



Report to Customers and Communities Committee

11 September 2014

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 2014/15.

Background

2. The committee has previously requested a quarterly update of involvement activity across the company.
3. Conducting regular involvement with our tenants and leaseholders supports the company's mission, 'to work in partnership with residents and the community to create homes and neighbourhoods that meet the aspirations of the people of Gateshead.'
4. The Regulatory Framework for social housing in England sets out a number of economic and consumer standards that landlords must meet. The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard places a requirement on landlords to ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in shaping policies and scrutinising our services.
5. 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.

Summary

6. During the period, 1 April to 30 June 2014, 66 involvement activities took place. A range of activities are offered to provide tenants and leaseholders with the opportunity to get involved and influence decision making in a way which suits them.

7. During this quarter, customers were involved in various activities including community events, meetings, Service Improvement Groups, drop in sessions, focus groups, surgeries, forums, workshops and training courses.
8. Customers have been involved in our involvement activities on over 2,862 occasions although some may have been involved in more than one activity.
9. 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.
10. Appendix 2 to this report shows the venues of where activities have taken place during this period.
11. Appendix 3 to this report shows a breakdown of activity by neighbourhood area.

Key outcomes of involvement

12. There have been a number of outcomes from customer involvement during this period which are highlighted below;
 - As part of the Opportunity Knocks programme we have attended many local community events and engaged with hundreds of customers. We used the opportunity to help our work around digital inclusion, and collect information on internet access, which will help with future work around this issue.
 - A working group of customers are meeting regularly to review the criteria and prepare for the Customer Service Excellence accreditation, which will be assessed in November 2014.
 - During Volunteers' month, a joint forum was held between the BME and Disabled persons' housing forums. The meeting focussed on volunteering, with members sharing information about the volunteering that they currently do, in turn helping to raise awareness of the opportunities available to others who may not yet volunteer but may be interested in this.
 - Customers attended the CIH housing conference as a networking opportunity, learning from other housing organisations and speaking to a range of organisations supporting work on digital inclusion.
 - A customer focus group was held to consult around the proposed hate crime guidance which is a new document to help victims of hate crime, including both customers and employees. A number of changes were made to the guide as a result of this.
 - A 'Swap it' event delivered by the Lettings team promoted the mutual exchange scheme and gave people interested in swapping their property the opportunity to speak to other customers in a 'speed dating' style.
 - An Involvement taster day gave customers the chance to drop in and find out more about our involvement opportunities by talking to other involved customers and officers.
 - A number of 'Here and Now' roadshows have taken place across Gateshead to give our older residents an opportunity to talk to us and share

their views about their home and what's happening in and around their neighbourhood.

- Grounds maintenance meeting held with customers to discuss and address issues including fly tipping and dog fouling on estates.

Volunteers' month

13. This year saw the 30th anniversary of Volunteers' Week and the second year of Gateshead Volunteers' Month in June 2014.
14. Organised by Gateshead Council and GVOC, following the success of the 2013 project, a national campaign was launched in 2014 to encourage other local authorities and volunteer centres to get involved in a month of volunteering.
15. Gateshead Council's Vision 2030 was launched in 2007 with Gateshead Volunteers being one of the Big Ideas set out in the strategy. With one third of Gateshead residents currently volunteering, the aim was to increase these figures by the end of Volunteers' Week.
16. The company were involved in the Volunteers' Month working group, and supported the event by holding events during June, including the Involvement taster day and the joint housing forum. We also supported the Trinity Live event, an outdoor event held in Trinity Square to promote the month.
17. As part of our Opportunity Knocks events we promoted volunteering to customers who we spoke to, and raised awareness of the various events taking place in the month.
18. During the month, GVOC managed a digital 'totaliser', which recorded the number of volunteering hours undertaken by volunteers during the month. At the events held, customers were asked to add information to the totaliser. There were 38,244 volunteer hours recorded by the end of the month.
19. To recognise the volunteering that takes place across the region, a 'hand holding' event was also held across the Millennium Bridge, organised by Gateshead and Newcastle Volunteer Centres. This was a very positive event which gave a visual impact of the range of people who volunteer in the area, with many of our involved customers taking part. A photograph of the event is available at appendix 4 to this report.

Newcastle Eagles – Hoops for Health

20. As part of our ongoing commitment to health and wellbeing, and community cohesion, we have continued to work in partnership with Newcastle Eagles across primary schools in Gateshead by delivering the Hoops for Health initiative.
21. We used the sessions to help relay positive messages to young people about important issues including: -

- The dangers of smoking and alcohol
 - The benefits of exercise to your long term health
 - The importance of not stereotyping people by their appearance
 - The importance of healthy eating.
22. The Eagles attended 15 primary schools across Gateshead with members of the Involvement Team. In total 759 children were involved in the sessions.
 23. This year the community session focussed on hate crime and stereotyping. A picture exercise was used as the basis for this session to promote discussion.
 24. The task consisted of children looking at a range of pictures, alongside a list of occupations with the aim of the exercise being to match the pairs. Examples of job roles included; a female footballer, a female police constable, a young inventor, a black Arch Bishop and a disabled athlete.
 25. The outcome of this exercise highlighted that their judgements were based on appearance, leading to the children learning that they shouldn't stereotype people and the associated risks with doing this. This was used to discuss the potentially serious impact of hate crime or targeting people for being different.
 26. The evaluation of Hoops for Health was shared with the Safer Gateshead Partnership in July 2014.
 27. A similar exercise will be rolled out in the 2014/15 season starting January 2015.

Performance against service standards

28. 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.
29. Performance results by the end of the first quarter indicates that we are on course to achieve our targets set for the year. At the end of the first quarter, performance was as follows: -
 - There were 896 involved customers on our database, exceeding the target of 890
 - There were 20 attendees on customer training courses. Our annual target is 180 but only one course took place up to the end of June.
 - Satisfaction with feedback following involvement is not due to be reported until quarter two

- 73.90% of tenants are satisfied that their views are taken into account which exceeds our target of 72.5%, and remains the same from the final quarter of 2013/14.
- We attended 11 events across Gateshead during this quarter. This will increase in the next quarter when a number of community events and festivals take place.

Involvement database

30. There has been an increase of 16 involved customers to the database since December 2013 totalling 896 members.
31. The representation of involved BME customers has increased by two people to 7.14% which is significantly higher than our overall customer profile at 2.75%.
32. Both involved males and females has risen since December 2013 and our 'over 75s' have been the age group to has risen the most to 155 (17.30%).
33. Appendix 5 to this report displays profile information of our involved tenants and leaseholders compared with our overall customer profile.

External recognition

34. Our tenant board member, Robert Buckley, won an award at the Inaugural CIH 'Celebrating the Region' awards ceremony for 'Exceptional contribution by a tenant board member. This award recognised the tireless work carried out by tenants to ensure we deliver excellent housing services. Robert has been actively involved since 2008 and was nominated for this award due to his regular and valued contribution in many of our involvement activities since then.

Mears involvement activity

35. Mears have been involved in a number of community activities during this quarter. See appendix 6 for a breakdown of activity.

Future activity

36. The following activities are planned for the second quarter of 2014/15, although there will also be a range of additional activities likely to take place: -
 - A Local Employment Advisory Forum (LEAF) event will take place in July led by Mears. This will involve a range of local businesses coming together to promote the employment opportunities and careers available within their organisation in terms of the type of roles within their company and what's required to achieve them. The first half of the day will be open to young people from local schools, with the second half of the day open to Gateshead residents.
 - A joint funding meeting will be held between Neighbourhood Management and the housing company. The aim of this will be to share information

around what funding opportunities are available and how to apply for them, and to help agree future joint working initiatives.

- We will work in partnership with Newcastle Eagles on the Hoops for Health project in 2014/15 across primary schools in Gateshead, continuing with sessions around hate crime, healthy eating, the dangers of alcohol and smoking and the benefits of exercise.
- We will collate the responses from the 'Let's get digital, digital' surveys and evaluate the feedback around internet access to help us understand what actions we need to take to improve digital inclusion in Gateshead.
- We will attend more events during the second quarter as part of our commitment to the Opportunity Knocks programme, to help us engage with our tenants and leaseholders in the local communities across the borough, with a theme around digital inclusion.
- An LGBT network will be launched with tenants and leaseholders to discuss issues that particularly affect this community, with the first meeting having a focus around hate crime.
- Recruitment for a Tenant Board Director will take place.
- An 'Annual Report Working Group' will develop the annual report for 2013/14.

Link to values

37. 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

38. 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.

39. 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

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

41. 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

42. 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

43. 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.
44. Support is available to assist people with additional needs to access involvement opportunities and this is regularly promoted.
45. Every effort is made to ensure we do not directly or indirectly discriminate against any individual or group. We ensure provision of equal access to services and the representation of involved tenants is regularly monitored and acted upon where necessary.

Value for money implications

46. 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.
47. Value for money considerations are made within Service Improvement Groups when making decisions. For example, since re-locating to the civic centre we endeavour to hold events in venues with free room hire or if this isn't possible we try to maximise the benefits of the cost, ensuring IT and refreshment facilities are included.

Environmental implications

48. 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

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

Health Implications

51. 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

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

Contact: Helen Watson, Involvement and Diversity Officer Tel: (0191) 433 5376

Appendix 1: Summary of involvement activities across the company

Title of Activity	Number of Events	Number of Customers Involved
Survey	1	7
Event	11	2,302
Service Improvement Group	9	73
Meeting	8	99
Surgery	3	44
Focus Group	4	40
Drop in session	21	249
Forum	1	15
Conference	1	9
Training course	1	8
Committee and Board meetings	6	16
Total	66	2,862

Summary of involvement activity – Corporate Services

Title of Activity	Number of Events	Number of Customers Involved
Survey	1	7
Event	10	2,240
Service Improvement Group	5	38
Meeting	6	86
Surgery	3	44
Focus Group	2	28
Drop in session	1	55
Forum	1	15
Conference	1	9
Training course	1	8
Committee meeting	6	16
Total	37	2,546

Summary of outcomes – Corporate services

- Have attended numerous local community events as part of Opportunity Knocks, where we were able to engage with local customers, promote opportunities available to them and find out about their internet access, which will help us with future digital inclusion work
- Held a joint forum with a theme of volunteering, giving customers the opportunity to meet new people and hear about what volunteering takes place across Gateshead, and encouraging potential volunteering from people who don't currently do this
- Re-launched the Complaints Scrutiny Panel with existing and new members, to plan future activity of the group and began an initial project around response letter quality
- Held BME surgeries to act as a point of contact for housing related queries for people who are less likely to access our services in our offices
- Customers attended a 'wellbeing' focus group to help feed into a piece of research being carried out by an independent body looking at 'what wellbeing means to you'
- Customers attended a basic plumbing course as part of the Moving Forward customer training programme to learn some skills to help tackle minor plumbing issues in their home.

Summary of involvement activity – Customers and Communities

Title of Activity	Number of Events	Number of Customers Involved
Service Improvement Group	4	35
Drop in sessions	20	194
Focus group	2	12
Meeting	2	13
Event	1	62
Total	29	316

Summary of outcomes - Customers and Communities

- Numerous 'Here and Now' roadshows have taken place across the sheltered schemes to give residents the opportunity to talk to their scheme officer and raise any queries they have about their home or estate
- Hate crime focus group held with customers to develop a guidance document for customers and employees to refer to when faced with hate crime related issues
- 'Swap it' event held to promote our mutual exchange programme and give customers the opportunity to talk to one another on the day if they were interested in swapping
- Older Persons' Service Improvement Group held which discussed and addressed the needs of older people in Gateshead living in and around our estates
- Grounds maintenance meeting held with customers which addressed issues including fly tipping and dog fouling on estates
- Service Improvement Group met to discuss and plan future work relating to multi storey blocks including the Designing Out Crime and Neighbourhood Pride funds, investment works in the blocks, customer inspections of service standards and CCTV usage in multi storey blocks.

Appendix 2: Venues of involvement activities

Venue	Amount
Civic Centre	19
International Business Centre	2
Community centres	10
Communal lounge	22
Housing Office	1
Gateshead Stadium	1
Outdoor community venues	7
Outside of Gateshead	3
Other*	1
Total	66

*indicates survey

Appendix 3: Neighbourhood area of involvement activities

Area	Amount
East	4
Central	37
South	14
Inner West	3
West	4
Other*	4
Total	66

*indicates outside of Gateshead

Appendix 4: Volunteers Month Handholding Event



Appendix 5: Profile information of involved customers

Gender:

	Involvement Database June 2014		Involvement Database December 2013		Customer profile June 2014	
Female	562	62.72%	555	63%	11272	58.74%
Male	334	37.28%	325	37%	7918	41.26%
Blank	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	896	100%	880	100%	19190	100%

Ethnicity:

	Involvement Database June 2014		Involvement Database December 2013		Customer profile June 2014	
Asian Or Asian British Bangladeshi	1	0.11%	1	0.11%	15	0.08%
Asian Or Asian British Indian	2	0.22%	2	0.23%	10	0.05%
Asian Or Asian British Other	10	1.12%	11	1.25%	105	0.55%
Asian Or Asian British Pakistan	13	1.45%	13	1.48%	12	0.06%
Black Or Black British African	30	3.35%	28	3.18%	195	1.02%
Black Or Black British Caribbean	-	-	-	-	4	0.02%
Black Or Black British Other	1	0.11%	1	0.11%	26	0.14%
Chinese	1	0.11%	1	0.11%	20	0.10%
Mixed Other	3	0.33%	3	0.34%	25	0.13%
Mixed White & Asian	-	-	-	-	17	0.09%
Mixed White & Black African	2	0.22%	2	0.23%	15	0.08%
Mixed White & Black Caribbean	-	-	-	-	5	0.03%
Other	1	0.11%	-	-	79	0.41%
Total BME	64	7.14%	62	7.05%	528	2.75%
Refused	1	0.11%	1	0.11%	44	0.23%
White British	741	82.70%	728	82.73%	18189	94.78%
White Irish	1	0.11%	-	-	33	0.17%
White Other	11	1.23%	12	1.36%	320	1.67%
(blank)	78	8.72%	77	8.75%	9	0.05%
Grand Total	896	100%	880	100%	19190	100.00%

Disability:

Does the tenant have a disability?	Involvement Database		Involvement Database December 2013		Customer Profile June 2014	
N	612	68.31%	601	68.30%	13434	70.01%
Y	281	31.36%	277	31.48%	5652	28.97%
Refused	1	0.11%	-	-	37	0.17%
(blank)	2	0.22%	2	0.22%	67	0.35%
Total	896	100%	880	100%	19190	100%

Age:

	Involvement Database June 2014		Involvement Database December 2013		Customer Profile June 2014	
No date of birth	113	12.61%	112	12.73%	2	0.01%
Under 25	20	2.23%	20	2.27%	604	3.15%
25-39	117	13.06%	116	13.18%	4008	20.89%
40-49	112	12.50%	111	12.61%	3278	17.08%
50-59	123	13.73%	114	12.95%	3376	17.59%
60-74	256	28.57%	265	30.11%	4575	23.84%
75 and over	155	17.30%	142	16.15%	3347	17.44%
Total	896	100%	880	100%	19190	100.00%

Appendix 6: Mears community activity

The following activity has been undertaken by Mears during this period;

- An opportunity was identified in Warwick Court to improve the communal lounge and help make it a more enjoyable area for residents to use. Mears supported the event by carrying out the decorating, with furniture being supplied by the housing company following our move from Keelman House. This communal lounge is now being used regularly, both by residents of Warwick Court and for other residents meetings.
- Apprentices of Mears supported the improvement works on the Winlaton Centre, which has had a positive impact on the wider community for all the groups that use the centre.
- Bill Quay Farm – Mears apprentices worked with Bill Quay Farm and students to develop a small animal corner to house a range of animals including rabbits, guinea pigs and ferrets. The animal corner was a part of a range of improvements aimed to increase visitors to the farm.
- Two customers of the housing company are actively involved in the Mears Change Club, reviewing the overall service Mears provide and helping to influence future work from our contractor.