

Customer involvement and communities team report: 2023-2024

Scrutiny:

At the start of the financial year there was a complete change in personnel of the Involvement & Communities Team and considerable change in personnel of the scrutiny team. Whilst this impacted heavily on time and resource for a period, it has meant an exciting transition with the two teams growing together. I&C have supported the remaining members, including the new chair, to recruit new volunteers and form a fully functioning team. A recruitment drive in April saw two new members join. They have all undergone induction, mandatory training and continuous development training. They are all members of TPAS (the national organisation on tenant participation and engagement experts). A new vice chair was recently elected.

The scrutiny team have been monitoring progress from their completed review into operational customer communications. Their recommendations have seen the creation of:

- a communications guidance document for staff.
- a set of 23 new templates for the most important and sensitive customer letters we send out.
- 'communications champions' within the business with continued training for them.

The team then undertook a further review into Selwood Housing's Damp & Mould Services. Working with TPAS, the review was carried out using their new 'bootcamp' method in a one-day workshop. Seven additional customers attended and alongside the scrutiny team members they reviewed and discussed the new service that had been presented to them by staff and managers. They analysed what worked and where there were gaps. Nine recommendations were then proposed at that session and seven have been adopted. The scrutiny team then carried out a phone survey to hear from a wider representation of our customer-base before completing their report which is currently with management for a response ahead of submission to board.

Working with the business performance & insight team we produce an information pack to share with the scrutiny team ahead of quarterly business meetings, so that they have the key information on 'Rant & Rave' customer surveys, Tenant Satisfaction Measure data and finance & performance ahead of the meeting presentations. We created a new Sharepoint site for the scrutiny team which helps with transparency of information sharing, teamwork and ensures higher security of shared documents. All of this helps scrutiny keep informed so they can best question our services and operation.

Together with Tenants:

Selwood Housing have adopted the National Housing Federation's Together with Tenants Charter. We agreed an action plan with the scrutiny team and with heads of service as to how we meet the charter's 6 commitments. Ahead of each quarterly business meeting the I&C team provide our scrutiny team with written updates on the progress of each action within the plan. This allows them time to reflect, discuss and bring questions/challenges to the quarterly business meeting.

Involvement:

Customers who have signed up to our Make a Difference list (a 'warm list' of over 1000 customers who wish to hear more about involvement opportunities) were invited to participate in four task & finish involvement projects over the year. 23 customers were involved in these in-person and digital sessions:

- July 2023: EDI Customer policy review, five customers attended an in-person focus group (with another inputting online). Five recommendations and suggestions were taken on board including use of Plain English and improved channels of communication.
- September-November 2023: Reporting a Repair, seven customers attended an in-person focus group feeding back on the communication of our repairs offer and advising what needed to be conveyed to customers. At a second stage they then shared their views on the creation of a webpage to help finalise the message.
- February-March 2024: four customers took part in a digital review of the Tree Policy, helping improve communication of key messages in the policy itself and through the website.
- March 2024: six customers helped develop a new policy on how Selwood Housing deal with Unacceptable Behaviour, in line with recommendations from the Ombudsman. Recommendations have been put forward and additions made to the Policy which is now with our solicitors for review.

In June 2023 the I&C team worked with the Marketing & Communications team to create a new Customer Involvement newsletter. The I&C team now send this monthly mailout to the 1050 customers on our make a difference list advertising forthcoming opportunities to get involved and sharing 'You Said, We Did' feedback on recent projects and policy reviews. This maintains regular engagement, interest and recognises the value of our volunteers and the importance Selwood Housing puts on hearing our customers' voices. We currently have an open rate of above 50% for our monthly mailouts. We continue to work closely with the

Marketing & Communications team to promote our work both internally & externally through our OurPlace team page, the Website 'Get Involved' pages, articles in the Customer Newsletter, on our Socials and in Staff Brief, including the recent Meet the I&C Team video.

Since the new I&C team have been in place we have started collecting EDI information anonymously from involved customers who are willing to share their details. This is to benchmark the diversity of those we are reaching, so that we can make necessary adjustments to improve engagement. We will start to evaluate this as part of our ongoing benchmarking, at the end of each quarter.

Complaints Forum:

Initial support for the newly created customer complaints forum: support in their quarterly meetings (for first 3 quarters until established), funding and administration of expenses & incentives, reporting & promotion of their work as well as advice & support to their coordinator on volunteer management and engagement. We have helped recruit three new customers, so now there are six permanently involved members in the group that every quarter review the process of five recently closed complaints and score them against set criteria. The complaints' coordinator and head of housing review this and relevant action is taken.

Decarbonisation project – resident engagement:

In September the I&C team organised, promoted and facilitated a drop-in session for customers who would be having decarbonisation energy upgrades in their home. This gave them the opportunity to engage with the management team and contractors and have their questions or any concerns answered. 17 customers attended this event. The I&C team also provided resources for all residents that detailed information about how to best make use of the new systems for example how to benefit from solar panels. The I&C team created an FAQs sheet following this drop-in session and then door-knocked all properties of customers who couldn't attend and shared that information with them, giving another opportunity for questions to the contractors and property team. In October the I&C team supported the property team and contractors to door-knock all properties at the second phase of the decarbonisation scheme to remind customers of the forthcoming surveys and to answer any initial queries. The I&C team then shadowed contractors in property surveys and took part in a training session on using new heating systems. We continue to be part of the ongoing Steering Group and have further resident engagement and support planned for the further phases of the project.

Communities:

The I&C team are a key partner in the priority neighbourhoods' project, working in Westbury and Warminster communities during 2023. We supported practical community tasks such as estate walkabouts and clear-ups and attended the regular project team meetings. The I&C team have led on the marketing & communications of the project with promotion of events as well as internal & external publicity of successes. We created an initial stakeholder mapping exercise and have engaged with key stakeholders, starting initial conversations and building relationships to create legacy after the project finishes. We have shared funding to enable two projects to go ahead: improvements to a community hub in Westbury and accessibility to a community garden in Warminster. We are currently supporting the Warminster project in applying for Area Board, and Police & Crime Commissioner grants, having already secured £5000 from the Town Council. These monies will fund a joint project with Wiltshire Police to install & manage CCTV in one of our neighbourhoods with high criminal activity and anti-social behaviour.

Stronger Communities Funding:

As a new team we looked at processes and criteria to ensure that the funding we distribute is best directed at our customers and in our neighbourhoods. We have made the process more efficient with four application windows open throughout the year. During 2023-2024 we distributed £22,835 from our Stronger Communities Fund to enable 15 community projects across 10 towns & villages where we have our housing stock.

Q1 of 2023-2024: £3,380 for 4 projects:

- Alzheimer's Memory Café in Westbury
- Julian House fun-run in Trowbridge Park
- Studley Green Primary School trip for SEN children
- Prize donation to 4Youth Active Fest

Q2 of 2023-2024: £3,510 for 3 projects:

- Bradford on Avon Bowls Club
- Purple Elephant children's festival in Frome
- Pop-up youth café on Studley Green

Q3 of 2023-2024: £9,945 for 5 projects:

- Old Sarum Community Pantry
- Step-Up Pre-School in Dilton Marsh
- Disabled facilities at Westwood Social Club
- YMCA Green Shoots Nursery on Studley Green
- Doorway homeless charity in Chippenham

Q4 of 2023-2024: £6000 for 3 projects:

- Group 5 charity (West Wiltshire)
- Flooring for Trowbridge Future community hub flooring
- Wiltshire Search & Rescue

We also worked with the Priority Neighbourhoods' Project to fund two additional projects at £2000 each:

- Bradley Road community garden in Warminster
- Westbury community project

Accumulatively these projects secured an additional £170,446.73 to be spent in our communities.

We are into the third and final year of a three-year funding commitment to local charity, Trowbridge Futures. This £30,000 contract helps fund a neighbourhood connector who is working across our three main housing estates in Trowbridge. Amongst other things they support a kindness cafe, veterans' group, community fridge and cookery sessions. They undertake door knocking as part of a community conversation project, have supported the development of a community association and centre. They have worked with the local authority's migration and resettlement team to support delivery of English language courses.

The new I&C team have worked with the Procurement team to reinstall the social value clause in appropriate high value contracts. It is proposed social value inclusion should be considered in high value arrangements over £1 million where the benefits are known to be available and worthwhile. Payments will be made on an annual basis, on the anniversary of the contract's commencement. This decision will guarantee ongoing funding to boost the Stronger Community Fund and allow us to continue supporting our communities.