

Customer Involvement Policy

OVERALL PURPOSE

The purpose of the Customer Involvement Policy is to establish the guiding principles which, if effectively implemented, will contribute towards achieving a key business objective: 'putting customers first'.

The Customer Involvement Policy outlines our minimum statutory and regulatory obligations and those delegated to us through our Management Agreement with Leeds City Council, whilst setting the platform for providing an excellent customer involvement service.

INTRODUCTION

West North West Homes Leeds will ensure that we have in place:

- A Customer Involvement Policy
- A Customer Involvement Strategy
- A Customer Involvement Agreement
- Customer Involvement Service Standards and Performance Indicators

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

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.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The Customer Involvement and Community Participation teams will monitor the implementation and delivery of services through this Policy by:

- Monitoring against agreed Customer Involvement Performance Indicators (incorporating measurable Service Standards)
- The Service Improvement Plan for Customer Involvement and Community Participation
- Submitting progress reports for scrutiny (see 6.0 Monitoring)

Customer Involvement Policy

1.0 Statement of Intent

West North West Homes Leeds:

- 1.1 aims to provide excellent customer involvement services which represent value for money in terms of their costs and impact.
- 1.2 aims to ensure there is equality of access to involvement and we will seek to further broaden the diversity of customers who become involved, to better represent our customer profile.
- 1.3 is committed to utilising the customer involvement service to listen to, and better understand, the needs and aspirations of our customers.
- 1.4 places customers at the heart of our business, enabling customers to influence and shape our services or achieve other positive outcomes for their communities.
- 1.5 will work in partnership with our customers and their formal representatives, whilst recognising their right to self-determination and independence.
- 1.6 will utilise customer involvement as a means to achieve continuous service improvement, to increase customer satisfaction and to build social capital.
- 1.7 recognises that an effective customer involvement service can contribute towards successful, sustainable communities and help promote good citizenship and community cohesion.
- 1.8 seeks to ensure customer involvement is a service which is integrated across the whole business and not limited to a specialist function.
- 1.9 will provide dedicated resources and expertise to support the implementation of an effective customer involvement policy and strategy.
- 1.10 recognises that for customers, key policies, such as Customer Care and Communications and Marketing, Cohesion and Diversity strategies are integral to good Customer Involvement.
- 1.11 will respect confidentiality and abide by Data Protection legislation.

2.0 Outline of Service

West North West Homes Leeds will:

- 2.1 provide a customer involvement structure explaining the different levels of involvement available to customers, the commitment required to participate and the potential influence afforded at each level.
- 2.2 aim to establish, facilitate and promote a wide range of formal and informal involvement opportunities which will potentially enable all of our customers to 'have their say'.

- 2.3 seek to ensure that customers have opportunities to become involved with, and influence, the design, monitoring and delivery of all key areas of the business. In respect of policy or strategy development we will seek to involve customers at an early stage.
- 2.4 provide, or signpost customers to, appropriate training, advice and practical support enabling them to obtain the knowledge, skills and confidence to engage with WNWHL and to otherwise contribute to community development.
- 2.5 formally recognise Tenants and Residents Associations established within our area, and provide access to funding for Associations which meet the agreed recognition and funding criteria.
- 2.6 encourage and support the setting up of new Associations and Area Representatives which seek to represent our tenants and leaseholders.
- 2.7 provide ongoing support for existing Associations and Area Representatives and signpost funding, training and other opportunities.
- 2.8 support existing area and subject-based Compact agreements and promote opportunities for new Compacts. We will review each Compact agreement annually.
- 2.9 advise on the boundaries to involvement and aim to develop terms of reference which make such restrictions transparent, for example that seats for Tenant Board Directors are restricted to tenants or leaseholders.
- 2.10 maintain and develop local and wider partnerships with statutory and voluntary sector organisations with the aims of: meeting 'beyond housing' agendas – such as financial inclusion; accessing customers who would not otherwise engage with us; and looking to obtain value for money.
- 2.11 establish an internal 'audit trail' mechanism which will give an indication of the activities, costs and benefits of providing a customer involvement service across the whole business.
- 2.12 Publicise examples of positive outcomes or changes resulting from customer involvement to further encourage involvement.
- 2.13 publish details of the costs of the service, including grants, and involve customers in evaluating costs against outcomes as a means of ensuring value for money.
- 2.14 provide a minimum of four customer newsletter per year and regular updates through our website. Using a variety of outlets and media, we will publicise the Customer Involvement policy, 'ways to get involved', the support available to customers, key performance information and feedback on the impact of customer involvement. (see Communications and Marketing Strategy)

3.0 Specific Needs

West North West Homes Leeds will:

- 3.1 promote equality and inclusiveness for our vulnerable and diverse customers as detailed in our Diversity & Cohesion strategy and Vulnerability Policy & Strategy
- 3.2 provide involvement activities which are inclusive and provide reasonable support to enable all customers to participate. Examples include providing interpreters and transport to and from events.
- 3.3 introduce measures to broaden the diversity of customers who engage with us and will monitor participation, satisfaction and perceived influence by age, ethnicity and disability.

4.0 Consultation

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

5.0 Implementation

- 5.1 The Board of Directors, Chief Executive and Heads of Service will provide the strategic direction for the implementation of the Customer Involvement Policy.
- 5.2 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 procedures relating to it.
- 5.3 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.
- 5.4 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.
- 5.5 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

- 6.1 West North West Homes Leeds will monitor the implementation and delivery of services through this Policy through the following methods:
 - Monitoring against agreed Customer Involvement Performance Indicators (incorporating measurable Service Standards)
 - Collation of relevant key customer satisfaction data from across the business – including results of the annual STATUS survey
 - Utilising the Service Improvement Plan for Customer Involvement and Community Participation.
 - Collation of summary activity, costs and outcomes undertaken across the business.

6.2 Progress will be reported to the following bodies which all include customer participation.

- Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) Strategic Board for Customer Involvement
- Customer Involvement Service Improvement Group
- The four Area Panels
- Customer Sounding Boards

6.3 In consultation with customers we will publish the results of monitoring and use the findings to identify and respond to areas for improvement.

7.0 Review

7.1 The Customer Involvement Policy, Strategy and Agreement will be reviewed and Equality Impact assessed annually.

7.2 The annual review will take account of:

Performance monitoring information as listed in 6.0 above, plus;

- Recommendations from the Audit Commission Housing Inspection;
- Leeds City Council or WNWHL Internal policy or strategy changes;
- Value for money assessments, including benchmarking costs and outcomes against other housing providers;
- Changing legislation or regulation;
- Learning from within the organisation and from communities themselves;
- Emerging best practice from 3 star ALMO's, Beacon authorities et al; and
- New legislation or government policy guidance.

8.0 Legislation and Regulation

8.1 The Housing Act 1980 gave Local Authority tenants the right to be consulted on housing management and other issues.

8.2 The Housing Act 1985 (Sections 104 and 105) extended these rights and required landlords to inform and consult secure tenants individually on specific matters relating to their home.

8.3 The Housing Act 1988 allowed local authorities to transfer stock to housing associations, subject to a successful tenant ballot for a change of landlord

8.4 In 1994 'Right to Manage' regulations were introduced to allow tenant or resident association

8.5 Guidance was introduced from 2000 requiring local authorities to establish tenant participation compacts. Best Value regulations also insisted on customer focus and consultation in service reviews.

8.6 The Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) Landlord Services: Resident Involvement published in 2004 provides consistent criteria for assessing and measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of a landlord's work to involve residents.

June 2008