

## INTRODUCTION

This report shows the real impact of resident involvement from April 2008 to March 2009. By getting involved Yorkshire Housing customers can really make a difference.

They can:

- Change the way Yorkshire Housing works and improve the services they receive
- Gain new skills and increase their confidence by working with other customers and staff
- Improve the area and community in which they live.

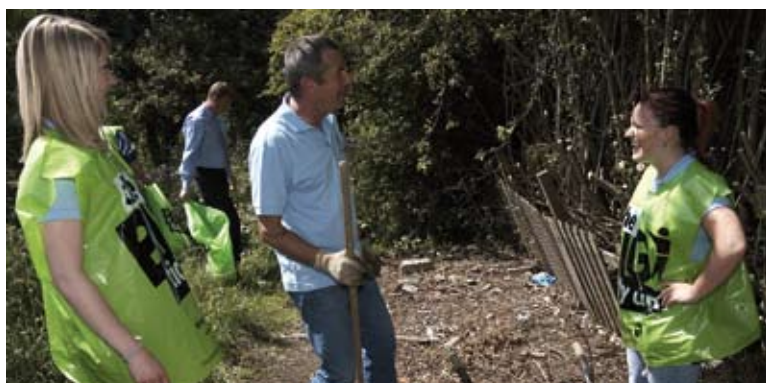
The report also sets out the actions that have been agreed for 2009/10 to meet our shared aims of Achieving Excellence by including customers in what we do.

## IN OUR CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY WE SAY THAT....

*'We recognise that the needs and expectations of our customers are changing and that to improve we have to know what matters to them as they experience the homes that we provide and the services that we deliver. We want to show that our customers' views do count and we aim to do this through increased accountability, service quality and choice, rather than by paying lip service by promoting customer involvement for involvement's sake.*

*Involving our customers is vital and important to us and we will continue to offer a wide and varied range of opportunities for engaging all customers...*

*...We do this because we believe that better participation and involvement of our customer's leads to better decision making which properly reflects local needs and leads to more sustainable and happy communities'*



## WHAT IS AN IMPACT REPORT?

Impact reports focus on outcomes - what changes have been made to our homes and services as a result of involvement. This report measures and evaluates the difference made to services by involving residents.

## WHY IS AN IMPACT REPORT IMPORTANT?

Customer involvement is now central to the Government's approach to delivering services and housing is no exception. There is a clear drive towards empowering citizens and communities to directly influence the services that they receive. Yorkshire Housing has a good track record in involving customers in how services are designed, planned, delivered, monitored and reviewed. By assessing the changes to services following customer involvement the value of customers' influence can be fed back to tenants and other stakeholders and used to set future priorities for further improvements.

## HOW WE HAVE ENGAGED CUSTOMERS

We work with and involve our customers in a great many different ways, and over the last two to three years involving customers in the day to day running of Yorkshire Housing, and in continuously reviewing our services has become embedded practice. In 2008/9 we have engaged with our customers to improve our services through:

- Membership of Board and Operational Committees
- Yorkshire Housing Tenant Focus Group
- Policy Review Groups
- Mystery Shopping exercises
- Surveys
- Involving young people
- Promoting diversity and engaging with hard to reach groups
- Involvement in communications
- Local consultation and involvement activities



## HEADLINES

2008/09 was a year of consultation for Yorkshire Housing against a background of internal and external changes and challenges. Over eight hundred and forty people took part in seventeen different customer consultation events on our future priorities, repairs and maintenance services and access and customer care standards. A variety of methods were used including focus groups, campervan interviews, board games, and who wants to be a millionaire style participatory voting. Customers have set the priorities for the next 3 years and are driving the 2009-2012 Corporate Plan:

Customers wanted:	We intend to deliver excellence by:
<p>Investment in existing homes</p>	<p>Focusing our asset management strategy (including our investment spend) on making our homes warm, modern and well maintained</p> <p>Improving our repairs service by expanding our in-house teams.</p> <p>Early indications are that our repair services are getting better. In the first 3 months of 2009/10 we carried out 97% of jobs on time, which means that we are providing a much improved service to our customers; 95% of calls to the repairs help desk were answered within 20 seconds ensuring greater accessibility and responsiveness; and over 98% of customer appointments were kept showing we are more reliable.</p> <p>Customer satisfaction is up too, with over 90% happy with the quality of the repairs service.</p>



Customers wanted:	We intend to deliver excellence by:
More homes	Building/buying 800 new affordable homes by 2012.
Better services	<p>Being more visible in our neighbourhoods, improving cleanliness and safety.</p> <p>Improving access to our services by establishing a customer service centre.</p>

Improvements to our communications with tenants were made as a result of customer involvement in editorial work and feedback on our website services. This resulted in the launch of two new customer magazines and the myhome area of the Yorkshire Housing website.

The overall response rate to all customer satisfaction surveys carried out in 2008/09 was 30%. As a result of customer feedback indicating survey fatigue and a preference for telephone surveys a new methodology was introduced. This has meant that repairs response rates have increased to 100%.

The introduction of randomly sampled representative surveys is also ensuring that all sections can provide us with their feedback and the Talkback panel is designed to be reflective of the general population of Yorkshire Housing as a whole.

The You Said We Did campaign reflects customer driven changes to services. This year, these have included; the introduction of an in-house gas team; the recruitment of an energy efficiency advisor; the availability of free light bulbs and other energy efficiency events; and a signpost to the new adaptations section on the Yorkshire Housing website and the adaptations leaflet.



## BOARD AND COMMITTEE

25 customers were involved in our governance structures. They had a vital role in setting the vision, values, strategic and policy direction of Yorkshire Housing including the corporate plan, monitoring performance, agreeing a business plan, managing risk and making business critical decisions. Customers on Committees were also called upon to set the strategic direction and monitor performance at a local level. Many were also members of our Complaints Panels which act as the final stage in our internal complaints procedure.

As well as recommending changes to policy and procedure such as providing more information to shared owners and leaseholders before they commit to buying, customer involvement in panels has ensured more scrutiny and accountability in the process. This has led to improvements with more complaints being logged and handled on the front line (96%) and complaints are also a regular item on team agendas, and lessons learnt are aired and shared within the organisation.

## FOCUS GROUP

The eighteen member strong Yorkshire Housing Focus Group (YHFG) has been active on estate visits; have met with staff on eleven occasions and acted as a 'sounding board' for corporate changes and policies; raising customer issues and setting and monitoring tenant involvement activity generally.

Members of the YHFG have also worked with staff on policy and service review groups such as anti-social behaviour and re-procurement of repairs and out of hour's services. As a result of their input YH now has a better out of hours repairs provider with an improvement in the percentage of calls answered in less than 20 seconds from 76-90%. The Group has promoted customer involvement so that it is now more embedded in Yorkshire Housing. They have set the framework for Resident Involvement Impact Assessments (RIIA's) with staff; reviewed their constitution and approved funding for community projects focusing on young people.



## POLICY REVIEW GROUPS

A new framework for policy development and approval was put in place from April 2008. The scrutiny role that had previously been carried out by the separate boards prior to amalgamation was in many cases replaced by individual Policy Review Groups, made up of members, customers, staff and where appropriate external expertise.

Six policies were subject to scrutiny by policy review groups over the course of the year including the complaints and compliments policy; child protection policy and fees and contributions to works. There were several examples of changes being made as a result of customer input including a reduction in compensation levels; promotion of tenant representatives in the complaints resolution process; and changes to the role of Directors in the complaints review process.

## MYSTERY SHOPS

Six mystery shopping exercises were carried out in 2008/09 on front line customer services and empty homes. As a result there were demonstrable improvements in front-line reception services and call handling; together with improvements in disability access and more welcoming reception areas. Mystery shops of void properties were introduced in January 2008. They highlighted the need for the voids process to be transferred to maintenance teams and have helped to define the new re-let standard.

## INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE

Approximately six hundred and thirty young people took part in activities designed for them in 2008/09. Fifty-four adults were also involved in projects like Dreamscheme which rewards young people for the hours (200 in all) they spend helping out in the community. This has had very positive results in terms of improving the environment - with things like bird boxes, bat boxes, litter picks, removing graffiti; developing a community garden; showing a marked increase in pro-social behaviour and a decrease in anti-social behaviour; and encouraging young and old to



work on projects overcoming barriers between age groups and improving community relations. In addition volunteers on the schemes have gained through better employment prospects and increased confidence.

Positive social behaviour orders or PoSBO's have also improved the reputation of young people, increased their confidence and led to new avenues and opportunities. One young person for example was able to apply for a gas apprenticeship as a result of the encouragement he received.

A series of school courses called Housing Why Bother? increased pupils' awareness of the realities of homelessness, living independently and housing rights and responsibilities, making some young people think twice about the implications of leaving home. The courses also challenged preconceptions and promoted partnership working. National Take Over Day enabled young people to gain an insight in to the world of work and Yorkshire Housing.

## PROMOTING DIVERSITY AND ENGAGING WITH HARD TO REACH GROUPS

Over the year we have been able to reach out to many diverse groups. We have sought to engage families and young people through initiatives like Dreamscheme and funding of specific activities through the Youth Activity Fund such as the Bangladeshi play scheme. Telephone conferencing has helped rural customers and those not able to get out and about to have their say and the Disability Forum has helped to raise the profile of disability issues and begin to make changes to services and perceptions. The adaptations service is monitored by this group and they have supported improvements in the information that is provided to customers on adaptation issues. In addition better parking arrangements for disabled people have been secured at some offices.

The Family Away Day continues to attract a younger and more diverse range of customers and the opportunity to mix with customers from different areas, cultures and ages has become one of the main reasons why people enjoy this cohesive event.



## LOCAL CONSULTATION AND INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

Our emphasis on building successful communities which are safe, secure and welcoming has been demonstrated by initiatives such as estate walkabouts, passionate about the patch and our support of local community projects. Face to face contact with customers has helped to build relationships and improve service delivery. Customers have told us about their concerns and what the priorities are for their areas and these have resulted in the implementation of security, safety, and environmental measures that have been significantly resourced through our scheme improvement budgets. Some of the feedback and consultation at a local level has led to more local surgeries which have improved access and communication; the provision of fencing which helps to create secure boundaries and tidy up an area; security measures such as CCTV; alarms; door entry access and systems make our customers feel more safe and secure; and landscaping upgrades which improve quality of life and the reputation of the neighbourhood. Our customers tell us they now feel much happier and safer as a result of the actions that have been taken.

We are very much part of a wider community and YH recognises this by supporting local projects that benefit everyone. Projects like:-

- Provision of a community building at Hill Top Gardens, Denaby Main which is a centre for neighbourhood activity in the area
- Dig day at Sherwood Court extra care scheme in Wakefield creating an accessible, pleasant garden space for residents to enjoy
- An Eid party in Bradford - breaking down barriers and celebrating different cultures
- European Neighbours Day in Malton/Norton encouraging a better sense of community
- Support for a youth centre in Ingleton in Craven helping to create a safe and enjoyable space for young people.



Consultation targeted specifically at Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) customers in Bradford was held to gain their views on the future of the repairs service. The event was important in that it not only broke down barriers between customers and staff but it also showed the way in terms of the benefits of consultation done a local rather than a regional level.

The multi landlord Greatwood and Horseclose estate in Skipton is managed by an estate committee of residents and other stakeholders and supported by Yorkshire Housing who are the major landlord on the estate. The hub of the estate is a community centre which acts as a key community resource and funds a broadband connection for community use. Facilities and activities for all residents are available all year round such as a crèche that runs five mornings a week, providing a valued service to local parents; sports activities held on the multi use games area adjacent to the community such as a programme for eleven year olds run in conjunction with local schools. Through engaging young people this way the level of reported anti social behaviour and nuisance on the estate declined during the holidays; cooking classes aimed at healthy eating and eating on a budget have been held and attended by ten local mums; and a sewing and recycling class has been formed by a couple of local residents and runs regularly at the centre - to name but a few.

In terms of improvement to the area customers lobbied for a housing benefit surgery which is now running on a six weekly cycle; residents wanted a greater police presence so the estate now has its own dedicated officer; improvements to the main access footpath between the estate and the town were also made and the Estate Committee provided £3,000 towards the cost of this; extra parking areas have also been funded by the Committee and in partnership with North Yorkshire County Council these have been provided at material cost only.

On a similar basis a footpath was installed across a verge where previously residents had to walk into the road for a short distance. Both of these were supported after requests and lobbying by residents.



## HOW DO WE COMPARE WITH OTHERS?

We have taken part in the Housemark Resident Involvement benchmarking over the last 2 years and whilst there are always difficulties with making direct comparisons the following table gives an indication of progress over the year.

2007/08		2008/09		Description
£19.75	Orange	£30.04	Yellow	Total spend on resident involvement per property managed.
0.65%	Orange	0.80%	Orange	Total spend on resident involvement as a percentage of rent due.
33.3%	Orange	53.6%	Green	% of members of service delivery boards who are residents.
0.3%	Orange	0.1%	Red	Residents who have received some training provided or part funded by the organisation as a % of properties managed.
	Grey	92.0%	Red	% residents who are satisfied with learning outcomes of training when asked 6 months after the training.
68.0%	Yellow	69.0%	Green	% residents satisfied with the opportunities for participation in management and decision making - overall

- Top quartile
- Second quartile
- Third quartile
- Bottom quartile
- No data / small sample

Whilst there are improvements in most areas, training of customers is a significant weakness that we will address in 2009/10.



## VALUE FOR MONEY

On the whole the value for money achieved has been fairly good. Our youth projects like Dreamscheme, PoBO's, Housing Why Bother? and National take over day have had a very positive impact sometimes with minimum input in terms of time or cash resources.

Some of the successes can be attributed to effective partnership working, the use of dedicated volunteers and after initial set up, projects that become self sustaining like the community centre at Hill Top Gardens and more demonstrably so the community resource and estate committee at Greatwood and Horseclose in Skipton.

Other initiatives like mystery shopping have really found their stride and are beginning to effect marked service improvements. Some like telephone conferencing are just good ideas and will be better utilised in future.

Embedding customer involvement in our day to day activity through estate walkabouts and passionate about the patch, backed up by a dedicated resource such as the scheme improvement budget has also proved effective in meeting customer aspirations and improving local communities.

Several activities have not yet proved as effective. This may be because the project has not yet had time to develop sufficiently to gauge impact; the outcomes are longer term and benefits not yet identifiable; or we have not put enough systems in place to assess actual impact. Some of the activities that fall into this area are Hi, Grass Roots and Youth newsletters; the Virtual Youth Forum and on-going customer satisfaction surveys.

There are also a number of activities that will require a more in-depth review to decide whether they should continue in their present format. These include the Family Away Day, Talkback Panel; and YHFG.



## INTO THE FUTURE

Yorkshire Housing has made a substantial commitment to customer involvement in the Corporate Plan 2009 - 2012. The five key objectives are:

- To provide **excellent customer service**
- To provide **great homes**
- To **support our tenants** to make a positive difference to our services and their community
- To be an **employer of choice**
- To be an **efficient business**

All of which will be shaped around what our customers tell us they want.

More specifically in providing our services to customers we will ***step up a gear in customer involvement and responsiveness across all our activity, with top quartile customer satisfaction with participation.***

Over the course of 2009/10 a series of strategies and projects will be delivered in order to achieve our objectives.

### Action Plan

The key activities specifically for customer involvement relate to:

- Continue to roll out the new customer satisfaction survey methodology to all service areas and aim to achieve a 60% response rate.
- Put systems in place to ensure that customers receive regular updates on the changes that have been made as a result of their involvement.
- Focus on hard to reach groups including BME customers, people in the 25-45 age group, those who are working, or those who we find are often not engaged for example, single, unemployed, young men.
- Develop a customer training programme
- Extend mystery shopping exercises to approximately 15 per year, and introduce shops in to day to day repairs and new build homes.
- Invite Tenant inspectors to 'test' our services from a customer perspective, and provide a clear understanding of those services and how they might be improved.

