorship from contractors, with no financial impact on the service. It has been identified that more focus needs to be given to understanding the profile of the attendees, and identifying the outcomes from the event to ensure value for money for future events.

2.05.6 The council holds an annual customer awards ceremony each year to recognise the many valuable achievements of the volunteers working across the various communities. To ensure value for money, members of the committee are asked to consider that the event could be delivered in partnership with other organisations working with the voluntary sector including FLVC or Neighbourhood Watch, who hold similar events.

2.05.7 There are also local repair/housing surgeries which provide face to face engagement on a community basis, currently there are 2 areas which hold monthly surgeries, with other areas arranged on an ad hoc basis. Neighbourhood Housing staff organise a programme of EVA's (Environmental and Visual Audits) which take place on a regular basis with NHO's, Repairs staff, Local Member and representatives from local groups.

## 2.06 **Supporting Involvement and Training Opportunities**

2.06.1 The service actively encourage and support customers to get involved by offering training and support where needed, helping to build capacity to enable effective involvement. This includes providing support and advice for local groups and residents associations to set up and undertake community garden's, kids clubs and fundraising.

2.06.2 The Housing service is supporting and work in partnership with Flintshire Tenant's Federation to design and improve services, which includes:

- Update on the WHQS programme
- Special subject meetings such as rent setting
- Members are on the involvement strategy group to develop and monitor involvement opportunities
- Two members of the Tenant's Federation sit on the Strategic Housing and Regeneration Programme (SHARP) Steering Group.

2.06.3 The council has supported a range of training opportunities to facilitate groups and individuals who wish to be formally involved. The knowledge and experiences gained through training and information sessions supports tenants by helping to build their confidence and

develop skills which help them access employment opportunities, whilst promoting community cohesion and building stronger and sustainable communities.

- 2.06.4 Training/information sessions undertaken in 2014/15 included:
- Negotiating skills for groups -June 2014 (11 attendees)
  - Involving your local community – Dec 2014 (10 attendees)
  - Appointment of Contractors briefing session -February 2015 (6 attendees)
  - Interview skills –March 2015 (6 attendees)
  - Right To Buy consultation - April 2015 (14 attendees)

- 2.06.5 Further training is planned for during 2015/16 on Fundraising, Basic First Aid, Service information updates, Basic food hygiene

By providing support and offering training opportunities the following outcomes have been achieved:

- Volunteers have develop luncheon clubs through gaining basic food hygiene certificates
- A formal response to Welsh Government on the Right to Buy consultation has been developed by the Tenants Federation
- Participation in contractor appointments
- A volunteer work placement with a contractor was gained which provided valuable work experience and enhanced employment opportunities.
- Asset management group volunteers were involved in the appointment of contractors to deliver the to Welsh Housing Quality Standard programme.

## 2.07 **Communication**

- 2.07.1 The Housing Service produces a Housing News magazine which is published and delivered twice a year to all tenants. Following recommendations at the scrutiny meeting held in 2013, the publication is now produced on a lower grade paper and in a newspaper format, making it a more cost effective publication. Tenant value the production of the housing news and at the October 2014 tenant conference rated the service as good.
- 2.07.2 The Publications and Information panel (PIP) was set up in June 2014 and consists of 3 elected members, 3 staff and 3 tenant representatives. The group meet monthly to develop articles for the housing news and review tenant information and leaflets to ensure it is appropriate for the target audience and provides valuable and meaningful information.
- 2.07.3 The Housing in Flintshire Facebook page was launched in 2014 with the aim of engaging with tenants and younger residents and has been successfully used to advertise events organised by housing services

such as the family fun day, Flintshire Council and Welsh government consultations and promoting other agencies information that our customers may find useful, including the 'Chip my Dog' programme organised by the Dogs Trust. The page 'likes' has increased to over 600 with the recent promotion of the page at local events, a promotion leaflet in the tenant sign up pack and promotion at the modern trainee information event.

2.07.4 The work undertaken on a day to basis by the many staff across departments within housing services, helps to mainstream participation and increase the involvement of our customers, and strengthens community confidence in the services delivered.

### **3.00 CONSIDERATIONS**

#### **3.01 Customer Involvement Strategic Review**

To further enhance the involvement opportunities for customers and to ensure the service delivers a value for money, customer focused service it is planned to review and refresh the customer involvement strategy to include the following:

- Expand the Asset management volunteer group, and undertake a series of training sessions to ensure all the volunteers recruited can play an active role in different areas of the WHQS projects.
- Continue to support the Publications and Information Panel group to review, and in the development of new information and publications that tenants receive.
- Continued support for the Tenants Federation and local resident groups, including providing advice and support, membership growth, increase knowledge base of member groups through internal and external training, and exchange visits with other similar organisations.
- Identify methods of involvement with younger tenants and those who do not engage in formal activities, including those that work during the day, when most activities happen.
- Provide opportunities for the wider tenant body to influence service improvement plans, through additional local consultation and involvement events, and working in partnership with other departments and organisations including Communities First.
- Develop an 'every contact counts' approach to gathering customer insight information to help tailor service delivery and drive improvements.
- Develop with customers an approach to digital engagement which reflects their needs and encourages real time customer feedback, this will involve looking at some of the leading practice being developed such as use of mobile applications, neighbourhood internet access

- Develop an impact assessment approach to review the effectiveness and value for money of events.

#### **4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS**

4.01 Members are asked to note the on-going service activity in relation to Customer Involvement and to provide input and advice to guide the development of the revised Customer Involvement Strategy described in section 3.

#### **5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.01 No issues arising from this report.

#### **6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT**

6.01 No issues arising from this report.

#### **7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

7.01 No issues arising from this report.

#### **8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT**

8.01 No issues arising from this report.

#### **9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

9.01 No issues arising from this report

#### **10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED**

10.01 Member and Tenant joint event to review and refresh the customer involvement strategies action plan.

#### **11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

11.01 Initial information gathered at October 2014 tenant conference will be used to influence the development of the customer involvement strategy.

#### **12.00 APPENDICES**

12.01 None.

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