



Report to Customers and Communities Committee

12 September 2013

Title: Opportunity Knocks 2013

Report of: Managing Director

Purpose of Report

1. To update the committee on the Company's 2013 Opportunity Knocks Programme.

Background

2. Following on from the success of the Opportunity Knocks 2012 programme, it was decided that the same approach would be taken for this year. By attending community led events across the Borough of Gateshead and Northern Pride (LGBT Festival) in Newcastle, would ensure the Involvement Team would be attending events which have a guaranteed high footfall level.
3. The purpose of the programme is to use range of opportunities to engage with the local community in their own environment and share key messages from the company.

Summary

4. Appendix 1 to this report shows a summary of events attended and outcomes achieved.
5. During the period, 22 May 2013 – 7 September 2013, the company attended 12 events across the five boroughs of Gateshead. One Newcastle Pride was held at Newcastle Exhibition Park). Feedback from 2012 highlighted a gap of events in the West. As a result this year we also attended the Blaydon Community Festival.
6. The full report of the programme is attached at the Appendix to this report.

Key outcomes of involvement

7. There have been a number of outcomes achieved from Opportunity Knocks 2013, full details of these can be found in Appendix 1, headline achievements include :
- Engagement with over 2000 customers (excluding National Play Day / Northern Pride).
 - Gaining feedback from those attendees at Northern Pride on experiences of customer service and to how the company could form a LGBT customer led group.
 - Meeting with customers whom we would not normally have the opportunity to engage with at well established community led events.
 - Signing people up to courses offered through Moving Forward.
 - Providing money advice and information to customers through advice and support officers.
 - Engaging with young people and their parents at National Play Day.
 - Receiving entries to Summer of Fun competition from local community groups.

Next Steps

8. The attached report will be shared with the Involvement SIG for discussion and we would be recommending adopting the same approach in 2014.

Link to values

9. 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

10. The Involvement SIG and Disabled Persons Housing Forum developed the programme of events with the Involvement Team
11. The Involvement SIG highlighted 18 – 25 year olds as a priority to target with some activities. 18 – 25 year old age bracket. By attending events targeted at younger children, i.e. National Play Day and Swalwell Fire Station open day, it was felt that this could be achieved, achieved through engagement with them and their parents.

Risk Management Implications

12. Failure to engage with customers was identified as a key strategic risk for the company.
13. 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

14. The Head of Corporate Services confirmed that a budget was available to support Opportunity Knocks 2013 and resources have been made available to support the activities outlined in this report.

Equality and Diversity Implications

15. 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.
16. Support is available to assist people with additional needs to access involvement opportunities and this is regularly promoted.
17. The Involvement Team attended Chase Park festival in Whickham which was an inclusive festival targeted towards disabled people.

Value for Money implications

18. Total costs associated with this years event were £5,727.06. When considering this involved engaging 2000 customers, (average cost £2.86 per person), this would suggest that the approach taken this year demonstrates VFM.

Environmental implications

19. There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

Consultation carried out

20. A number of groups were consulted in the planning stages of this project (please see details in Appendix 1) The Involvement Service Improvement Group is regularly updated with the progress of Opportunity Knocks programmes and a review will be undertaken with the group once the programme has been completed.

Health Implications

21. There are no direct health implications arising from this report.

Recommendation

22. The views of the committee are sought on whether it is satisfied with the impact on customers of the Opportunity Knocks Programme.



Opportunity knocks! - 2013 evaluation

Introduction

Following the success of last years Opportunity Knocks it was decided to adopt a similar approach for this years programme.

This approach was to attend existing events taking place in communities across Gateshead rather than setting up stand alone events.

The events attended were held between May and September 2013,¹ across the five neighbourhoods in Gateshead. Our attendance at pre-existing events was co-ordinated by members of the Involvement team and where appropriate they were supported by staff from across the company. The theme this year focussed on the welfare reform bill and associated training whereby customers could gain knowledge of money saving activities via training and support.

Aim

The aim of our approach in 2013 was again to engage with the local community in their own environment. This involved us liaising with tenants and leaseholders with whom we would not normally come into contact with. As was proven last year, our attendance at existing community events would see a guaranteed a high turnout of people. It was also expected that this would help us reach our younger tenants and leaseholders.

We also targeted our attendance at events where we were aware they would attract high numbers of younger people, such as National Play Day, Swalwell Fire Station open day and Carnival on the Hill. At these events we expected a high number of young adults would be in attendance due to these events being targeted at younger children.

Objectives

The objectives of the programme were:

- Increasing the awareness among customers of the forms of financial advice / support that are available to them via the Money Matters guide and advice and support officers. This was patricianly relevant to those customers whom had been affected by Welfare Reform.

¹ At the time of writing this report we had not as yet attended Carnival on the hill due to be held 7 September



- Increasing awareness among customers of the services available to them from The Gateshead Housing Company across the board.
- Increasing the number of customers involved with the company and reaching people who typically wouldn't be involved
- Owing to the success of last years approach, to actively seek to reach a wider audience than in the past by attending numerous community events across the five boroughs of Gateshead
- To promote and encourage sign up to courses as part of the Moving Forward Training Programme.
- To promote Tyne and Wear Homes.
- To raise awareness of shared ownership properties in the Kibblesworth area.
- To actively promote Summer of Fun promotion to those in attendance all events attended.
- To seek feedback from those attending Northern Pride on their thoughts as to how a LGBT housing forum should be set up.
- To ensure queries raised by customers at the various events were forwarded to the relevant department(s) and responded to in a timely fashion.

Background

The events were planned to be held at various times during the week and also weekends, this ensured that we would be able to engage with people whom we would not normally see when holding events Monday to Friday during normal office hours.

Planning

During planning stage, the following groups were consulted with:

- BME forum
- Gateshead Visible Ethnic Minority Support Group
- TGHC Involvement SIG
- Disabled Persons Housing Forum
- Members of TGHC Corporate and Senior Management Teams.
- Linking with Local Community Leaders
- Area and Local Housing Managers
- Linking with local councillors
- Northern Pride Planning Committee

Events were selected based on experiences of attending in 2012, feedback from employees and consideration to the proportion of tenants and leaseholders who would be in attendance.



Taking into consideration comments that we in previous years had not attended community led events in the South borough, this year saw us attend Blaydon Festival.

An attempt was made, where possible to attend events in each borough, however, this depended in the number of events taking place which varied significantly. For example the Bankies festival in Felling did not take place this year.

A list of prospective events was presented to the Involvement Service Improvement Group. This was well received and those customers in attendance felt that this offered a range of opportunities for us to engage with our tenants and leaseholders across all boroughs of Gateshead.

Promotion

To ensure maximum exposure of our planned attendance at community events, we advertised proposed attendance on our internet site, facebook and twitter pages. Also placing information within our customer based publications, thus raising awareness across all Boroughs of events taking place, coupled with our attendance at same.

Events Attended

Events Attended
Adult Learners Week – Council Chamber 22 May
Blaydon Festival (Picnic by the Pond) on Sunday, 9 June
Party in the Park, Saltwell Park (Adult Carers Week) on Friday, 14 June
Birtley Community Festival on Saturday, 15 June
Teams Community Festival on Saturday, 15 June
Bensham and Saltwell Festival on Sunday, 30 June
Dunston Gala, Dunston Park on Saturday, 6 July
Swalwell Fire Station on Saturday, 13 July
Newcastle Pride, Exhibition Park, Newcastle on Saturday, 20 July
National Play Day, Saltwell Park, Low Fell on Wednesday, 7 August
Chase Park Festival, Chase Park, Whickham on Saturday, 10 August
Carnival on the Hill, Elgin Centre, Deckham on Saturday, 7 September

(Please note that Northern Pride took place outside of Gateshead)

This approach again has enabled us to engage with customers from all age groups and as such we have been able to promote services to an audience from all ages and areas of the borough across Gateshead.



National Play Day held at Saltwell Park again saw a high attendance with over 20,000 people attending, many of these falling to the age category we would normally struggle to make contact with, coupled with an estimated 30,000 people attending Northern Pride, held at Exhibition Park in Newcastle. This is particularly significant to provide the company with an opportunity to engage with the LGBT community.

- Our main contractor Mears have attended two community led events with us, this being, Teams Community Festival and Northern Pride.
- We have received 40 completed Summer of Fun questionnaires back from those handed out at events.
- Queries raised during events were mostly for Tyne and Wear Homes in terms of tenants wanting to know how they could find out their place on the housing list. or for Home Repairs whereby there were repairs outstanding . All queries raised at events were forwarded to the relevant internal department.

Pictures below were taken during Northern Pride – LGBT festival





Pictures taken at Teams Community Festival





Cost of delivery

Costings for this year's programme of events for Opportunity Knocks in total were £5,727.06. When considering that this involved engaging 2000 customers, (average cost £2.86 per person), this would suggest that the approach taken this year demonstrates VFM.

This years costs were made up from:

• Sponsorship and Stand Hire Northern Pride £750.00
• Stand at Chase Park Whickham festival £100.00
• Staff overtime costs £2654.36
• Bensham & Saltwell Festival £10.00
• Merchandise £2212.70
• Total £5,727.06



Outcomes

Outcomes resulting from attendance at these events:

- Increased awareness across the borough for all of the Moving Forward training programme and consequently increased attendance on the courses. As such we would hope to see an increased number of customers signing up for training due to high levels of leaflets we were not only able to give to customers at the time, but also as we were able to give customers real time advice and information about the course programme content.
- A visual presence at established community events thus allowing customers to be able to ask questions face to face and queries taken and feedback to the relevant service.
- Continued engagement with LGBT at Northern Pride, demonstrating our commitment to be a positive service provider and employer. Also, during attendance at Northern Pride, we requested feedback from those approaching our stand with regards to their thoughts on how a customer led LGBT housing group should be set up, via the completion of a customer survey
- Awareness raising of the Tyne and Wear homes application process.
- Increased awareness of the different way in which customers can become involvement.
- Several hundred leaflets were handed out to customers and leaseholders alike during the course of this period. This meaning that we were able to advise customers across the board of our services in terms of both the Moving Forward programme and forms of financial advice available in the form of the Money Matters guide
- Engagement (excluding Northern Pride / National Play Day), with around 2000 customers during the period May – September 2013.
- 40 completed Summer of Fun applications have been received.
- Teams Festival – received monies from the community fund. Their local housing manager encouraged the group to apply for this and supported their application.

Information shown above has been shared with customers from Involvement SIG who have agreed that once again this programme has been a great success via engaging people in their local community environments.

Conclusions and learning for future events

Having reviewed the approach to Opportunity Knocks taken this year, generally it can be seen that it delivered some positive outcomes as detailed previously.

The cost effectiveness of this approach can also be noted, as in the majority of cases the only costs incurred were for overtime for staff to work outside of normal hours., with



the exception of Northern Pride, Chase Park Festival and Bensham and Saltwell Festival events attended as stand space costs were incurred.

Continuing in our bid to offer more inclusive services, although costs may have been attached to our attendance at Northern Pride, we gained feedback in the form of a customer experience survey from 60 people who visited our stand. Feedback from this will enable us to design and hopefully launch an LGBT housing based forum. Continued attendance at this event and the publicity this offers, also enables us to publicise in Out North East our continued commitment to LGBT and this shows customers our commitment levels too and supports our work on the Stonewall workplace index.

Based on the above findings it is recommended that the company continues to focus Opportunity Knocks on a similar concept in 2014, due to the amount of customers that can be reached and the excellent value for money savings that can be made.