



## Policy Outline

### Customer Involvement Policy 2009/10

#### OVERALL PURPOSE

West North West Homes Leeds (WNWhL) is committed to placing customers at the heart of our business, enabling customers to genuinely influence and shape our services and policies and achieve other positive outcomes for their communities.

When effectively implemented customer involvement can be a means to achieve continuous service improvement; increase customer satisfaction; increase understanding and mutual respect; contribute towards successful sustainable communities and promote good citizenship and community cohesion.

#### INTRODUCTION

West North West Homes Leeds will ensure that this Policy sets the principles which apply to the overall framework for customer involvement:

The framework consists of:

- A Customer Involvement Policy;
- A Customer Involvement Strategy;
- A Customer Involvement Compact;
- Customer Involvement Service Standards; and
- Performance Indicators.

For the purpose of this policy, and related documents, a customer is defined as a Leeds City Council tenant residing in a property managed by West North West Homes; a family or household member of the tenant; a Leeds City Council Leaseholder whose property is within West or North West Leeds, other local residents; a member of the Leeds Housing Register.

The term customer involvement is used in this policy to describe: information provision, consultation, participation, empowerment and control.

#### Service Standards

1. We will offer a variety of ways for you to become involved and publish these in our Customer Involvement leaflet, which we will promote to our customers.

2. We will provide support and friendly training to help you to get involved with us or your community.

3. We will use accessible venues, provide interpreters and help with transport and childcare or carer costs.

4. We will publicise quarterly examples of how customer involvement has made a difference on our website and in the customer newsletter 'The Buzz'.

5. We will measure our performance against agreed targets and publish the results quarterly. These will include:

- Percentage of Council properties represented by a Tenant and Resident Association or Area Representative
- Percentage of tenants satisfied with their opportunities to participate
- Percentage of tenants satisfied that their views are being taken into account
- Number of customers attending training

## PERFORMANCE MEASURES

We will monitor the implementation and delivery of services through this policy through measuring performance against a number of indicators. The following Performance Indicators are incorporated into the Customer Involvement service standards:

- % of Council properties represented by Tenants and Residents Association or Area Representatives.
- % tenants satisfied with opportunities to participate in management and decision-making.
- % of tenants very or fairly satisfied that their views are being taken into account
- Number of individual customers who have attended training provided or part funded by WNWHL

In addition we will monitor performance against additional management data and will benchmark with other housing providers using the online Resident Involvement Benchmarking data.

## Customer Service Policy

### 1. Statement of Intent

- To place customers at the heart of our business enabling customers to genuinely influence and shape our services and policies and achieve other positive outcomes for their communities.

- To use customer involvement as a means to listen to, and better understand, the needs and aspirations of our customers; to achieve continuous service improvement; to increase customer satisfaction and to build greater understanding and respect between ourselves and customers.
- To recognise that an effective customer involvement and community participation service can contribute towards successful, sustainable communities and help promote good citizenship and community cohesion.
- To provide and effectively promote a range of involvement activities which are tailored to be inclusive of our diverse population, which provide support to encourage and enable a greater number of customers to participate.
- To empower customers through the provision of skills and capacity training to enable them to provide real challenge and impact on services, etc.
- To work together with local statutory and voluntary sector partners to improve engagement with our under-represented customers, including identifying opportunities for joint service delivery.

## 2. Outline of Service

West North West Homes Leeds will:

- Provide a dedicated budget and staff resources to support key involvement activity; particularly for Tenants and Residents Associations, Area Representatives, Compacts and other involvement mechanisms. The budget includes grants to Associations, travel, hospitality, training, customer expenses and publicity.
- Produce an overarching Customer Involvement Compact, incorporating thematic and area-based compacts. The Compact will include a customer involvement structure showing the types of activity, the commitment required to participate, boundaries to involvement and the potential influence afforded at each level.
- Facilitate and promote a wide range of formal and informal involvement opportunities, which will be tailored to meet the needs and interests of our diverse communities, particularly under-represented groups.
- Seek to ensure that customers have, at an early stage, opportunities to become involved with, and influence, the design, monitoring and delivery of all key areas of the business – primarily through Service Improvement Groups and Customer Sounding Boards.
- Provide, or signpost to, appropriate training, advice and practical support enabling customers to obtain the knowledge, skills and confidence to engage with WNWHL and their communities. Monitor and evaluate the impact of training provided.
- Formally recognise Tenants and Residents Associations and Area Representatives that meet the recognition criteria and provide ongoing funding, advice and support to them. This will include an Annual Support

Grant, access to a Diverse Community Fund, an annual Support Visit and regular mail shots with up to date funding, training and other involvement opportunities.

- Encourage and assist residents in setting up new Associations, or advise on alternate options, such as becoming Area Representatives or joining existing forums and improvement groups.
- Maintain and develop local, and wider, partnerships with statutory and voluntary sector organisations with the aims of; engaging 'under-represented' customers; meeting 'beyond housing' agendas, such as financial inclusion and worklessness, and seeking to obtain value for money.
- Monitor the value for money of customer involvement services by evaluating their cost and impact - and benchmark this against emerging 'good practice' amongst regional and national housing providers.
- Identify and provide the training and support needed by staff and Board Directors to deliver the customer involvement strategy - ensuring that it is an integrated service.
- Monitor customer satisfaction with key service areas, including customer involvement, and collate and publicise evidence as to how customer involvement is making a real difference.
- Work in partnership with our customers and their formal representatives, whilst recognising their right to self-determination and independence.

### 3.0 Specific Needs

West North West Homes Leeds will:

- Promote equality and inclusiveness for our vulnerable and diverse customers as detailed in our Cohesion and Diversity strategy and Vulnerability Strategy.
- In particular we will provide;
  - training and support for involved customers;
  - assistance with child care or carer costs;
  - translation, interpretation or signers as appropriate;
  - use of accessible venues, wherever possible and mobile induction loop;
  - taxi or transport costs;
  - protective clothing as appropriate for tenant inspectors;
  - refreshments at meetings and seek to meet all health, cultural or faith-based dietary requirements;
  - meetings at different times, including evenings and weekends; and
  - tenant 'buddies' for newly involved customers, if requested.

- Monitor the profile of involved customers by age, ethnicity and disability within each of the key involvement activities and measure performance against targets.
- Address under-representation through an under-representation project group focusing on areas such as community engagement, partnership working, innovative involvement methods and targeted publicity.

## 4.0 Consultation

- In developing the Customer Involvement Policy, Strategy and Compact we will consult with customers, staff and other stakeholders; utilising a range of involvement mechanisms.

## 5.0 Implementation

- The Board of Directors, Chief Executive and Heads of Service will provide the strategic direction for the implementation of the Customer Involvement Policy.
- It is the responsibility of all West North West Homes Leeds' managers and staff to ensure that their work is carried out in line with this policy and the procedures relating to it.
- Service Improvement Plans, which are part of the Performance Framework, require each Service Manager to incorporate actions and targets for Customer Involvement within their service area.
- The role of the Customer Involvement and Community Participation teams will be to monitor implementation across the business against the agreed performance measures and audit requirements.
- We will provide training, support and advice to all managers, teams and staff. Procedures and other key information will be accessible to staff.

## 6.0 Monitoring

West North West Homes Leeds will monitor the implementation and delivery of this Policy through the following methods:

- Collect and record data and actions against Customer Involvement Performance Indicators, Service Standards and management data.
- Carry out quarterly surveys to monitor customer satisfaction with 'involvement opportunities' and 'taking account of views'.
- Benchmark our costs and satisfaction performance against other housing providers using the online Resident Involvement Benchmarking (RIB) system.
- Utilise the Customer Involvement Audit Trail to obtain details of activity, costs and outcomes carried out across the business.

Regular progress reports will be provided to the following:

- Services and Investment Committee
- Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) Board for Customer Involvement
- Area Panels (Inner West, Outer West, Inner North West, Outer North West)
- Customer Involvement Network Executive Committee and General Meetings
- Access to Services Service Improvement Group and Sounding Board

## 7.0 Review

- In preparation for delivering this policy during 2009/10 West North West Homes Leeds has reviewed and taken into account new or emerging government legislation and government and council policies.
- As a result, this policy now fully reflects, and is inclusive of, the issues arising from those policies and legislation and considers the impacts arising.

## 8.0 Legislation and Regulation

8.1 New or emerging legislation and new policy for 2009 include:

### **The Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 (July 2008. )**

- Part 1 of the Act creates the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and sets out its objects and powers.
- Part 2 of the Act creates the new social housing regulator, the Office for Tenants and Social Landlords (the Tenant Services Authority), and sets out its objectives and powers. The new regulator will regulate social housing in England and will take on the regulation functions of the Housing Corporation. The Act also abolishes the Housing Corporation.
- The Act also gives effect to a number of measures in the consultation paper *Tenant Empowerment: A Consultation Paper*, published on 11th July 2007, which set out proposals to increase tenant empowerment. The Act gives effect to proposals to:
  - introduce a requirement for a local authority to hold a statutory ballot to ascertain tenants' views before seeking consent from the Secretary of State to transfer its housing stock to a private sector landlord; and
  - give local authority tenants powers to consider the options for the future management of their housing stock and, if they desire, to effect a change of a landlord (subject to certain conditions).
- The Act also gives effect to other measures in relation to housing services, including to change the requirements in the 1985 and 1987 Landlord and

Tenant Acts about the information landlords will be required to supply to service charge payers and how service charges monies are held.

### **Housing (Right to Manage) (England) Regulations 2008**

- replaces the Housing (Right to Manage) Regulations 2004.

- The regulations set out the procedure for tenant management organisations to enter into management agreements with local housing authorities to provide housing management services. The new regulations reduce the two ballots to one and provide for a simpler system of balloting residents in the area
- Local housing authorities, tenant organisations, and people who represent and support tenant management organisations are required take into account the statutory guidance.

### **The Duty to Involve - Section 138 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007**

- The duty to involve, which came into force in April 2009, requires all local authorities to take appropriate steps to involve *representatives of local persons*, in the exercise of any of their functions, where it is appropriate to do so. It specifies three levels of involvement that need to be considered:
  - providing information – about a particular function;
  - consulting; and
  - involving in another way.
- See Statutory Guidance - Creating Strong Safe and Prosperous Communities (July 2008)

### **The Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE 5) Resident Involvement**

- Published in 2004, provides consistent criteria for assessing and measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of a landlord's work to involve residents.

### **The Equality Bill 2009**

- This is scheduled to come into force in April 2010. The legislation will place new duties on public bodies, which are likely to form part of the regulatory and inspection framework, as well as service provision and community engagement.

The new legislation will draw together nine current pieces of legislation and will affect bodies in England, Scotland and Wales. It will cement the rights of many groups of people who rely heavily on social housing such as disabled people, older age groups and black and minority ethnic groups. However, the new legislation will require public bodies to consider and plan more effectively for the diverse needs of their communities on issues such as sexual orientation, religion and belief.

