



Report to Customers and Communities Committee

6 November 2014

Title: Customer Involvement Activity - update

Report of: Involvement and Diversity Manager

Purpose of Report

1. To provide an update on involvement activity for the second quarter of 2014/15.

Background

2. 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.'
3. The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard in the Homes and Communities Agency's Regulatory Framework 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.
4. 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.

Summary

5. 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. During the period, 1 July to 30 September 2014, 64 involvement activities took place.
6. 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.
7. Customers have been involved in our involvement activities on over 2,830 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;
 - Launched an LGBT customer and staff network group to discuss particular issues faced by this community group
 - Held regular grounds maintenance monitoring meetings across Gateshead with customers being involved in reviewing issues on estates including fly tipping and Neighbourhood Pride schemes
 - A range of Opportunity knocks events have taken place across the borough enabling us to engage with residents in their local communities, and meet new people who may not participate in other ways. In particular this focussed on gathering research for our 'Let's Get Digital' survey.
 - The Newcastle Eagles 'Hoops 4 Health' project for 2014/15 was launched, engaging with primary schools across Gateshead on healthy eating, exercise and stereotyping.
 - A pilot digital drop in took place in support of EE's 'Techy Tea Party' to help develop skills of residents to get online. Following its success, further drop ins will take place to increase the online skills of our customers, and ensure wider access to services.
 - The Annual Review for 2013/14 was produced with a working group of tenants and leaseholders, providing a summary of the company's activity for all customers.
 - We supported a Local Employment Advisory Forum led by Mears, to encourage local people who are out of work to find out about what different organisations look for in a potential employee. This event was attended by local school children and other residents of Gateshead
 - A number of Complaints Scrutiny meetings were held to support the company's overall approach to complaints and compliments and working on specific projects such as letter writing.
 - A satisfaction survey of customers in the Kibblesworth new build properties helped to establish and address any issues they've experienced in their new home.
 - Held a number of Rookie Golf sessions across our sheltered schemes which encourage people to keep active and have wider health benefits in terms of reducing social isolation by meeting new people.

Opportunity knocks

12. This year again saw us attend many events under our Opportunity Knocks branding during the summer months, enabling us to meet people at a local level in their own communities.

13. We attended 10 events reaching over 1,700 customers during this period where we were able to promote our range of involvement opportunities along with our free customer training programme.
14. Each event also had a theme around digital inclusion, where we offered residents the opportunity to complete a survey about their access to online services, and as a result would be entered into a free prize draw to win a tablet. 448 surveys have been completed during this period.
15. Feedback from these surveys will help us plan our future work around digital inclusion, allowing us to see information broken down by profile of tenants and neighbourhood area to help us to establish whether there are any patterns in the data to help us carry out more focussed work.
16. In the short term, this information has already helped us target customers to invite them to digital drop in sessions we are hosting, based on their feedback around wanting to find out about sessions in their local area on how to access the internet.

Service Improvement Groups

17. In the last six months the Service Improvement Groups have met regularly with service managers to enable customers to be involved in monitoring performance, identifying areas for improvement and working to develop new initiatives or policies.
18. Appendix 4 to this report provides a summary of the outcomes from these groups during the period 1 April to 30 September 2014.

External recognition

19. In September, the company was shortlisted for a Northern Housing Consortium Silver Screen award in Regeneration for Kibblesworth. As part of this process, a video is being produced to capture the story of Kibblesworth regeneration, in particular focussing on important part the community played in this process.
20. TALISMAN members have recently been asked to present at the Fourth National Tenants' Panel Conference about their scrutiny review of voids. They will be talking about the process they go through in their reviews, how they reached the recommendations they have reported and their experience of working with the organisation.

Mears involvement activity

21. Mears have been involved in a number of community activities during this quarter. See appendix 5 for a breakdown of activity.
22. In particular, during this quarter, Mears worked with a range of partners including the housing company to hold the Local Employment Advisory Forum (LEAF) at Gateshead College. An evaluation of the event is available at Appendix 6.

Future activity

23. The following activities are planned for the third quarter of 2014/15, although there will also be a range of additional activities likely to take place: -
- An event to support National Older Persons day will be held to launch the Older Persons' strategy where a Rookie Golf tournament will take place between existing sheltered scheme teams, to promote to other scheme residents who may want to take part in this sport
 - Following a successful pilot digital drop in, and the feedback from the 'Let's get digital, digital' surveys, we will continue to offer drop ins across Gateshead, to offer customers the chance to develop their online skills and increase access to information
 - We will support a campaign on Illegal Money Lending in November to help raise awareness of this prevalent issue affecting some of our tenants and leaseholders. This will include a door knocking exercise to help promote important information about this subject.
 - As part of the International Day of Disability, we will attend the Annual Disability North Event in December to promote our services to disabled service users and colleagues of other organisations, and to attend workshops and stay up to date with current legislation and good practice
 - As part of the Princes Trust Team programme, we will be delivering a session to young people in Winlaton around independent living and the importance of prioritising payments to stay out of debt and effectively manage their tenancy.
 - We will continue to deliver the 'Hoops 4 Health' project with Newcastle Eagles across primary schools in Gateshead

Link to values

24. 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

25. 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.
26. 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

27. Failure to engage with customers was identified as a key strategic risk for the company.
28. 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

29. 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

30. 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.
31. Support is available to assist people with additional needs to access involvement opportunities and this is regularly promoted.
32. 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

33. 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.
34. Value for money considerations are made within Service Improvement Groups when making decisions, for example using free or low cost venues or supporting local community venues.
35. We have also improved the process of reimburse customer expenses for bus fares and parking, which has decreased the use of some taxis and thus reduces expenditure.

Environmental implications

36. 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

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

Health Implications

39. 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

40. The views of the committee are sought on whether it is satisfied with the involvement activities undertaken during this quarter.

Appendix 1: Summary of Involvement Activities across the Company

| Title of Activity | Number of Events | Number of Customers Involved |
|------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|
| Survey | 5 | 519 |
| Event | 10 | 1,794 |
| Service Improvement Group | 10 | 81 |
| Meeting | 7 | 58 |
| Surgery | 2 | 11 |
| Focus Group | 12 | 76 |
| Drop in session | 3 | 139 |
| Forum | 4 | 30 |
| Workshop | 1 | 55 |
| Training course | 5 | 38 |
| Committee and Board meetings | 4 | 37 |
| Mystery shopping | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 64 | 2,839 |

Summary of Involvement Activity – Corporate Services

| Title of Activity | Number of Events | Number of Customers Involved |
|---------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|
| Survey | 4 | 465 |
| Event | 8 | 1,770 |
| Service Improvement Group | 6 | 44 |
| Meeting | 6 | 54 |
| Surgery | 2 | 11 |
| Focus Group | 9 | 46 |
| Drop in session | 3 | 139 |
| Forum | 4 | 30 |
| Workshop | 1 | 55 |
| Training course | 5 | 38 |
| Board/Committee meeting | 4 | 37 |
| Mystery shopping | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 53 | 2,690 |

Summary of Outcomes – Corporate Services

- A pilot digital drop in took place in support of EE's 'Techy Tea Party' to help develop skills of residents to get online giving tenants direct support to get online.
- A range of Opportunity knocks events have taken place across the borough enabling us to engage with residents in their local communities, and meet new people who may not participate in other ways
- The Annual Review for 2013/14 was produced with a working group of tenants and leaseholders providing all customers with a summary of the company's activities to be able to hold us to account.
- We supported a Local Employment Advisory Forum led by Mears, to encourage local people who are out of work to find out about what different organisations look for in a potential employee.
- Held a number of Complaints Scrutiny meetings working on projects to improve the way we deal with complaints across the organisation.
- A working group has been working with the organisation to help prepare for the Customer Service Excellence accreditation and identify potential improvements for customer service.

Summary of Involvement Activity – Customers and Communities

| Title of Activity | Number of Events | Number of Customers Involved |
|---------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|
| Service Improvement Group | 4 | 37 |
| Survey | 1 | 54 |
| Focus group | 3 | 30 |
| Meeting | 1 | 4 |
| Event | 2 | 24 |
| Total | 11 | 149 |

Summary of Outcomes - Customers and Communities

- Regular Grounds maintenance meetings have taken place across Gateshead with customers being involved in reviewing issues on estates including fly tipping and Neighbourhood Pride schemes.
- A satisfaction survey of customers who have moved into the new build properties in Kibblesworth, established and addressed issues they've experienced in their new home
- Rookie Golf sessions held across our sheltered schemes have encouraged people to keep active and resulted in wider health benefits in terms of reducing social isolation by meeting new people
- Regular focus groups held at Harlow Green allowed residents to discuss a range of issues regarding the estate and included information about the office relocation.
- A number of Service Improvement Groups held by various services across the company have ensured that customers continue to influence decision making and make improvements to the way we deliver services.

Appendix 2; Venues of Involvement Activities

| Venue | Amount |
|-------------------------------|-----------|
| Civic Centre | 25 |
| International Business Centre | 1 |
| Community centres | 12 |
| Communal lounge | 6 |
| Housing Office | 3 |
| Gateshead Stadium | 1 |
| Outdoor community venues | 2 |
| Outside of Gateshead | 3 |
| Children's centre | 3 |
| Gateshead leisure centre | 1 |
| Primary School | 1 |
| Gateshead Central library | 1 |
| Other* | 5 |
| Total | 64 |

*indicates survey

Appendix 3: Neighbourhood Area of Involvement Activities

| Area | Amount |
|--------------|-----------|
| East | 5 |
| Central | 42 |
| South | 6 |
| Inner West | 2 |
| West | 1 |
| Other* | 8 |
| Total | 64 |

*indicates outside of Gateshead and survey

Appendix 4: Outcomes of Service Improvement Groups

Anti-Social Behaviour

- Members were involved in developing the procedure to tackle untidy gardens, in particular the wording of letters sent to customers
- Group involved in consultation with Community Safety on the promotion of the launch of the Community Trigger pilot, on behalf of all Tyne and Wear authorities
- Involved in performance monitoring and implementing improvements and suggesting amendments to indicator targets for the current year
- Group to be involved in further work around the nature of ASB cases and actions taken that resulted in eviction orders being obtained.

Multi Storey

- Reviewed and agreed the Concierge service standards
- Discussed and agreed the content of High Rise News
- Agreed for a customer working group to meet and review estate tours in multi storey blocks

Tenancy and Allocations

- Reviewed letters sent by Rent and Income team and made suggested improvements to them
- Discussed and approved the leaflet to promote hard-to-let properties
- Shared the Annual Report draft content with members

Older Persons

- Members were involved in a dementia awareness session to help increase the number of 'dementia friends' to provide support to those in need
- Members reviewed and agreed the updated leaflet to be used to promote Sheltered Scheme and Care Call service

Leasehold

- Members reviewed and made improvements to the painting programme leaflet
- The group reviewed and made suggested amendments to the 'Guide to being a Leaseholder' booklet
- The group implemented changes to the issue of statements to one being sent rather than two statements being sent at the same time, to reduce confusion among recipients
- Members made amendments to the Service Charge booklet to make it more appealing to readers
- Improvements have been made to the Painting programme protocol.

Involvement

- The group analysed the data shared with Mears operatives using handheld devices when visiting properties, with customers making suggested amendments to improve this process
- Members involved in developing evidence gathering for the CSE accreditation based on their customer service experiences
- Members were involved in the development of the Stonewall Equality Index Programme submission
- The group reviewed and approved the 2013/14 Newcastle Eagles Hoops for Health evaluation to help shape the programme for 2014/15.

Value for Money

- Members were involved in making proposals around how to maintain VFM as a key focus for the company
- Group members agreed to receive information electronically, to support value for money in terms of cost of post and time taken to send
- The group made suggestions to implement a strapline for any information going out about VFM, which has been agreed by Communications team.

Appendix 5: Mears Community Activity

The following activity has been undertaken by Mears during the second quarter;

- Held a Local Employment Advisory Forum with the support of the housing company, offering young people from local schools, and the wider Gateshead population the chance to speak to local employers and find out about the criteria they look for in potential employees
- Attended Northern Pride in July to engage with LGBT residents and promote hate crime reporting. Being present at this event also made the service more accessible and customers were able to liaise directly with a representative from Mears and get advice if required
- Tenants involved in the Change Club, gaining a greater understanding of the roles and tasks undertaken on a daily basis by Mears operatives by visiting their premises and understanding some of the barriers faced on a daily basis. Customers write a case study based on their experiences.
- Attended the Disabled Persons Housing Forum to discuss the process of sharing customer profiling data with Mears and how we use this to ensure that we respond effectively to people and their specific needs.