

Arch Tenants Conference – 19 Sept 2012

Workshop: Feeling the pinch – getting value out of money spent

Hand out - Value for Money Initiatives

North West Leicestershire District Council

Involved customers have been recruited to a Tenants' Performance and Finance Working Group that meets quarterly and gets involved in budget setting, and monitoring and scrutiny of costs and performance.

The Group is also responsible for monitoring a "Tenants' Top Ten" performance indicators, agreed in 2008 as part of NWLDC's Tenant Participation Compact, on which the department reports quarterly. These indicators allow the housing service to focus effort on what really matters to tenants.

Building on this idea, Tenant's Top Ten Budgets were introduced in 2010. These give tenants the opportunity to explore expenditure patterns and the underlying reasons for any variances, and to challenge financial performance throughout the year. Exposure to budgets on a regular basis also allows tenants to make more informed recommendations when it comes to budget development for the following year, since NWLDC invites the working group to propose budget changes as well as review and comment on proposals from team managers.

A value for money market was held as a fun way of explaining value for money. Staff were asked to taste common supermarket items such as coffee and biscuits and then to rank the products in terms of value for money and give the reasons for their decision. This helped people to understand that value for money involves trade-offs between cost and quality, and bring home the message that they should make similar judgements at work to those they make every day in their private lives.

"VFM Champions" have been appointed from each section of the housing service to maintain awareness of value for money – they meet regularly to exchange ideas.

The importance of value for money is constantly communicated to staff through regular updates and bulletins, and articles are included on the council's intranet

and in tenant and staff newsletters. There is a dedicated email address for value for money ideas and suggestions from customers and staff.

Babergh District Council

Introduction of a new empty properties and responsive repairs contractor, Morrison, who have been working with us since July 2009. As a result the overall costs for the contract have reduced by 10%. The council also found that it needed to be more flexible with outgoing tenants who often may throw away good carpets and fittings the new tenant might want. So now, when it visits the outgoing tenant it agrees with them what can be left behind – meaning less waste and better value.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk DCs have agreed to work more closely together to achieve savings. A previous proposal to merge both councils into one new council was narrowly defeated in a local poll in May 2011; the joining together of services and integrating staffing structures are still proceeding but the two councils will remain as separate legal entities.

In April 2012 Babergh and Mid Suffolk successfully formed a Joint Housing Board. Earlier this year, tenants and leaseholders were invited to stand for election to become part of this new Board, which will make decisions about issues affecting all tenants across the two districts.

Following a campaign to ask for nominations to the Board, the Councils asked all tenants to vote for their preferred candidate, who would represent them in the area in which they live. The first election for the 6 seats on the Housing Board was held on 9 March 2012.

<http://bdc.onesuffolk.net/housing-and-homelessness/council-housing/council-tenants/tenant-involvement/joint-housing-board/>

Barrow in Furness BC

VFM section of annual report to tenants 2010-11 – more energy into fast response when tenant gets into debt – reducing arrears by £42,000 and reducing number of evictions.

Reduced staffing numbers and redirected money to home, resulting in 6% increase on spending on home improvement.

Introduced flexible direct debit payment dates, enabling them to sign up an extra 125 customers to this inexpensive method of rent payment.

<http://www.barrowbc.gov.uk/pdf/Housing%20Service%20Annual%20Report%202010%20to%202011.pdf>

Cambridge City Council

Cambridge City Council is currently consulting its customers on the option of withdrawing its 'Home-Link property magazine' - the fortnightly magazine of its choice-based lettings scheme. It says:

"Many hundreds of Home-Link property magazines are printed and distributed each bidding cycle, advertising available properties. This costs Home-Link partners £125,000 each year. Many of the magazines are not picked up by customers and are, in reality, thrown away. We have greatly reduced the number of magazines printed since the scheme was first introduced, but it is still a significant cost and we think the money could be better spent in other ways. We believe that our customers are mainly interested in properties they can bid for, not those which they cannot bid for.

"In order to make sure customers can still find out about properties that they are eligible to bid for, the on-line version of the magazine will continue. We also propose to introduce:

- a) A new system of email reminders for those who sign up to receive them.
- b) Fortnightly mailings for customers who cannot access the website enclosing 'Personalised Property Lists' of properties they can bid for.
- c) The ability to download and print off a magazine and Personalised Property Lists from the website."

<http://www.home-link.org.uk/tho/content.aspx?wkid=351>

Reading Borough Council

Many local authorities (and housing associations) have reshaped their sheltered housing services in recent years with the aim of improving value for money. As most of these changes involve withdrawing residential wardens, they have usually been controversial and unpopular with sheltered housing tenants.

In May 2012 Reading began phasing in changes to its sheltered housing support service that will enable the Council to reinvest up to £120k a year into new services for older people with support needs across the borough.

Key proposals include:

- The introduction of an activities officer or service to enable greater participation by tenants and neighbouring older people in social and health activities. This was widely welcomed by residents.
- Fixed on-site attendance times for staff so residents can be sure when Sheltered Housing Officers will be available.
- An officer will be on duty at the sheltered housing schemes between 8am and 1pm at week-ends, after which an off-site service will provide cover. The original proposal, for Council staff to provide on-call cover from home, was revised as a result of feedback from residents.
- Opening up some schemes to people aged under 60 years with support needs. This has been modified in response to residents' views to specify a minimum age of 55 years.
- Integration of the current night service with a new 'Reading 24' out-of-hours service.
- Instead of having one sheltered housing officer based at each scheme, seven of the schemes will be looked after by two teams of staff, with staff available at fixed times at each site. Three other schemes will each retain a dedicated officer. Although there will be changes in staffing levels, support time for individuals will continue to be determined through their individual support plan. Staffing ratios across the schemes will actually improve, owing to the decommissioning of two sheltered housing schemes which are being replaced by state of the art extra care housing schemes later in 2012.

www.reading.gov.uk/pressreleases/2012/jan/council-plans-better-sheltered-housing-support/

Camden Council

Camden Council uses abseiling to install polybead cavity wall insulation in its high-rise homes, estimating that this saves residents up to £80 a year on their energy bills. Traditional installation techniques use scaffolding which is expensive, can look unsightly and is unpopular with residents.

The abseiling method is about 40 per cent cheaper, saving the council between £1-2 million in scaffolding costs alone, while minimising disturbance to residents.

www.housemark.co.uk/hmkb2.nsf/1/091CBFD4738458688025788C00373914?OpenDocument

Stockport Homes (ALMO)

During 2010 an initiative was introduced across Stockport Homes to reduce both the volume and cost of all types of computer based printing whilst maintaining service delivery.

Up to 2010 over 2 million sheets of A4 paper were printed each year, with a direct cost to Stockport Homes of around £45,000 and an associated impact upon the environment. It was clear that a large percentage of this printing could be removed without impacting on service delivery.

The Target 20 initiative has achieving year on year savings of 20 per cent through:

- raising staff awareness
- using printers that are automatically configured to print double sided and in black and white (unless specifically requested to be in colour)
- the introduction of wireless networking in key areas across the business. This has enabled meetings to be carried out without the need for printing out agendas and supporting papers.

Stockport Homes is also looking at ways to reduce the amount of paper sent out to tenants. In the summer of 2011 it launched myonline, which allows its customers to securely access their personal information online including rent account details, contact details and communication preferences.

One of the key benefits of myonline is to allow customers to see details of rent balances and payments. They can choose to receive printed documents such as rent statements and newsletters by email rather than through the post.

Those choosing to go paper free are automatically entered into a quarterly prize draw for the chance to win a £50 high street voucher.

For every customer that chooses to receive printed information electronically, Stockport Homes estimates it will save £20 a year in staff time, printing and postage. Achieving its target of 10% of paper free customers would save over £22,000 a year.

www.housemark.co.uk/hmkb2.nsf/1/4A9048A34E4E4140802578E70034BE42?OpenDocument