Wellingborough Homes

contents

1 INTRODUCTION

Background and Definitions 3

Principles of this strategy 4

Understanding our communities 4

Corporate Strategic Objectives 4

2 REGIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT

Wellingborough Homes Operating Area 5

Local – Wellingborough 5

3 OUR AMBITIONS

Customer Involvment 6

Community Investment 9

Resources for Involvment and Investment 13

4 MEASURING OUR IMPACT

5 WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

6 CONCLUSION

"Wellingborough Homes will work successfully with its customers and communities to provide great services and high quality living environments."

introduction

BACKGROUND

As the major provider of affordable housing in the Borough of Wellingborough, we recognise our responsibility to our existing customers and to the communities in which they live.

This document is a summary of our Customer & Community Investment Strategy for the period 2015 until 2019. It is one of six strategies which align with the overall mission and objectives set down in our Corporate Plan 2015-19.

A copy of the full strategy document is available on request.

DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are provided here to enable understanding of this strategy.

Customer involvement

There are many terms used to describe how landlords work with their customers and users of their services to ensure they are involved in working together to shape our services. We have agreed upon the term 'Customer Involvement' as we want all people living in a property owned and/or managed by WH to feel valued as the primary recipients of services provided by us.

Community investment

"Community investment is designed to help create, support and/or develop more self reliant communities which have a positive impact and equal relationship with local service providers and have a measure of control over their own neighbourhoods."
(Source: HACT 2013).

Tenant, Resident and Customer

'Tenant' refers to anyone who rents a home from Wellingborough Homes.

'Resident' includes leaseholders and shared owners and anyone living within the immediate neighbourhood of WH properties.

'Customer' refers to anyone who receives a service from Wellingborough Homes.

PRINCIPLES OF THIS STRATEGY

- We will adopt the principles of co-regulation, working in partnership to ensure that our customers are supported and enabled to both shape and scrutinise service delivery and performance
- We will develop a framework for the involvement of our customers which will be based on the principles of empowering customers to get involved and influence at any level; we will create a range of opportunities that are appropriate and relevant to achieve this
- We will only invest in new community social investment activity where we can be satisfied that the majority of beneficiaries are WH's customers
- We will be clear about the expected outcomes of all community investment activity and ensure it aligns with our mission.

UNDERSTANDING OUR COMMUNITIES

We have gained significant knowledge of local housing and support needs and we know that some of the neighbourhoods in which we operate face a number of social and economic challenges.

In 2013, we commissioned research into the needs of the three priority wards within Wellingborough: Croyland, Queensway and Hemmingwell. Through the work of the Community Organisers Programme we now have detailed knowledge of the potential needs of these communities.

Building on this knowledge we will improve our understanding of the needs of our customers and our communities.

CORPORATE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

This strategy will support our overall mission:

"Wellingborough Homes will work successfully with its customers and communities to provide great services and high quality living environments."

This strategy is designed to achieve the following Corporate Strategic Objectives:

- Produce and use effective, high quality, accurate and timely data
- Ensure investments generate optimum social and financial value
- Reduce costs and drive efficiency
- Ensure operational performance is maintained at a high level.

regional and *local context*

REGIONAL – WELLINGBOROUGH HOMES OPERATING AREA

We currently operate almost exclusively in the Borough of Wellingborough, although we recently expanded into Northamptonshire Borough Council through the acquisition of a new development of housing in Hardingstone.

Wellingborough is one of seven District and Borough Councils which comprise the county of Northamptonshire.

LOCAL - THE BOROUGH OF WELLINGBOROUGH

The Borough of Wellingborough covers an area of 163 sq. km, situated in the eastern half of Northamptonshire, and lies about 65 miles from both London and Birmingham.

Wellingborough town forms the urban centre of the borough and is surrounded by 19 villages which range in size from Earls Barton (population 5,387) and Irchester (population 4,745) to Hardwick (population 70) and Strixton (population under 50). Much of the borough remains essentially rural and is primarily comprised of gently undulating farmland.

The economy has undergone a transformation from one based on manufacturing, particularly of footwear and engineering products, to one with a more diverse profile and a growing service sector. However, prosperity from this transformation has not reached all parts of Wellingborough's population and there are pockets of significant deprivation.

Our *ambitions*

OUR CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT OBJECTIVES

The objectives of our approach to customer involvement are:

- Ensuring our involvement framework delivers effective Co-Regulation
- Creating a menu of opportunities to maximise involvement and engagement
- Recruiting, supporting and sustaining our customers to get involved
- Aiming to ensure involvement is diverse and representative of our customer base
- Enabling involvement in service improvements
- Ensuring improved customer satisfaction.

Our aim is to adopt a 'bottom up' approach engaging with customers at a local or informal level which in turn will provide strong foundations for more formal involvement, including scrutiny and co-regulation.

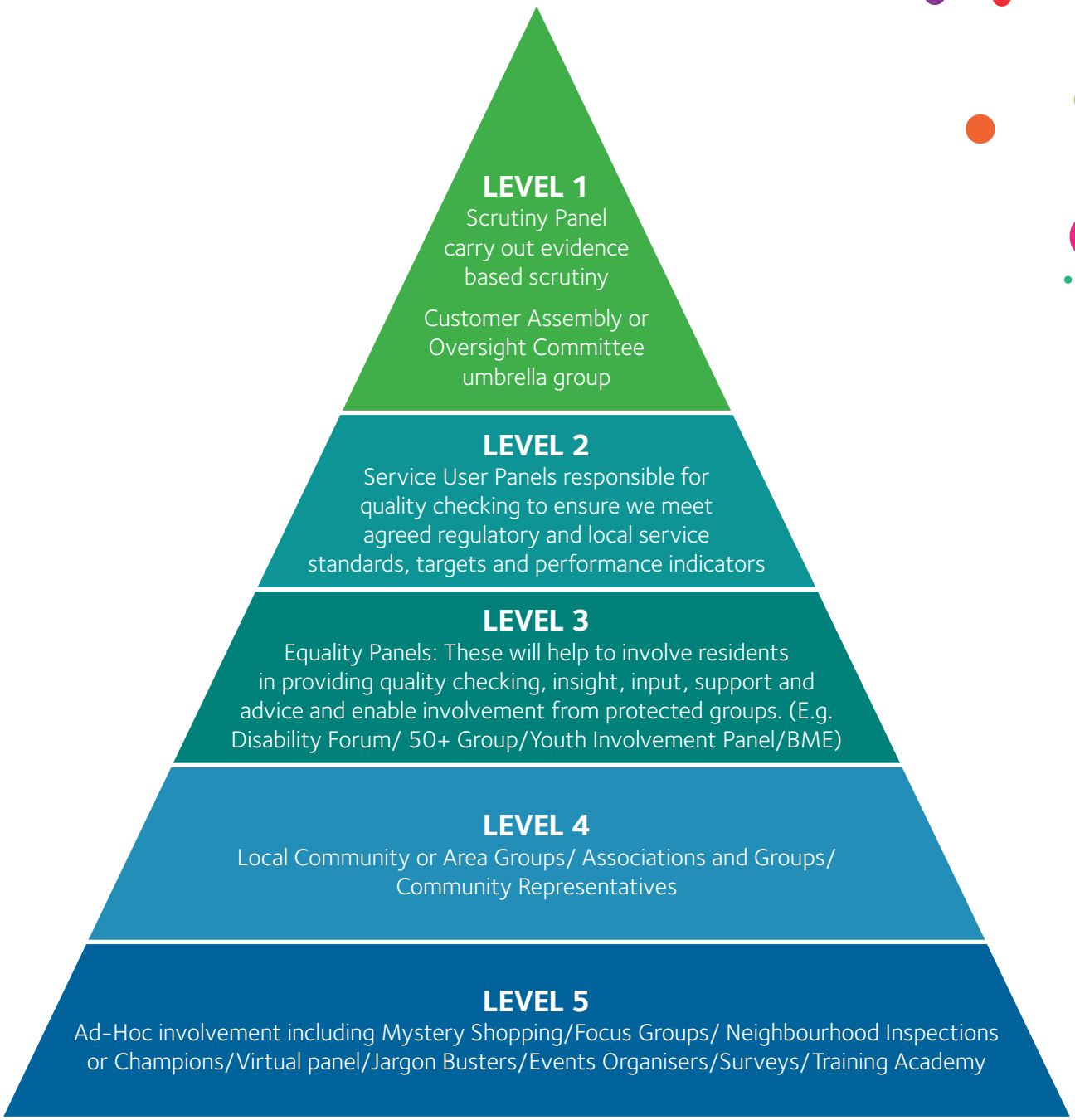
Our framework will ensure positive outcomes for customers and enable us to exceed the required regulatory standards.

Our approach will be to enable and support customers to get involved through effective training, developing skills to sustain effective involvement. Training and capacity building will be available to all involved and, where necessary, individual and group development plans will be introduced.

The aim is to develop this framework during year one of the strategy working in partnership with our involved customers.

The diagram overleaf illustrates our proposed framework that enables tenants, residents and customers to become involved at any of the levels.

CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT FRAMEWORK



CURRENT ACTIVITY IN RELATION TO CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT

A number of projects are currently being developed to support the development of this framework and will be the primary focus for year one of this strategy.

- A recruitment campaign and door knocking to gauge levels of interest
- Pilot notice boards in blocks on estates with residents developing into a network of "Neighbourhood Champions" providing monitoring/ feedback on Estates Services
- Develop resident associations on Kiln Way and Minerva Way in partnership with a local councillor
- Organise a welcome event with local residents from Sylvanus House for Sylvanus and Diana House and also linking this in with wider public relations opportunities
- Develop the mystery shopping pilot
- Work to formalise residents' involvement in the Editorial Panel and creating a virtual group to widen the input from residents
- Work to explore a new "best fit" to ensure the Repairs Monitoring Panel is fit for purpose, delivering against strategic objectives
- Investigate the possibility of a community garden project on the Hemmingwell with a view to recruiting estate champions and link into existing environment/gardening groups
- Review our service standards to ensure they align with the Consumer Standards. This review will ensure they are up to date and relevant and can be measured and reported to relevant Service User panels.

TRAINING ACADEMY

We currently run a 'Training Academy' that provides a wide range of training courses for customers. This includes:

- IT Skills
- Making the most of your money
- Food hygiene
- Customer Service
- Job searching skills
- British Sign Language
- English for Speakers of Other Languages
- Confidence workshops.

We will within the first 12 months of this strategy, review the Training Academy to ensure it supports our customer involvement objectives and delivery of the community investment themes. We will also measure the impact of the training academy.

OUR COMMUNITY INVESTMENT OBJECTIVES

Our priority objectives that support our customers and help sustain our communities are:

- Investing in enabling customers to access financial inclusion services that seek to improve financial security
- Investing in employment, skills and training to enable customers to access employment opportunities
- Investing in Digital Inclusion to enable customers to become confident in the use of IT and can support themselves to create employment and other opportunities.

Our intention is to drive forward a range of practical initiatives responding to the needs and aspirations of our residents and communities in which they live, based on our knowledge of those communities. We aim to make a real difference to the quality of life and cohesion of our communities.

In addition through our customer involvment activity we will seek to build strong and resilient communities, enabling customers to improve their neighbourhoods and contribute to high quality living environments.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION

Financial inclusion is about 'ensuring that individuals have access to appropriate financial services, enabling them to:

- Manage their money on a day to day basis effectively, securely and confidently
- Plan for the future and cope with financial pressure by managing their finances to protect against short term variations in income and expenditure, and to take advantage of longer term opportunities
- Deal effectively with financial distress should unexpected events lead to serious financial difficulty.'

(Source: HM Treasury)

With Welfare Reform changes coming into force we need to invest in and strengthen our approach to financial inclusion.

Within the period of this strategy we will:

- Review our investment in FISH (Free Impartial Support and Advice) to ensure our tenants are getting the maximum benefit and the right access to appropriate welfare benefit, debt and legal advice
- Restructure our Neighbourhood Services team to improve in-house financial inclusion services helping residents to maximise income through welfare benefit and debt advice
- Help residents to access appropriate banking and financial product advice through our work with the local Credit Union. We will support improved access to financial products and bank accounts for customers, including training for staff
- Provide budgeting training for residents through our Training Academy.
- Develop fuel poverty and affordable warmth initiatives.

EMPLOYMENT, SKILLS AND TRAINING

Supporting our residents into work will have a range of benefits. These benefits include an increased ability to pay their rent and meet living costs. This will minimize the impact of Welfare Reform and, by increasing confidence and financial skills, bring benefits for the individual, families and local communities.

Our aim will be to support our residents to gain employment or provide them with tools to improve their employment opportunities.

Within the period of this strategy we will:

- Review our Training Academy to target resources towards our tenants and residents, supporting skills development and training opportunities
- Support work placements and work experience and consider developing an apprenticeship programme
- Work with local agencies and employers to improve employment opportunities for our tenants and residents
- Consider providing employment and training grants
- Work with schools to help improve educational attainment.

DIGITAL INCLUSION

The use of the internet is now an expectation of many service providers.The introduction of Universal Credit confirms this approach. Those who do not use the internet are at risk of marginalisation as services become increasingly 'digital by default'. This can lead to increased inequalities.

It is thought that 4.1 million of the 8.7 million adults who have never been online live in social housing. Digital Inclusion is important because:

- **Education and Life Chances** - Home access to a computer and the internet can improve children's educational performance. If the 1.6 million children who live in families which do not use the internet got online at home, it could boost their total lifetime earnings by over £10 billion.
- **Employment and Skills** - It is estimated that between 75% and 90% of jobs require at least some computer use. Being online also gives people more opportunities to search and apply for jobs.
- **Saving Money** - Offline households are missing out on estimated savings of £560 per year from shopping and paying bills online.
- **Welfare Reforms** - The benefits system is changing. The Government wants 80% of applications for Universal Credit to be online by 2017.

The Government has identified four main kinds of challenges that people face going online:

1. **access** - the ability to actually go online and connect to the internet
2. **skills** - to be able to use the internet
3. **motivation** - knowing the reasons why using the internet is a good thing
4. **trust** - a fear of crime, or not knowing where to start to go online.

Within the period of this strategy we will:

- Support residents to access and utilise the internet and develop a framework for digital inclusion
- Provide training for residents on IT skills as part of our Training Academy
- Develop our framework relating to digital inclusion.

BUILDING STRONG AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

Building strong, resilient communities is important to providing safe, secure places with a good quality living environment. Our approach to customer involvement will support this.

Building capacity enables those communities to continue to thrive and develop. Our local communities and the existing relationships within them are critical to building capacity and community resilience.

We will seek to develop local residents/ community groups to support this area of activity.

We have mapped the local groups, projects and partners across all our communities to ensure our strategy supports successful initiatives and projects that are already in place.

We will seek to work and support existing community initiatives where we can demonstrate a direct benefit to our customers. This will vary from one area to the next and will depend on the priorities within that community.

Within the period of this strategy we will:

- Develop at least four locally based community groups/residents associations across our four housing management areas and work with them to build confidence, skills and knowledge
- Provide funding directly to those communities or access external funding
- Develop our neighbourhood plans for each housing management area (and link to themes), including rural plans to inform future projects.

RESOURCES FOR INVOLVEMENT AND INVESTMENT

We will provide the following resources to support the delivery of this strategy:

THE COMMUNITY INVESTMENT TEAM

This team has overall responsibility for supporting our approach to customer involvement and empowerment. It will work with customers to ensure they have the right skills to enable them to contribute effectively.

We will develop the skills within the team to enable members to train and support our involved customers to operate effectively, scrutinise services and have an overall view and understanding of performance management.

The team will also work with the wider staff base to support both involvement and wider community investment activities.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

We have a community investment budget for 2015/16 to support involvement and community investment activities including staffing, publications, mystery shopping, allocating start-up grants and annual allowances to resident associations.

We will continue to review our financial investment annually in line with the impact model.

measuring *our impact*

INVOLVEMENT TARGETS

We will establish targets for involvement and improve how we measure involvement in terms of each specific category of tenants, residents and customers. Research has found that on average 1% of people are regularly involved and 5% are occasionally involved with their landlord.

Regularly involved = most active residents. (E.g. Strategic level involvement - Boards/ Scrutiny Panel etc.) Level 1 and 2.

Engaged = those who are regular attenders but not often actively involved. Level 4.

Occasionally involved = responds to surveys, occasional event/ focus group or attends open meetings (non-committal involvement but more than just expressed an interest, must have actually been involved in some way). Level 5.

The table below is a guide towards overall involvement targets.

No. of Dwellings	1% Level 1,2 & 3	3% Level 4	5% Level 5	No. of Occupants	1% Level 1,2 & 3	3% Level 4	5% Level 5
4,523	47	141	235	9,750	100	300	500

We will aim to achieve minimum levels within the next 12 months of 1%, 3% and 5% targets for involvement in relation to number of properties. We will then not only aim to maintain this but seek to go beyond to assist future succession planning and sustain productive involvement.

In addition to the above involvement targets we will gather two customer satisfaction statistics which feature in "STAR" surveys, to measure progress in this area:

- % of customers satisfied that their views are being taken into account
- % of customers satisfied they are being kept informed.

IMPACT MODEL

The strategy will provide a framework to target investment where we can achieve strong financial return and measurable benefits to communities.

How and where we will invest is key to maximising the impact we can have on our communities.

At the beginning of any activity we need to understand the cost and anticipated value (financial, social, economic and environmental). As part of this we need to be clear about what we are seeking to achieve and then understand and evaluate our anticipated outcomes or impacts.

We will pilot the Housing Association Charitable Trust (HACT) model that provides a framework to measure the social impact of community investment.

The model is a wellbeing valuation approach. This measures the success of social intervention by how much it increases people's wellbeing. It provides robust impact values to enable us to carry out detailed social-return-on-investment-based analysis of specific projects.

We will pilot the HACT Wellbeing Valuation model during the first year of this strategy and evaluate its effectiveness in supporting us to achieve our corporate objectives to

- Establish an investment measure for social and financial return
- Ensure investments generate optimum social and financial value.

These corporate objectives will be measured through the following KPIs:

- Methodology for social and financial return to be in place by April 2016
- 100% of new initiatives measured against methodology
- 100% of existing work streams to be measured against methodology
- 100% of new investments that achieve an acceptable level of social return (as defined by new methodology).

VALUE FOR MONEY

We will improve how we involve our customers to shape our services. We will aim to deliver year on year savings to ensure value for money.

By adopting the HACT model we will have greater intelligence about what,where and how we should invest in our local communities.

The model will ensure we can fully measure the impact of what we do and the benefits this brings to our communities.

working in *partnership*

Working in partnership will be fundamental to ensuring this strategy is successful.

We already work with a number of different partners but our challenge is to determine who we should be working with to deliver our corporate strategic objectives. A summary of our key partners is detailed below. By adopting a partnership approach, taking the lead where appropriate and supporting other organisations where not, we will maximise resources and reduce duplication.

This section outlines how our community investment work can achieve strong financial return and measurable benefits for our customers and the wider community.

Within the period of this strategy we will:

- Review our current partnerships to ensure we are adding value
- Review our approach to community grants, including how grants are allocated and to whom, and ensure we can measure the social impact of those grant allocations
- Adopt the approach as part of this review to determine where we will "Lead, Influence, Follow and Exit"
- Seek to work with organisations where their strategic objectives and investment outcomes align with this strategy.

"Wellingborough Homes will work successfully with its customers and communities to provide great services and high quality living environments."

conclusion

Through the delivery of this strategy and the objectives relating to customer involvement and community investment we will:

- Substantially improve how we involve our customers to exceed the requirements of the HCA Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard
- Ensure our investments are aligned with the needs of the community
- Measure the impact of the investment we make.

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