

**FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
HOUSING SERVICES**

**CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY AND ACTION
PLAN 2018 - 2021**

FOREWORD:

I am pleased to introduce Flintshire County Councils revised Customer Involvement Strategy for 2018-2021 which describes how the Housing Service here in Flintshire, working alongside our customers, continues to improve the quality of the services we are responsible for and supports our customers to maintain their obligations to ensure we provide the best possible service.

We intend to use our customer involvement activities and the feedback that our customers provide to help us improve our range of services. In essence this means our customers and stakeholders can and should make a significant contribution and difference in their communities.

This Strategy and the detailed action plan describes how we will create the range of opportunities for our customers in Flintshire to get involved locally and share their views with us. Critical to the success of involving customers will be how and where we communicate with them.

Having access to our housing officers, either in local surgeries or locally based offices, will provide the opportunity for day to day contact, working alongside and supporting local elected members.

As well as the more conventional methods of communicating with our customers, we also need to consider and implement other communication methods and channels. There is rapid change in how people communicate, particularly in digital and social media technologies, and we need to reflect this in the way we communicate with customers.

In addition to local dialogue and improving our on-line and social media communication we will of course retain our commitment to our annual conference which will continue to bring together customers representatives to share their experiences of our service and discuss what further improvements can be introduced to improve service quality.

Our customers are experts at knowing what excellent service looks like for them and, I hope, this Strategy and the actions we undertake, helps our customers to find a way to get involved that suits them best and improves the services we provide.

Bernie Attridge
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing

BACKGROUND:

Flintshire County Council's Housing Service is responsible for approximately 7200 homes across the county comprising of general needs and sheltered accommodation. To support the management of those homes and it is important to us that our customers are given the opportunity to share their experience of those services.

We do have a history of delivering customer involvement activities, however, we are delivering our housing and customer services within a continually changing and challenging financial environment, therefore it is important how we share our thoughts and proposals, linked to our aspirations to continually provide value for money and retain our commitment to maintaining effective and efficient customer services.

A key issue for the housing service is to understand how customers may want to participate in service improvement, and how they want to receive and provide information on their needs and experiences of the services we are currently providing, and what potential changes they would like to see introduced to improve the quality of our homes and services. It is important that we receive the views of our customers as to how they wish to engage, however, we recognise the changing nature of communication, particularly through digital and social media, therefore we will explore all available avenues to maintain a dialogue with customers

We remain committed to giving our customers the opportunity to influence how our services are delivered, how we develop improvement plans and continue to ensure that within a value for money framework we continue to provide quality services that meet our customer's needs.

In developing this strategy and action plan we have taken into account all of the involvement approaches we have previously undertaken and retained those that have been well used and attended by our tenants, and in reviewing those approaches we have highlighted areas where we think improvements can be made, and as a result of that review we will be developing new options based on suggestions from customers and elected members.

As indicated earlier we will focus on how we need to engage and develop alternative channels of communication to gather views and inform customers of events, policy changes and any changes to housing or customer service activity.

SCOPE OF THIS STRATEGY:

The aim of this strategy and action plan (2018-2021) is to support the involvement of our customers in the development of effective, efficient and quality housing services. Within the strategy and the action plan we will be describing why we have developed our involvement strategy (including the legal, regulatory and good practice principles); what we are aiming to achieve over the three year period, and, what we will focus our attention on and the specific actions we will engage in to inform and improve our delivery arrangements and service offer.

Central to the success of this strategy will be the willingness of customers to work alongside service providers and together recognise our obligations to each other in improving not only the quality of homes but the communities and environments that those homes sit within.

The strategy will also identify the resources we will be using to ensure we match our intentions with a range of activities and, more importantly, how we propose to monitor our activity and the impact it is having on our stated aims and how we report back to all our customers and stakeholders here in Flintshire.

LEGAL CONTEXT:

While there is no specific legal requirement on Flintshire County Council's Housing Services to involve our customers in the development and delivery of services we recognise however that encouraging our customers involvement and participation can and does play an important part in helping to shape the services we provide and assisting in the monitoring of our performance against our aims as well as our day to day service delivery.

In addition to customer involvement there is primary involvement in the form of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2012 (Section 62) which obliges local authorities to take account of the views of the public in the work of Flintshire's Overview and Scrutiny committees, therefore it is important that our customers have the opportunity to feed into the councils wider scrutiny function.

In developing our approach we will take account of the 2011 published document "The National Principles for public engagement for Wales" which contains overarching guidelines for all public services when developing any type of public engagement.

OUR AIMS:

We are committed to involving our customers in a meaningful and effective way. The aims of our Customer Involvement Strategy are to:

- a) Ensure that customers are provided with a range of involvement opportunities.
- b) Provide customers with training and development opportunities to support their involvement.
- c) Ensure that customer involvement is considered a mainstream feature in all our service delivery activities.
- d) Encourage mutual trust, respect and partnership between customers and Flintshire County Council's Housing Service to ensure we have effective customer feedback.
- e) Work in partnership with other agencies and organisations to improve the communities of our customers

To achieve these aims we are focusing on engaging and supporting (through training and information) our tenants by;

1. Providing more opportunities for tenants to engage particularly through the development of local arrangements.

2. Helping tenants to resolve issues that affect them and help us ensure that tenants retain satisfaction with the quality of our services.
3. Improving and extending the range of communication options to ensure our tenants are informed, engaged and have the opportunity to challenge.
4. Developing training programmes which encourage participation and encourages their involvement in the development of resilient communities.

NB: See action plan for specific details linked to these aims.

In terms of customer involvement this strategy and action plan seeks to ensure that customers:

1. Can participate in their landlord's decisions and discuss tenancy obligations.
2. Are satisfied that their views and priorities are reflected in their landlord's services.
3. Are given opportunities to be involved in developing, monitoring, assessing and reporting on the quality of the housing services the landlord provides.
4. Have a range of ways to get involved – including ways suitable for those hard to reach or seldom heard.
5. Are able to get involved – if and when they want to – at a level they feel comfortable.
6. Get support to build their capacity for more effective involvement.
7. Can take part in reviewing opportunities for involvement to ensure they are working well.

WHAT WE WILL DO OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS:

Having reviewed our involvement activity over the last three years, and taken into account the views of our customers, we have identified a number of areas that we need to develop further in order to improve; these developments include,

- a) **Ensuring customer service is at the heart of our delivery.** Through our own staff training, through the appraisals process we conduct with staff, and through the development of local actions plans.
- b) **Performance information.** Ensuring that we have the ability to provide our customers with information on how are services are performing.
- c) **Influencing business and policy development.** Ensuring there is adequate time and resource available to inform our customers of proposals and capture their views.

- d) **Building new homes and improving our current stock.** Ensuring that we consult our customers on available choices in respect of building design and improvements to their existing homes.
- e) **Customer Satisfaction.** Improving the way we capture and measure how satisfied our customers are with the services we are offering them, including independently gathered and assessed satisfaction information and communicating outcomes to our customers.
- f) **Communication.** Develop wider effective and more methods of communicating with our customers including the use of social media platforms and channels.

RESOURCES:

We are committed to providing both support and staff time so that customers can be involved and contribute to shaping services and sustaining the neighbourhoods and communities they live in. Housing Management will form the centre of the involvement strategy with the emphasis on local patch based delivery which will provide the focus for more localised engagement and service delivery.

Through working from local hub offices throughout the county, Housing Officers are integral to delivering excellent customer service that takes into account the need to tailor initiatives to the specific needs of each locality.

Regular housing surgeries and estate walkabouts provide a forum for customers to be involved and identify how their communities can be supported to tackle local issues and meet need. The development of Local Action Plans will support a joined-up approach to the delivery of neighbourhood services, encourage innovative partnership projects and act as a lobbying tool for further resources.

We will offer a range of involvement methods that provides our tenants with a variety of ways in which to be involved and we will use social media options such as Facebook and Twitter to determine how effective they may be in involving customers and providing information to them.

To ensure that customer involvement is embedded across the organisation all Housing Officers will be made aware of how it shapes services and what their role and their team's role is within the process.

MONITORING OUR INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY

Our Customer Involvement Strategy is for a three year period, however we will be reviewing our action plan on a quarterly basis to ask if we have achieved what we said we would do and what impact those actions are having.

Flintshire County Council's Housing service will formally review progress with the Customer Involvement Strategy Action Plan annually and, where required, will update and communicate changes to all our customers.

A review of progress will be published in our quarterly housing news and published on our website.

We will produce an annual impact assessment report which sets out how customers and clients have changed, shaped and influenced the way we work across Flintshire.

CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT ACTION PLAN

Aim 1	Ensure that customers are provided with a range of involvement opportunities
Objective	To provide a variety of opportunities for customer involvement in developing and monitoring service standards to ensure they are delivered in an efficient and effective manner
Outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure that our customers are able to influence the way in which we make decisions relating to our housing and customer services. 2. Provide mechanisms for customers to influence both local issues and shape strategic decisions relating to new services or significant changes to existing ones. 3. Enable customers to choose the level and type of involvement that suits them best. 4. Increase the knowledge and satisfaction of customers who are involved.
Key Activity, timescale and lead	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Housing officers to deliver neighbourhood services from the area(s) they serve leading to the development of localised development plans. March 2018. Dawn Kent/Mike Angell/Jan Martin. 2. Regular housing surgeries and estate walkabouts involving Housing Officers, relevant Housing departments and customers. March 2018. Dawn Kent. 3. Development of wider communication methods with our customers in line with FCC corporate Digital Strategy which embrace the opportunities that technologies offer for effective service delivery in an agile, mobile and responsive way including the use of digital and social media platforms. Delivery programme March 2018, full utilisation March 2019 Debbie Davies. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Providing and promoting accessible and inclusive transactional services and information online, ie. reporting a housing repair on-line, housing enquiries b. Using technology to offer customers increased flexibility in when and how they access our services c. Provide information and signpost via Facebook and Twitter d. Identify further opportunities for use of social media to support service delivery 4. Housing staff to support & attend local community events with information stands and collect views given by customers as appropriate. March 3018. Debbie Davies/Dawn Kent. 5. Organise a county wide Tenant's Conference to deliver service insight, develop new services and promote benefits of customer involvement. January 2018. Debbie Davies. 6. Organise annual programme of customer 'Reality Checkers' group to undertake service reviews to identify service improvements. March 2018. Debbie Davies. 7. Develop WHQS / SHARP delivery and standards group to support the local implementation of planned / new build programmes and any wider environmental implications e.g. communal facilities. March 2018. Debbie Davies. 8. Develop a consistent approach to measuring customer satisfaction by agreeing key questions for surveys with customers. March 2018. Debbie Davies. 9. Ensure all service managers include customer feedback when reviewing strategy and policies. March 2018. Debbie Davies.

Aim 2	To provide customers with training and development opportunities to support their involvement
Objective	To develop and promote training opportunities for customer involvement at a level that will suit the individual/group
Outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased opportunities for all residents to access formal and informal training 2. Increase in knowledge and confidence of staff and customers to encourage and facilitate involvement 3. Support our customers to develop the skills and knowledge they need to participate at a level that suits them.
Key Activity and timescales	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop annual training plan to enable customer involvement. April 2018. Debbie Davies. 2. Enable engaged customers to gain a greater understanding of what is happening locally and nationally by supporting them to set up or attend network events, exchange visits and attend national conferences. Debbie Davies.

Aim 3	To ensure that customer is considered a mainstream feature in all our service delivery activities
Objective	To develop a culture of Mainstreamed Customer involvement across the whole service, where staff involve customers in developing and monitoring services as part of their day to day work
Outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase the knowledge and experience in involvement opportunities and activities for Elected Members, staff and customers. 2. Increase awareness of directorate priorities and involvement initiatives to all staff
Key Activity and timescales	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promote the service volunteer involvement 'promise' and standards. March 2018. Debbie Davies. 2. Include Customer involvement as standard agenda item for all team meetings, staff appraisals and the staff induction process. On-going from January 2018. Debbie Davies. 3. Customers to be involved in the recruitment process of contractors responsible for the delivery of WHQS. March 2018. Sean O'Donnell/Debbie Davies.

Aim 4	Encourage mutual trust, respect and partnership between customers and Flintshire County Councils Housing Service to ensure we have effective customer feedback
Objective	To monitor, evaluate and provide appropriate feedback of our Customer Involvement and Community Development activities
Outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To increase customer satisfaction and provide evidence that we are taking account of our customers views and comments 2. To increase awareness to those tenants who do not get involved of the difference it can make
Key Activity and timescales	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Publish service developments in Housing news and through all digital channels. March 2019. (See Aim 1 (3)) above Debbie Davies. 2. Develop 'You said - we did' as standard item delivered through all communication channels (Based on local delivery plans). March 2019. Debbie Davies.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Maximise the use of wider communication methods to engage with and provide feedback to our customers. March 2019, (See Aim 1 (3)) Debbie Davies. 4. Develop independent customer satisfaction reporting for all service areas
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Aim 5	Work in partnership with other agencies and organisations to improve the communities of our customers
Objective	To improve the environment and communities where our Residents live, through fostering partnership working with tenants, leaseholders and key stakeholders working within the communities
Outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The development of a coherent approach to improve the local environment 2. Develop information and support mechanisms to increase community capacity 3. Develop sustainable community activities.
Key Activity and timescales	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support the development of objectives contained within the community benefit strategy. Following formal adoption by FCC. Service Manager/Debbie Davies. 2. Develop and promote joint community involvement events with other organisations to increase VFM. June 2018. Housing Officers/Debbie Davies. 3. Support the development of an approach to collecting and storing greater and more accurate profiling information on our customers. March 2018. Dawn Kent/Debbie Davies.