



## Report to Customers and Communities Committee

12 September 2013

---

**Title:** Customer Involvement Activity - update

**Report of:** Managing Director

---

### **Purpose of Report**

1. To provide an update on customer involvement activity for the first quarter of 2013/14.

### **Background**

2. Customer involvement is central to the way the company delivers services, believing that all customers should be able to make a difference and get involved in a way which suits them.
3. The Involvement and Empowerment standard of the HCA's Regulatory Framework places a requirement on landlords to ensure that tenants are given a range of opportunities to influence and shape policies and scrutinise our services.
4. The Delivery Plan 2013-15, includes an objective to support and fully embed co-regulation. This is carried out through a range of ways including the TALISMAN panel, Complaints Scrutiny Panel and through the development of an annual report for tenants and leaseholders each year.

### **Summary**

5. During the period, 1 April 2013 to 30 June 2013, 59 involvement activities took place. During this quarter, customers were involved in various activities including TALISMAN meetings, Leasehold Performance Forum, school activities, Service Improvement Groups; focus groups, workshops and training courses.
6. This quarter also involved the company's attendance at a range of events as part of the Opportunity Knocks programme for 2013. Further information on this is provided in another report to this committee.
7. Customers have been involved in our activities on over 2684 occasions, although some may have been involved in more than one event.

8. Appendix 1 to this report shows a summary of activities undertaken during this period and demonstrates the variety of ways customers have been involved. This information is broken down by the two broad service areas, Corporate Services and Customers and Communities, to highlight the different work that has taken place across the company.
9. Appendix 2 to this report shows the venues of where activities have taken place during this period and the breakdown by neighbourhood area.

### **Key outcomes of involvement**

10. There have been a number of outcomes from customer involvement during this period which are highlighted below: -
  - Sessions held with customers to review the current methods of accessing the repairs reporting services and how this could be improved to inform a service review.
  - Customers attended a Leasehold Performance forum and were provided with leasehold and caretaking performance for 2012/13. Attendees were able to review the work plan and priorities for the year.
  - Attended and supported an older person's event in Chowdene Children's Centre promoting the training and activities provided by the company and making links to deliver some sessions directly to the group including How to Spot a Scam.
  - Customers viewed and made selections for fires and surrounds at a Choices event for people due to receive work through the Maintaining Decency programme.
  - Provided advice and information to Polish residents on applying for properties through Tyne and Wear homes and resolved a number of queries through a Saturday polish drop in event.
  - Repeat mystery shopping exercise on anti-social behaviour highlighted that a number of the recommendations from the TALISMAN exercise had been put into place.
  - Tenants reviewed and monitored the performance in their locality of Local Environmental Services in line with the grounds maintenance service agreement.
  - A board recruitment event took place for interested tenants and leaseholders, leading to the successful appointment of two new Tenant Board Members.

### **Performance against service standards**

11. There are a number of service standards in place for involvement to help monitor performance and ensure that we continue to involve customers in the way services are delivered. They are as follows;
  - Representation of involved customers (customers on our involvement database)
  - Annual training programme course attendance
  - Satisfaction with feedback following involvement (reported in the next quarter)

- % of tenants satisfied that their views are taken into account
  - Number of events attended.
12. At the end of the period 1 April 2013 – 30 June 2013, performance was as follows: -
- There were 867 involved customers on our database, exceeding the target of 840
  - There have been 43 attendees on customer training courses, and are on course to meet the target of 180 attendees by the end of the year.
  - Satisfaction of tenants that their views are taken into account was 73.9%, exceeding the target of 72.5%
  - We have attended 16 events meeting the target set for the year.

### **Mears Community Initiatives**

13. As the repairs and maintenance contractor for our properties, Mears committed to undertaking a range of community activities during the term of their contract. This includes a contribution to the company's Community Fund to support both cash and in kind initiatives.
14. Appendix 3 shows the activities undertaken by Mears since the start of the contract.
15. A project is already underway as part of the Community Fund on the refurbishment of a toilet block in Leam Lane Methodist Church.
16. Mears representatives have attended a number of community events with the company as part of Opportunity Knocks and have undertaken some joint initiatives such as providing talks in sheltered schemes as part of National Fall Prevention Week in June to discuss risks of tips and falls.
17. During the last quarter, through a partnership between Mears, the company and Gateshead College, an 8 week training programme has begun offering tenants and leaseholders the opportunity to gain more detailed training on DIY, painting and decorating and carpentry, enhancing the training offered through the existing Moving Forward programme. The outcomes of this training will be evaluated and reported to a future meeting of this committee.
18. Additional projects are also being identified in partnership between Mears and the company to be delivered during the course of the contract including support towards the refurbishment of Warwick Court communal lounge.

### **Future activity**

19. The following activities are planned for 2013/14, although there will also be a range of additional activities likely to take place: -
- The Annual Report will be finalised with the working group and made available to all tenants and leaseholders in November.

- A Board recruitment event will take place to raise awareness of what's involved in being a board member and to encourage new tenant board member applications.
- A number of 'Meet the Team' sessions will take place in September with the Management Team visiting the local offices to meet with residents.
- The TALISMAN panel will begin their third scrutiny review of the Voids service.
- The Summer of Fun draw will be made, providing a range of community groups with prizes ranging from kitchen packs to supermarket vouchers to support their local activities.

### **Link to values**

20. This report relates to the following company values: -

- Being customer focused, innovative and professional
- Being a listening and learning organisation
- Embracing Equality.

### **Impact on tenants**

21. We have worked extensively with tenants, leaseholders and the wider community during this period, to get views and opinions to identify priorities and inform services.
22. The information gained from these involvement activities helps inform service improvement and delivery to make sure that the services we are providing to our customers meet their needs.

### **Risk Management Implications**

23. Failure to engage with customers was identified as a key strategic risk for the company.
24. The Homes and Communities Agency's (HCA's) Involvement and Empowerment standard requires us to demonstrate that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to be involved in the management of their housing and are provided with the support they need to take part in this. The activities outlined within this report demonstrate our compliance with this standard.

### **Financial Implications**

25. The Head of Corporate Services confirms that a budget is available to support customer involvement and resources have been made available to support the activities outlined in this report.
26. Individual service managers have the opportunity to request funding from this budget to support involvement activities where they can demonstrate the potential outcomes for housing company tenants and leaseholders.

## **Equality and Diversity Implications**

27. The company is committed to involving people from diverse communities to ensure everyone's views, needs and aspirations are considered in the decision making process.
28. Support is available to assist people with additional needs to access involvement opportunities and this is regularly promoted.
29. Every effort is made to ensure we do not directly or indirectly discriminate against any individual or group and to provide equal access to this service and the representation of involved tenants is regularly monitored and acted upon.

## **Value for Money implications**

30. The involvement of tenants and the wider community can result in value for money savings as service managers can gain an insight into what tenants want and need. This can result in resolving the issues first time and delivering something that works for all parties.
31. Value for money is considered within each of the Service Improvement Groups as part of the agenda.

## **Environmental implications**

32. The environmental impact of involvement is considered when conducting activities across the company and addressed wherever possible, for example, customers sharing taxis where possible when attending events.

## **Consultation carried out**

33. The Involvement Service Improvement Group is regularly updated with the progress of involvement across all services and the outcomes which result.

## **Health Implications**

34. There are no direct health implications arising from this report although the successful implementation of the recommendations would have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of Gateshead residents.

## **Recommendation**

35. The views of the committee are sought on whether it is satisfied with the involvement activities undertaken in the quarter.

---

Contact: Louise Taylor, Involvement and Diversity Manager Tel: (0191) 433 5380

---

---

**Appendix 1: Summary of involvement activities across the company**

---

<b>Title of Activity</b>	<b>Number of Events</b>	<b>Number of Customers Involved</b>
Workshop	1	34
Board & Committee Meetings	5	30
Drop In Sessions	1	9
Forum	8	71
Focus Group	5	36
Service Improvement Group	6	46
Mystery Shopping	3	8
Surgery	6	62
Training Course	4	49
Meeting	3	14
Event	16	2,282
Surveys/Questionnaires	1	43
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>2,684</b>

---

---

## Summary of involvement activity – Corporate services

---

Title of Activity	Number of Events	Number of Customers Involved
Board & Committee meetings	5	30
Drop in session	1	9
Forum	8	71
Focus group	3	21
Service Improvement Group	3	23
Mystery Shopping	3	8
Surgery	6	62
Training course	4	49
Event	12	1,695
Surveys/Questionnaires	1	43
Meeting	1	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>2,019</b>

## Summary of outcomes – Corporate Services

- Supported an IDAHO (International Day Against Homophobia) event to help raise awareness and reduce homophobia in the region by dispelling myths
- Held a number of customer training courses to help provide support where it is felt tenants and/or leaseholders may benefit from additional skills and knowledge. This included a Spot the scam course during Scam Awareness month and Adult Learning Week, and a How to Manage your money session to help those who may be struggling with their finances following the implementation of Welfare Reform
- Attended BME surgeries where a number of hate crime issues were reported and subsequently addressed
- Attended a number of events as part of our fourth Opportunity Knocks programme where we were able to raise awareness of involvement opportunities including free courses and the Summer of Fun project. Events during this quarter included Picnic by the Pond at Blaydon, the launch of a new BME community group GECT (Gateshead Ethnic Communities Together), Party in the Park (Gateshead Carers) and Bensham and Saltwell Festival

- Began an eight week training programme in conjunction with Mears at Gateshead College, for tenants and leaseholders to build skills to help them around the home, such as decorating, electrical, plumbing and carpentry
- Held BME and disabled persons' housing forums to discuss issues specifically faced by these groups of tenants and leaseholders.

---

### Summary of involvement activity – Customers and Communities

---

Title of Activity	Number of Events	Number of Customers Involved
Service Improvement Group	3	23
Workshop	1	34
Focus group	2	15
Meeting	2	6
Event	4	587
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>665</b>

### Summary of outcomes - Customers and Communities

- Held a workshop with customers to consult on the repairs reporting service and improvements suggested to ensure effectiveness of operatives during peak call times
- Grounds Maintenance Service Level Agreement meeting held with customers
- A number of Choices events held for customers to make choices for their kitchens and fire places
- Worked with Whitemere Primary School children on a 'Love where you live' campaign to highlight the importance of living in a clean environment, resulting in increased awareness of young people and tidier estates
- Tenants from Beacon Lough East multi storey blocks designed a mosaic through Neighbourhood Pride funding which was produced by Durham College and placed on the side of Fell Court, the purpose to improve the appearance of the area and make it more appealing for residents
- Focus group held with customers to review the rent statement and areas for improvements were suggested and approved.

---

**Appendix 2: Location of involvement activities**

---

**Venues of activities**

<b>Venue</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Keelman House	24
Primary school	2
Gateshead College	1
Community centre	12
Dryden Centre	1
Civic Centre	7
Gateshead Leisure Centre	1
Housing Office	2
Children's Centre	2
Newcastle (B&Q Scotswood and Newcastle Civic Centre)	2
Other*	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>

\* includes outdoor events for Opportunity Knocks events held at Blaydon, Birtley, Teams and Saltwell Park and a drop in at Gateshead Carers

---

**Neighbourhood area of involvement activities**

---

<b>Area</b>	<b>Amount</b>
East	5
Central	17
South	7
Inner West	27
West	1
Other*	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>

\* refers to venues outside of Gateshead

---

**Appendix 3: Mears 'Serving Our Communities' Projects**

---

Attended community events including Birtley Fire Station Open Day, Teams Community Festival and Newcastle Pride
Have commenced a refurbishment project on the toilet block of Leam Lane Methodist Church through the Community Fund
Held a coffee morning for The Alzheimer's Society raised £140
Raised money for charities including Alzheimer's Society, Diabetes UK, Comic Relief, Army Benevolent Fund, Children in Need and FACT through charity days, coffee mornings, dress down days and raffles etc.
Recycling of voids furniture for Foundations
Heavenly Hampers provided to local charities within Gateshead
Apprentice Challenge Refurbishment project at Bensham Grove. Due to commence in August 2013
Raised £2,000 for the Eagles Community Foundation through a charity tournament with Mears and their sub- contractors
Slips, trips and falls. Mears visited a sheltered scheme with Mears Care and the Housing company to raise awareness as part of National Falls Prevention Week
Mears 25 <sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebrations. £500 raised and donated to a local children's cancer ward in Gateshead