



## Report to Customers and Communities Committee

8 May 2014

**Title:** Customer Involvement Activity - Update

**Report of:** Managing Director

### Purpose of Report

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

### Background

2. The committee has previously requested a quarterly update of involvement activity across the company.
3. As part of the company's delivery plan we aim to support and embed co-regulation by involving customers in looking at the services we provide now and helping us to shape them in the future via a number of methods including supporting the TALISMAN and Complaints panels and continuing to involve customers in how we deliver services.
4. The Guide to Getting Involved sets out the wide range of ways customers can get involved depending on the time they have available and the areas they are particularly interested in.

### Summary

5. During the period, 1 January to 31 March 2014, 64 involvement activities took place.
6. Customers were involved in various activities including panel meetings, Service Improvement Groups, drop in sessions, focus groups, forums, workshops and training courses.
7. Customers have been involved in our involvement activities on over 980 occasions although some may have been involved in more than one activity.
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. The activities are broken down by service area 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.
10. Appendix 3 to this report shows a breakdown of activity by neighbourhood area.

### **Key outcomes of involvement**

11. There have been a number of outcomes from customer involvement during this period which are highlighted below;
  - Delivered twelve Energy Best Deal sessions to a range of community groups across Gateshead raising awareness of how customers can save money on their fuel bills. One person switched their fuel provider via Energy Angels saving £169/year, enabling us to receive funding for future financial inclusion work and was the first person to use this service.
  - Raised awareness of the housing company, how to apply for housing and involvement opportunities among the Roma travellers community through attendance at a Gateshead Carers drop in.
  - Worked in partnership with Newcastle Eagles basketball team and delivered a number of workshops across Gateshead primary schools which included a session on stereotypes, provoking discussions on hate crime and the impact this can have, feeding into the wider community cohesion strategy for Gateshead
  - Leasehold service charge budgets and estimated accounts were reviewed and agreed for 2014/15
  - Mystery shopping carried out on investment works looking at contractor's standard of work and staff attitude leading to improvements for the 2014/15 programme.
  - Agreed redesign of the annual sheltered housing satisfaction survey
  - Residents involved in planting outside their block of flats at Moorfoot Garden improving the general appearance of their area.

### **Service Improvement Groups (SIGs)**

12. Service Improvement Groups continue to meet on a regular basis to help drive improvements around service delivery across the company.
13. There are currently eight SIGs, covering the following areas of the business;
  - **Involvement** (covering involvement, diversity and customer service)
  - **Older Persons**
  - **Home** (covering repairs and improvements)
  - **Leasehold** (covering issues faced by leaseholders)
  - **Multi-storey** (covering issues faced by multi storey customers)
  - **Tenancy and allocation** (including allocations, tenancy strategies and rent and income services)
  - **Value For Money**
  - **Anti-social behaviour.**

14. All groups receive performance information relating to the service's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) or service standards at least every 6 months.
15. Where a TALISMAN review is conducted on a particular service area, the action plan developed as a result will be monitored by the relevant SIG.
16. During the year the SIGs have influenced services and achieved a range of outcomes including: -
  - Staff training on case handling developed with the ASB SIG and delivered to the Anti-social behaviour team as a result of TALISMAN findings from their scrutiny review
  - Involvement SIG approved TPAS membership due to the benefits it can bring to customers and staff accessing discounted and free training, as well as a wealth of online information
  - Members of the Older Persons' SIG agreed to be involved in undertaking surveys with sheltered scheme residents, to help get increased and more honest feedback to identify service improvements
  - Home SIG re-categorised repair priorities from 'planned' to 'routine' resulting in over 150 jobs being changed and as a result now being carried out more quickly
  - Leaseholders developed a process map to support all TGHC staff in relation to rights and responsibilities of leaseholders
  - Customers influenced the Caretaker & Concierge Dual service survey
  - VFM SIG members approved the targets set for the repairs service and Investment works programme.
17. Appendix 4 provides more information on outcomes by each SIG group.

#### **Mystery Shopping 2013/14**

18. Tenant led mystery shopping remains key for checking whether our service standards are being achieved.
19. During the period 2013/14 a mystery shopping exercise was undertaken on the Investment section to capture tenant's experiences of works undertaken in their homes by our contractor. This work was undertaken as part of the follow-up process following the initial Decent Homes project and included the following: -
  - Overall standard of work undertaken
  - Level of customer service and care offered by operatives and Resident Liaison Officers in and around tenants' properties
  - The level of aftercare services provided.
20. Six tenants were involved in this exercise, having attended our 'Checking our services (mystery shopping)' course. Their role was to develop the questions to be asked during the exercise, undertake telephone calls to customers who have received investment work to their property and record their feedback.
21. In total 39 customers were contacted with the majority offering a positive response of their experiences. A report on the findings has been produced and shared with the Tenant Liaison Manager.

22. Areas of concern and or recommendations for improvement were identified in the report and will be used to forward plan service delivery of this nature in the coming year.
23. Feedback from this report will be used to forward plan for service delivery in the coming year and will be shared with relevant contractors to advise of good practice and service delivery failure.
24. In the coming months, further mystery shopping exercises will be carried out testing service standards with the local housing offices, this being in preparation our Customer Service Excellence submission. We are also looking to undertake peer mystery shopping with other local housing organisations to share best practice and gain a different perspective.
25. A summary of the report findings from this exercise can be seen in Appendix 5.

### **Performance against service standards**

26. 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
  - % of tenants satisfied that their views are taken into account
  - Number of events attended.
27. At the end of the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 performance was as follows: -
  - There were 889 involved customers on our database, exceeding the target of 840
  - There were 276 attendees on customer training courses which exceeds our target of 180. This includes customers who attended the Energy Best Deal drop in sessions (95) and external seminars and conferences (19)
  - Satisfaction with feedback following involvement is high at 98.36%, exceeding our target of 97%
  - 73.90% of tenants are satisfied that their views are taken into account which exceeds our target of 72.50%, and represents an increase from 2012/13.
  - We have attended 37 events during this period, which is a significant increase from our target of 16.

### **External Recognition**

28. In the last quarter the company has been recognised and shortlisted for three awards for projects where tenants and leaseholders have been actively involved. In the Northern round of the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) awards for 2014 we were shortlisted in the following areas: -

- ‘Excellence in Annual reports’ – for the development and production of our 2012/13 annual report with a working group of tenants and leaseholders
- ‘Excellence in Equality and Diversity’ – for the partnership working with Newcastle Eagles around the ‘Hoops for Health’ project, this year exploring issues of hate crime and stereotyping, working towards community cohesion
- ‘Excellence in tenant led scrutiny’ – for the scrutiny work that TALISMAN have undertaken across the company to help improve service delivery.

### **Future activity**

29. The following activities are planned for 2014/15, although there will also be a range of additional community events likely to take place that we are awaiting confirmation for: -

- The company will be attending a Funding Event in April, organised by Gateshead Council to promote the various funding opportunities available to community groups. We will use this as an opportunity to launch this year’s Community Fund.
- An event will be held in Trinity Square to celebrate and raise awareness of Volunteers month in June and its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary
- As part of Gateshead together week and Volunteers month in June, we will be holding a joint forum with a focus on volunteering, to help raise awareness of the variety of voluntary work people do in their own time
- A Local Employment Advisory Forum (LEAF) event will be taking place in July at Gateshead Sports College which will promote local businesses to local residents of all ages and give information about various jobs. Students from some local senior schools are being invited to attend this event as well as members of the public.
- As part of our Opportunity knocks programme we will be attending a range of community festivals during the summer to promote involvement activities available and the range of services we provide
- A further project is to be delivered with Newcastle Eagles basketball team to continue our work with young children and raise awareness of the importance of respecting communities and not stereotyping others
- A programme of mystery shopping will be carried out during 2014/15 to continue to monitor whether we are delivering services in line with our service standards
- Annual report will be developed with tenants and leaseholders for 2013/14.

### **Link to values**

30. 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**

31. 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.
32. 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**

33. Failure to engage with customers was identified as a key strategic risk for the company.
34. 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**

35. 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.

### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

36. 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.
37. Support is available to assist people with additional needs to access involvement opportunities and this is regularly promoted.
38. 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**

39. 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.
40. Value for money considerations are considered within service improvement groups when making decisions, for example most recently in relation to TPAS membership with customers assessing whether this is an effective use of resources.

### **Environmental implications**

41. 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**

42. The Involvement Service Improvement Group is regularly updated with the progress of involvement across all services and the outcomes which result.
43. Members of the Involvement SIG were presented with an overview of involvement activity for the third quarter and were happy with the information provided.

### **Health Implications**

44. 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**

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

## Appendix 1: Summary of involvement activity

Title of Activity	Number of Events	Number of Customers Involved
Service Improvement Group	12	98
Focus group	5	35
Drop in	9	74
Surveys	4	28
Surgery	2	14
Meeting	8	64
Event	1	100
Workshop	10	511
Training	5	40
Mystery Shopping	5	5
Forum	2	13
Other	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>984</b>

## Summary of involvement activity – Corporate Services

Title of Activity	Number of Events	Number of Customers Involved
Surveys	4	28
Focus group	1	3
Surgery	2	14
Service Improvement Group	6	57
Meeting	8	64
Event	1	100
Workshop	10	511
Training	5	40
Drop in	8	54
Mystery Shopping	5	5
Forum	2	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>889</b>

## Summary of outcomes – Corporate services

- A number of Hoops for Health workshops have been carried out with primary schools across Gateshead in partnership with Newcastle Eagles in order to raise awareness of the impact of stereotyping people and how hate crime can affect people
- A range of Moving Forward customer training courses have been held to increase the skills and knowledge of Gateshead residents including; Summer gardening, Mystery shopping and Confidence building
- Energy Best deal drop in sessions have been carried out across Gateshead to help raise awareness of how customers can save money on their fuel bills, with one person switching their supplier through Energy Angels resulting in some funding for the company
- Mystery shopping exercises have been carried out on the Investment works carried out in customers' homes, to ensure whether contractors are carrying out work to our agreed standard
- BME and Disabled persons' housing forums held to ensure services for these groups are accessible and to address any areas of concern.
- TALISMAN have met regularly to undertake their current review of Void Management.

## Summary of involvement activity – Customers and Communities

<b>Title of Activity</b>	<b>Number of Events</b>	<b>Number of Customers Involved</b>
Service Improvement Group	6	41
Focus group	4	32
Drop in	1	20
Other	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>95</b>

## Summary of outcomes - Customers and Communities

- Residents took part in planting at Moorfoot Gardens to improve the general appearance of the area.
- Estate officer attended a community drop in and acted as point of contact for local residents to raise concerns about their estate in an informal environment, and gave residents the opportunity to meet their neighbours
- Customers involved in developing training on case handling for staff in Neighbourhood relations team as a result of a TALISMAN scrutiny exercise
- Customers involved in re-designing the Annual sheltered housing satisfaction survey
- Older Persons' Service Improvement Group members involved in the initial plans for developing a directory of services for older people with useful contacts and events taking place that isn't available online.

## Appendix 2: Venues of involvement activities

<b>Venue</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Keelman House	20
Primary school	8
Community centre	15
Civic Centre	13
Housing Office	2
B&Q Scotswood	1
Other	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>

### Appendix 3: Neighbourhood area of involvement activities

Area	Amount
East	2
Central	25
South	11
Inner West	23 <sup>1</sup>
West	1
Other	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>

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<sup>1</sup> 20 activities took place at Keelman House

## Appendix 4: Outcomes from SIG Groups

A number of outcomes have been achieved by SIGs during the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014;

- **Involvement** – The group reviewed results from the Stonewall Equality Index and recommended the company continues to maintain membership to the programme and suggested how to improve our score for next year. Members endorsed the company working towards Customer Service Excellence accreditation again for 2014. The group requested regular updates on transport costs following our co-location as recommendations have been made that more people should try and use public transport due to the civic being central to these links. Members approved TPAS membership due to the benefits it can bring to customers and staff accessing discounted and free training, as well as a wealth of online information.
- **Older Persons** – Members agreed to be involved in undertaking surveys with sheltered scheme residents, to help get more honest feedback. Members developed the Directory of services with useful contacts and advice for older people.
- **Home** – The group re-categorised repair priorities from ‘planned’ to ‘routine’ resulting in over 150 jobs being changed hence will now be done quicker. Members were involved in the HomeRepairs Call Centre Service Review resulting in opening times changing and the introduction of Mears 24/7 for out of hours cover. Customers were involved in key Performance Indicator target setting, reviewing 2013/14 and set targets for 2014/15
- **Leasehold** – Process map developed to support all TGHC staff in relation to rights and responsibilities of leaseholders. The number of complaints, enquiries and disputes reduced from 121 in 2012 to 95 in 2013 (Feb 2014). Income policy reviewed and implemented May 2013. Service Charge policy reviewed and implemented Oct 2013. Secured £1 million of funding through affordable warmth to provide qualifying leaseholders with new boilers.
- **Multi-storey** – members discussed and agreed performance targets for the year ahead. Customer inspectors agreed to widen their inspection remit into other blocks. Customers influenced the Caretaker & Concierge Dual Service Survey. Members involved in fire safety improvement works in multi storey blocks.
- **Tenancy and allocation** – Members agreed the service standards for the coming year to remain the same. The group agreed future plans for the group including the effects of welfare reform and what we are doing to support tenants.
- **Value for money** – Members approved the targets set for the repairs service and Investment works programme. The group approved for the annual survey to be sent biennially. Members approved the VFM employee survey results and suggested something goes in the TGHC newspaper large enough to take notice.
- **Anti-social behaviour** – Staff training delivered within the Anti-social behaviour team as a result of TALISMAN findings from their scrutiny review and feedback from SIG members. Developing a Hate Crime guidance document with a focus group of customers, to encourage reporting from victims. Members involved in the fire safety awareness work being implemented in schools following an arson attack in May 2013.

## **Appendix 5: Mystery shopping summary of findings**

### **Strengths**

- Initial letters from TGHC were seen as being clear and easy to understand by customers.
- A tenant with sight issues praised the service for sending out a member of staff to talk through the schedule of works that was going to be taking place rather than send out a letter and the Clerk of Works had identification in large print
- Identification badges were readily available and visible when operatives were working within customer properties.
- Tenants' furnishings were protected from dust and cleaners undertook a good job at the end of each day
- Tenants who required assistance received appropriate help with lifting carpets and moving heavy items
- Clerk of works was flexible in work start time due to customer childcare responsibilities.

### **Areas for improvement**

- Better understanding of staff when to issue third party claim forms to customers
- Ensure staff use their voicemail facility when they are away from office
- Improve customer service of operatives when in customers' homes
- Improve communication between services as to responsibility of re-connection of appliances
- Aftercare service to ensure all remedial work is completed within an appropriate timescale.

### **Recommendations**

- Could a system be implemented for customers to contact the Investment team directly so queries can be forwarded to relevant contractors and monitor thoroughly whether works requests have been actioned and completed
- In exceptional circumstances can decoration vouchers that have been issued but misplaced, be cancelled and replaced
- From a safety perspective, for more vulnerable customers, can carbon monoxide alarms be fitted within their properties
- TGHC to ensure subcontractor staff are fully briefed as to the process of explaining and issuing a third party insurance claim form
- Ensure a clear process that should be followed by contractors when tenants have cooking facilities re-connected.