Campaign of the year: Winner

Paragon Community Housing Group:
Wise money

What is your campaign and what is it intended to achieve?

Wise Money is our campaign to communicate the Government's changes to the benefits system from April 2013. The aim is to help people move into and progress in work, while supporting the most vulnerable. The campaign has three strands – communicating to residents and the communities in which we work, raising awareness and understanding with staff and our boards, responding to feedback from residents to deliver services most effectively.

Wise Money has used ‘Watson the Owl’ to develop a clear brand that is separate from our corporate branding to ensure that residents engage with the message that is being delivered. This reduces communication fatigue which can become an issue with general communication and feedback from residents endorses this strategy. Another benefit to this approach is that we are able to share the brand with other providers and partners to reach as many affected residents as possible within the communities that we work. The campaign is planned over three stages a targeted mail out of our eye catching die cut ‘Wise Money’ leaflet was sent to all residents who could be impacted upon by the reforms, this was accompanied by briefings with staff who also received a ‘Wise Money’ Staff guide. Our website featured a ‘Wise Money’ pop up that customers had to close to access the site.

We are following this with ‘Wise Money’ on tour in May 2013. A Facebook page and Twitter campaign is being developed with a resident focus group to enhance the print based and personal communication.

How does your campaign address local challenges or help to meet local priorities?

Paragon CHG owns and manages over 9000 homes in 8 boroughs – our stock is diverse and only in Elmbridge are we the largest housing provider with a degree of estate based stock. This presents a challenge in communicating across the group and making sure that we are reaching all of our residents who will be affected by the welfare reforms.

The majority of our stock is based in some of the most affluent areas of the country and this is a constant challenge in service delivery. The social exclusion of our residents is heightened by the lack of services, funding and provision to meet their needs. Paragon is the main advocate for our residents and we are required not to just sign post residents to services but to deliver a number of these ourselves. To tackle these local issues we have tailored our campaign to be mobile, a key element was Paragon on Tour where we utilised a double decker bus and Facebook page that visited 10 key sites across the group.
We have lead on establishing a Local Provider Forum that is attended by 12 organisations within the boroughs that we work. We have taken the role of encouraging all landlords and relevant support agencies to work together across organisations. We have also enhanced the community development work that we carry out in our communities and are continuing to respond to resident feedback to deliver more of the services that they require.

**What evidence can you provide to demonstrate the positive impact of your campaign and how it has been meeting its objectives?**

Paragon holds an annual family Christmas Cinema event and we used this opportunity to gain feedback from our residents on the Wise Money campaign. Over 300 people attended the event and a key response was the finding that 71.4% of attendees had found out about the government’s changes to the benefit system via the Wise Money campaign. This clearly demonstrates how successful the campaign has been so far in getting the message across to our residents.

The first Paragon on Tour programme aimed to raise awareness of the issue and showed that many residents were confused about the proposals and how they would be affected. Since the first targeted mailout to residents our Welfare Benefits Advisors have seen their self referral rate rise by 15% and referrals from Income Recovery Officers and Tenancy Services Officers are showing a regular increase on a monthly basis. This has delivered direct support for residents in making claims, clarifying the potential impact of the reforms and also advocating on their behalf. Active staff involvement in this process has increased following our staff briefings.

Internally the impact of the campaign has been substantial and successfully supported a business case for additional resources to support residents and develop services to meet the needs of welfare reform. This has seen board approval for 7 additional staff, 6 of whom will be providing frontline resident services. Over £200,000 of funding for community development projects, service improvements and improved technology has also been agreed.

The area in which the campaign has most impacted upon the organisation itself is that the increase in feedback from residents has given a clear message on how we need to communicate and work with our residents. Overwhelmingly residents have told us that they want personal contact or as an alternative direct mail. To deliver this we have had to revise our customer approach and the internal support that is provided to staff to deliver services. This is being developed to enable staff to work away from the offices using mobile communication to work directly with residents at their homes or local facilities.

We have also established much closer links with local advice services and the CABS to ensure that residents are provided with the most comprehensive level of support available. This has included the local Money Adviser at our CAB providing advice to residents through our Income Recovery Newsletters.
As a new initiative we are promoting Resident Welfare Benefit champions in our communities who will promote our campaigns and explain the issues as they arise within their local groups.

**Why should your organisation win this award?**

The campaign is not corporate – it is about meeting the needs to the customer not the organisation. We have provided the medium to receive meaningful feedback that genuinely is changing the way we deliver services to our customers. We are leading on bringing together other registered providers, support agencies and charities to deliver a joined up approach to helping residents to understand the changes.

The fact that we are happy to share the ‘Wise Money’ brand and messages across other organisations is in itself an innovative approach to partnership working. The campaign is highly innovative and relevant in its style and approach. We have developed a number of unique features, the die cut eye catching leaflet and website pop up, and resident Welfare Benefit Advocates are three examples. We can demonstrate that our residents are genuinely engaged with the campaign and are more informed as a result of this.

The organisation has responded to the challenges set down by Government in the Welfare Reform programme and will emerge with residents who are fully aware of the changes and how best to maintain their benefits.