

Your Choice Homes Community Involvement Statement



September 2005

Introduction

Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) manages the largest stock of social housing in the City. The communities it supports have a range of diverse needs and some people are particularly vulnerable in a number of ways. Your Choice Homes (YCH) is the name of a choice-based lettings scheme introduced by Newcastle City Council. This is now a partnership between Your Homes Newcastle, Newcastle City Council and Housing Associations who have homes to rent in Newcastle.

The scheme has been designed to create greater choice for people looking for housing. In designing Your Choice Homes every effort has been made to create a simple and open system which is accessible and understandable by everyone.

Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) believes that operating a simple choice based lettings policy in partnership with other providers is the key to high customer satisfaction, a growing customer base and openness and transparency. It allows time for more and better information for customers and supports vulnerable people to make the right choices.

It helps to change the perceptions of social housing and makes a significant contribution to sustaining communities while at the same time enabling YHN to make the best use of council stock and resources.

This document outlines the Your Choice Homes Services approach to community involvement enabling people to live as successfully and independently as possible within the wider community. It also seeks approval to formalise and build on existing relationships to enable Your Choice Homes to make a positive impact on the community it serves.

Policy Statement

YHN believes that all tenants have the right to access a range of services that allow them to successfully move into and stay in their homes for as long as they want to. In order to achieve this, YHN will continually work to develop excellent and appropriate services and ways of working which provide support where and when it is needed.

Context

The Government sees choice as a key feature of its housing policies and indicated this through their green paper 'Quality and Choice -A Decent Home for All'. YCH policy is consistent with this theme and the requirements of the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and the Allocations Code of Guidance

2002.

The Newcastle Plan sets out the vision of the Newcastle Partnership for the City from 2004 to 2007. The plan is divided into nine themes and the service's approach to community involvement is endorsed in the Community Safety and Crime, Creativity and Culture, Health and Social Care and Prosperity themes.

The Council's Strategic Housing Service is responsible for the overall housing strategy, meeting housing need in the city and ensuring that people in need have access to a decent home. Specific strategy and policy that underpin work of Your Choice Homes include:

- Supporting People Strategy
- Community Safety Strategy
- Homelessness Strategy
- Older Persons Housing Strategy

The YHN delivery plan sets out the aims and objectives of the organisation in managing the Council's homes and meeting the relevant strategic aims of the Council. Specific reference is made to supporting independent living, meeting diverse needs and to helping people keep their tenancies through providing advice and support. These are key features within the Lettings Policy.

Your Choice Homes Business Plan 2005-2008 set out the service's considerable contributions to the City Council's impact on sustainability, cohesion and regeneration within the communities it works with. The service reaches people with special needs, especially vulnerable people and socially excluded groups, including those on low incomes, thus helping to promote social inclusion and to reduce barriers to equal access.

Aims and Objectives

YCH aims to have a positive effect on the community it serves. To do this it will;

- Encourage customer empowerment by offering choice and opportunity in Newcastle and across the region
- Increase customer commitment to their homes and communities as a consequence of their own self-selection
- Encourage mixed and balanced communities that contribute to sustainable regeneration
- Promote wider social inclusion by supporting vulnerable people to exercise choice
- Widely publicise the scheme and provide information about how people can qualify to join
- Advertise homes in a range of ways so that people will know which properties are available
- Give information about local services and amenities to help people decide where to live
- Maintain the demand for properties and stimulate new markets to strengthen the stability of local neighbourhoods
- Offer work placements to people attempting to return to work after a period

of illness

- Enable staff to contribute to community groups during work hours

Method Statement

YCH can demonstrate its usefulness to and positive impact on the community it serves in a number of ways;

- We have 3 dedicated Health Professionals from Health and Social Services who proactively work with customers and their advocates to ensure housing need is met and customers can either remain their homes safely or secure the best possible new home to promote independence
- We work with a dedicated Officer who visits customers in hospital to work with them and their advocates to ensure effective discharge plans and secure suitable housing options
- We work closely with organisations and hold surgeries to assist and support customers find a home
- We are working with Shelter Housing Aid Centre to train community representatives from the BME community so that they can support their community through the rehousing process
- We work closely with our adaptations service to ensure the most efficient use of current adaptations, produce guidance and offer assistance as part of regeneration programmes

Work placements

- Service managers have spent time working with Shaw Trust to help individuals who have been ill get back into work by taking them on work placement
- We have made a commitment to have four placements each year

Staff involvement in community groups

YCH can demonstrate its involvement the community. Staff participate in a number of groups and forums which have direct links to the community. These include:

- YHN Area Boards, Ward Committees and the Tenants Federation
- The Quality of Life Partnership
- Newcastle Warm Zone and Affordable Warmth Partnership
- Community Safety Team, Housing and Anti-Social Behaviour Team and Multi-Agency Problem Solving Team
- Working in partnership with other providers to create Extra Care developments offering 24 hour on-site care to promote independence
- Hospital Discharge Groups and Health and Housing Forums
- Liaison sessions with customers with health needs
- Working with the Carer's Centre to offer advice
- Attending the Complementary Therapy Forum
- Attending the Learning Disability liaison Group
- Working with the Private Landlords Forum

- Working with members of the voluntary sector to offer advice and assistance

Environmental sustainability

- Our service complies with City Council IT recycling and environmental policies.
- Our service business plan includes sustainability targets
- The service uses recycled paper in the office
- All of our paper and plastic are recycled.
- All staff make use of public transport for business purposes. Where a car is needed for visits or meetings we ensure that this is kept to a minimum

Targets and Performance Monitoring

There are a number of performance targets that YCH has been set in relation to community involvement and sustainability

Targets

- Take four people on work placement during 2005/6
- Review the effectiveness of staff involvement in community groups by March 2006
- Produce a YCH business plan for 2005-08 to include community involvement role

Performance Monitoring

Performance is monitored within the service as part of the performance management framework.

Customer Information

- We have asked for customers views on our activities through regular consultation, focus groups and questionnaires
- We have discussed our community involvement at team meetings and made improvements as a result
- Customers information and access is a part of our ongoing improvement programme

Further information to customers will be given in on a regular basis in our weekly property advert and on our service website.