Community Involvement: Making a Difference in Shaping the Services we Provide

The changes your involvement made in 2017/18
Making Improvements Together

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“I have learned about (the) workings of Clwyd Alyn, feel that views are listened to. (I am) able to put forward suggestions, become more confident and questioning. Good for self-esteem”

Welcome to our annual ‘impact assessment’ for April 2017 to March 2018, which sets out the changes that have taken place to the services we provide you as a result of involving Residents in the decision making process.

Where possible we have included the cost for the volunteer hours given, which shows how the association is benefitting from the commitment our volunteers make. We did this be assigning a cost of £7.50 for each volunteer hour worked on a particular project or event and then totting up the total for the year as a whole.

Raising Customer Service Standards

“There are many important things in our lives especially where we live, being a volunteer, I can have a say in how Clwyd Alyn plans for the future and how existing policies are modified or brought up to date. It does make you feel part of something. Also, it is a chance to meet new friends.”

Our Resident led Service Improvement Committee makes sure that Residents approve policies that improve your services. During the year in question they amassed £4,181.25 in volunteer hours and looked at a number of important issues including:

- The new Community Regeneration and Resident Engagement Strategies
- A new rent arrears policy
- Fire safety updates for our homes following the Grenfell fire tragedy
- Use of mobility scooters policy
- Repairs priority updates
- The telecare and community alarm project
- A programme for the replacement of electrical heating systems (economy 7 heaters)
- The Service Improvement Committee and Quality Partner Scrutiny Group work plan for the year ahead
- The Quality Partner audit on the Planned Maintenance Service
- Universal Credit role out updates
- Chargeable costs pilot project
- The rent increases planned for 2018/19
- Our volunteer recruitment plan

Now re-branded as the Quality Partner Scrutiny Group, this involves a group of Residents who have been trained to inspect Landlord services. During the year, they completed an audit on the process for dealing with empty homes, looked at the way we organise taxi journeys for volunteers to attend meetings and events and started an audit on our policy for keeping pets.

In total, our Quality Partners contributed £4,252.50 of their own time to their inspection work in 2017/18.
After a lengthy transition period during which members had to choose which group to be on, both the Service Improvement Committee and the Quality Partner Scrutiny Group are now bedding in to their new roles at the heart of our Resident Involvement activities. The Quality Partners have an enhanced role, scrutinising service areas and recommending improvements to the Boards of Management and the Service Improvement Committee. In turn, the Service Improvement Committee provides assurance that service quality, value for money and the expectations of you, our customers, meet the Board’s requirements.

Both groups also agreed their **work plans** for the year ahead now that they were in their newly agreed roles. One of our members who is now solely on the Quality Partner Scrutiny Group noted that “the transition has been very good. I can understand why wearing two hats might lead to a possible conflict of interest if you sit on both. I can now focus on my role as a Quality Partner and concentrate on our work plan for the year ahead”.

We are continuing to work on improving satisfaction with the services we provide you following the **STAR Landlord wide survey** in 2016. We are now supplementing this with shorter independent surveys (known as wave surveys) where we target a smaller number of different Residents each quarter to find out how satisfied you are with the services you receive.

Our **Customer Service Ambassadors** initiative started off again in 2017 with a range of new Resident Volunteers joining Staff to look closely at the services we provide Residents to ensure the best possible customer service is experienced by our wider Resident population.

**Leaseholder Resident Involvement** continues to flourish with the Leaseholder Panel meeting six times in 2017/18. Chaired by a Resident member, Residents and Staff, agreed a range of new policies and procedures including the following:

- Amended the terms of reference for the leaseholder Panel
- Planned and produced a newsletter for all Leaseholders
- Agreed the priorities for the Sales and Marketing team and built these into the annual plan for 2017/18
- Agreed times and dates for two Leaseholder surgeries open to Residents to publicise the work of the team and to seek new volunteers to join the Panel
- Agreed the design for the team’s presence on the new web site currently under development
- Updated the rent arrears procedure, agreeing revised letters and means of communication

Residents joined Staff to look at a revised **Resident Handbook** at focus group sessions held in October and November 2017. The meetings looked at the content and layout of proposed new handbook. Residents proposed updates to the wording and suggested changes and additions to reflect the customer viewpoint as users of the services in the guide.
A mini complaints panel continues to meet involving Resident volunteers and Staff looking at resolved complaints received by the Association. As one of our volunteers explains “we look at a selection of complaints to see if the approach and methodology could have been better and if any improvements could be made. Complaints are a good way of providing proof of how the services are being perceived by Residents and using that information to improve those services”.

We have established a core group of Resident Volunteers have joined interview panels for new Staff. They are able to ensure that the perspective of Residents as the customers of the services we provide are properly considered when appointing new Staff. As one of our volunteers confirms “being on an interview panel has given me great experience on how new Staff are recruited. Taking part in the interviews including agreeing who gets the job, I feel my views are taken seriously when new Staff are chosen”.

A focus group meeting was held in March to look at the Chargeable costs process and to seek Residents views on how this could be operated efficiently and fairly when we need to levy a charge for those Residents, for example when they leave their homes in a poor and damaged condition. The meeting was very keen to see a streamlined process so that invoices are sent out as soon as possible so that there is a better chance of recovering money owed. In all, £4,698.75 in volunteer hours has been contributed by Residents involved in service panel work between April 2017 and March 2018.

Influencing the way we work

“I would like to volunteer for other areas as well as (the) Service Improvement Committee. I have only been volunteering a short time, but I feel I could make a difference”.

The autumn of 2017 saw the commencement of a big Volunteer recruitment drive to fill vacancies within the Service Improvement Committee, Quality Partner Scrutiny Group and generally to boost the numbers of active Resident volunteers. The recruitment drive has continued into 2018 and is now concentrating on areas where volunteer activity is low.

We have held meetings with Service Directors to boost Service Panel use so that new volunteers joining us have an introductory platform for their participation from which they can scale up their involvement if they so wish.

Linked to the recruitment drive outlined above, a new Resident Board Member was recruited to the Clwyd Alyn Board in December 2017. He has described the experience of becoming a Board Member as the “best thing I have ever done” finding that the role is “interesting challenging and very rewarding”.

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Our Results Based Accountability (RBA) Groups, Residents have helped us to assess how services are improving and report this to the Welsh Government, thus providing assurance to them that your views are central to the delivery of services. We have continued to simplify them, making them more streamlined and relevant to the services most important to you. During the year £2514.75 in volunteer hours was contributed by Residents working with RBA groups.

Residents have continued to volunteer to make follow up calls at our Contact Centre to find out what you think about recent repairs you have had done. As a result, we continue to receive lots more feedback on repairs, both good and bad, which we are using to improve the service overall. During the year, Residents amassed a total of £1012.50 in volunteer hours, doing this work.

Residents involved in shaping Clwyd Alyn’s Business Plan for the financial year 2017/18 joined Staff in January for this meeting. They had the opportunity to hear about the threats and opportunities facing the Association in the years ahead and set out their priorities for 2018/19. Chief amongst these was communication, investing in our communities and maintaining our homes and these have now been included within the Business Plan for next year.

Our ambitious new Resident Engagement Strategy was officially approved in November 2017 and will provide the platform upon which all our Resident Involvement activities will be based for the next few years.

Also in November, Residents joined Staff and Members to receive a presentation from an organisation called House Mark on how we perform against a range of other Landlords, known as benchmarking. Residents offered the customer’s point of view about how we can ensure that all the services we provide offer value and were pleased to see that Resident Engagement scored highly, providing good value for money.

Three of our active Resident volunteers joined Staff scoring the tenders received for the new Grounds Maintenance Contract to ensure the views of customers are reflected in the process and as a result, new contractors have been appointed covering the six counties where we work.
Improving Communication

“It’s great that Resident volunteers have communication channels through to senior management. It helps us be more effective in our roles”

Read all about it! Our Resident editorial panel works hard to produce our newsletters. They oversee the content and write articles and agree the overall look of the newsletter. At their suggestion we are increasing the number of newsletters to four a year in 2018/19.

A focus group meeting took place in April 2017 to consider our new Website currently under development and our Social Media presence. Residents had the opportunity to feedback on the new design and format of the website and comment on the ease of navigation around it compared to the existing site from their perspective as potential customers of the website. They were also able to offer their views that our social media presence could be more Resident friendly.

Residents who contributed to the Resident Handbook consultation described above were also keen that the document would be available on line, as a hard copy and in leaflet format for all the individual sections as well so that people could dip in and out of it, thereby encouraging greater usage.

Communication came up as a constant theme during the year, especially through the work of Quality Partners, via the STAR surveys and the repairs telephone surveys carried out by Resident volunteers. This is an issue we are tackling head on, for example through our STAR satisfaction survey action plans and through the mini STAR ‘wave’ surveys.

Our 2016 STAR Landlord wide survey disappointingly confirmed that only 63% of our Residents felt that we listened to their views and acted on them. Working with our active Residents and Staff we have pushed this up to 76% during the course of this year via our mini wave surveys and for 2018/19 we are hoping to extend this to 78% satisfaction.
Improving quality of life

“being part of my Residents Association helps me feel safe and secure where I live. Over time my quality of life has improved as well as my confidence. I am doing things now I never dreamed I would do”.

Residents groups have continued to be active in the year, working on behalf of their communities and with Clwyd Alyn to improve services for Residents.

During the year we carried out a number of ‘You said we did meetings’ at which the Corporate Directors of Resident Services and Asset Management met with Residents to hear about what was good and not so good about where they lived and the services they received.

Following each meeting, the results have been fed back to all the Residents concerned.

The Sheltered Housing Umbrella Group represents sheltered housing Residents across the areas where we work, encouraging them to have a voice in services affecting them. It has also made a real difference, securing grants for a number of activities and additional facilities at our schemes.

Taking place in July, Resfest 2017 around a theme of drugs and alcohol, was the ninth consecutive year the event had been staged for all Residents in Supported Living schemes. Its purpose, to provide one day in the year which is ‘theirs’ and where they are the ‘stars of the show’, an event at which they learn, have fun, interact with others, their achievements and skills are celebrated and from which they take away lasting memories and enthusiasm which have an impact on their confidence and wellbeing.

The event encouraged Residents to socialise, enhance their inter-personal skills by taking part in workshops or being on the Resfest Crew, or by gaining increased confidence and sense of self worth by submitting artwork for display. “we have many young people who say they don’t want to come to Resfest, but we never have any who, having attended, wish they hadn’t come”.
Improving skills and knowledge

“I am more able to convey my opinions in public without feeling embarrassed. I feel my opinions are valued”

Improving the skills and knowledge of our Resident Volunteers is very important especially when it also leads to improvements in self confidence as well.

As Housing Associations and their Boards become more business like against a background of cuts and austerity, it has been recognised that Resident volunteers at the highest level (those on the Service Improvement Committee and the Quality Partner Scrutiny Group) have also taken on more responsibility which is now supported by appropriate training. This has included Safeguarding, Equality and Diversity, Data Barring and Data Protection, which have further enhanced their skills and knowledge.

The Service Improvement Committee also undergoes a group appraisal session each July during which they are able to review the year which has gone by and look ahead to the coming year and what they will need to do to achieve their work plan. This process is to be brought in this year for the Quality Partner Scrutiny Group.

In the autumn members of the Service Improvement Committee and Quality Partner Scrutiny Group met to put together a **training brief to select a trainer** to help them settle in their new roles. TPAS Cymru were chosen to provide this training.

The **training sessions** subsequently took place between January and March 2018 and have been well received by members, providing as one Resident said, a “clear understanding now of the workings of SIC and QPSG”.

Service Improvement Committee members put together a new survey which is being used to track the development of volunteer skills and knowledge which we will use to see how these improve over time as a result of their involvement in improving services. This will be coupled with developing a more structured succession pathway for volunteers to scale up their involvement as skills, knowledge and confidence improve.