The overarching aim of Paragon Community Housing Group is to have an approach to Resident Involvement that is clear and easily understood, accountable and inclusive of all residents who live in the communities in which the Housing Group works. The Group is committed to involving tenants and leaseholders in helping to improve services and the way they are managed. In order to achieve a high level of involvement, Elmbridge Housing Trust (a subsidiary of Paragon Community Housing Group) surveyed a number of residents to feedback on how they could have a voice, assert and influence and develop knowledge on and about the services provided by the Trust. We want residents to have clarity on how they can get involved with us and our research determined that a clear menu of opportunities available was the key to empowering involvement. We briefed creative agency Strudel to come up with a range of visual options and have developed a fresh and colourful menu approach which is aimed at tempting our residents to greater involvement.
What did you set out to achieve?

The strategic aim of the Trust was to have an approach to Resident Involvement that is clear and easily understood, accountable and inclusive of all Elmbridge Housing Trust residents who live in the communities in which the Trust works. By providing a menu of opportunities for residents they can have a voice, assert an influence and develop knowledge on and about the services provided by Elmbridge Housing Trust.

The under arching aim of this strategy should embed resident involvement throughout the organisation ensuring that everyone at Elmbridge Housing Trust puts resident involvement at the heart of what they do.

Involving our residents improves the effectiveness with which housing services are delivered, brings benefits of new skills and increased confidence to residents. It is a core component of helping to ensure that our neighbourhoods and communities are places where people want to live, now and in the future. Therefore, our objective was to implement a Menu of Involvement which would:

- Define how our residents could get involved
- Encourage increased resident involvement
- Ensure that resident feedback and information is used to improve services.
- To improve satisfaction and empower our residents.
- Provide a value for money resident involvement service.
- To provide services that are shaped by those who use them and communities which are shaped by those who live in them.
- To develop Paragon Community Housing Group wide opportunities for resident involvement and service development.

How were these aims and objectives met?

We met our key objectives by clearly defining how our residents can get involved in the Trust and the Group. We encouraged resident involvement by offering a wide range of involvement opportunities which had different time contributions and accessibility needs attached making it more appealing to our residents.

We take on board all feedback from our residents with the aim of improving the services which we provide in order to shape them to the communities in which our residents live. For example, through the creation of our Menu of Involvement and the new opportunity for an ASB forum, we utilised this group to help produce our ASB Local Offer. A local offer is the landlord and residents working together to design and deliver services to meet local needs, to produce a service standard.

We ensure that all meetings are held at a local office or ERA scheme to ensure that our venue costs remain low and we remain within budget for the
large number of opportunities we provide. We also pledged to run these meetings / groups at structured times and with trained staff and management in order to provide a value for money resident involvement service.

We have also had a positive uptake in more formal groups such as the Paragon Residents’ Council and Paragon Sounding Board which offer a wide range of opportunities for resident involvement and service development.

What challenges did the project face, and what lessons were learned?

The key challenge we faced was to get our vision realised in terms of design and accessibility. The brief for the Menu of Involvement had been sent to a number of agencies who didn’t come back with an engaging piece of collateral. A new and more in depth brief was written and sent out to a new agency who work closely with a number of RSLs and charitable organisations and they sat with us and listened to our requirements for the Menu. They provided us with three concept routes and we felt that one stood out from the rest and ticked all the boxes and requirements which were set out in the brief.

By producing the Menu, we have since had feedback from residents that we would not normally hear from who have made further suggestions for residents’ groups such as a Keyworker forum. Only by producing the Menu have these suggestions come through to the organisation and this is an opportunity that we will consider for the future. It does allow us however to feed this information through to our sister Trust, RuTCHT (Richmond upon Thames Churches Housing Trust) who will be using this model to develop their own Menu at the end of 2010.

Our main aim was to design something that was inclusive to residents of all ages, was easy to read / follow and to create a Menu that was current and engaging to all. The Menu flows and is easy to follow. It is clearly laid out and adheres to RNIB guidelines which mean that the colours and fonts are complimentary and easy to read from. We have received a large amount of positive feedback from our residents, staff and board members who refer to this as our ‘best publication yet’.

How was the success of the project measured?

On both the launch date and when the menu was sent to all EHT residents, a feedback form was included so we could gauge whether we had provided a piece of information that our residents were happy with. Statistical analysis follows:

Menu of Involvement launch event
AIM: recruitment opportunity for uninvolved residents plus further involvement from current involved residents.

- 37 out of 37 (100%) enjoyed the event and thought it was a fantastic way of
launching the Menu.

- 37 out of 37 (100%) felt informed about the Menu of Involvement.
- 37 out of 37 (100%) thought the Menu was user friendly and understandable.
- As a result of the launch 29 people (78%) of the residents who attended wanted to get more involved with the way that the Trust is run.
- 31 people (84%) were happy with the methods of Involvement listed in the Menu.

Uninvolved residents wanted to get involved and our involved residents want to get more involved.

**Feedback from posting Menu of Involvement to 4,925 properties**

AIM: recruitment opportunity for uninvolved residents.

To date 162 feedback forms have been received. This is an incredibly high return despite us sending it out to all properties, and we are very happy with this return.

- 50% of residents want to get more involved.
- 98% thought the menu was user friendly and understandable.
- 90% were happy with the methods of involvement included in the Menu.
- 93% think Resident Involvement is important.

Paragon will now use these results as a benchmark for Resident Involvement at our other subsidiary Richmond upon Thames Churches Housing Trust (RuTCHT) as the implementation of this successful model comes to fruition towards the end of the year.

**What were the key positive outcomes?**

The response to the menu has been very positive. All the residents that responded that they wanted to get involved, will be added to our involved residents’ database, and notified of events that are upcoming.

The uptake on the methods of involvement that we have never offered before such as the Sounding Board, Residents Council etc have been very positive, Paragon wide which is becoming more prominent.

TUG, our main tenants’ consultation group, has potentially 20 new members to be signed up, moving towards meeting our target of 100 members by the end of the year. They were also very happy with the Menu.

This has proved to be a very valuable exercise as we have received a number of feedback forms which have highlighted that people like the menu, and think Resident Involvement is important but they don’t wish to get involved. This means that we can contact each resident individually and ask them why they don’t want to get involved and whether we can do anything else to involve them.
How did the project demonstrate positive practice in equality and diversity?

Paragon Community Housing Group, incorporating Elmbridge Housing Trust is committed to providing information and services, equally and without discrimination to meet the needs of the community it serves. We are working towards a profile of residents in order to ensure that the opportunities for involvement match our resident’s needs.

The Group also understands and respects the broad range of qualities which characterise its residents, which include race, religion, nationality, ethnic background, colour, disability, sex, sexuality, age, literacy, vulnerability and income level.

The Resident Involvement Strategy and subsequently the Menu of Involvement recognises the differing needs of our residents, in particular those from special interest groups such as those living in Elmbridge Retirement Accommodation or difficult to reach groups such as young people and parents with young children. The new menu of involvement offers options to such groups to help overcome barriers to their effective involvement. In addition Elmbridge Housing Trust also offers the following:

- Child care costs
- Transport to and from meetings
- Carer costs
- Translation services
- Various times and venues for meetings.

In designing and printing the Menu of Involvement, we requested that colours and fonts were in line with RNIB guidelines. Also, to ensure the Menu was accessible to all of our residents, we provided on request translation into Cantonese, Braille, large print versions and audio copies. We also have the Menu available to download online.

What elements of the project could be replicated by others?

Following the success of the Menu of Involvement at Elmbridge Housing Trust, Paragon aims to roll this out to our other subsidiary RuTCHT towards the end of 2010. The make up of RuTCHT is much different to EHT with a large percentage of residents living in care / sheltered schemes. We aim to tailor the menu in accordance to the new Resident Involvement strategy at RuTCHT. Consultations are currently in place with residents of RuTCHT to find out how they would like their menu to look and what groups they would like to feature in the menu.

The Menu of Involvement can be rolled out to all housing associations as long as sounding boards and residents groups reflect the make up of the housing
community in question. It is a very simple but effective model of communication, involvement and resident empowerment which generate great transparency to residents and regulators.

How have you worked in partnership with local service providers and communities?

We have empowered residents in making decisions about the services they receive by giving them choice through the number of ways they can get involved as well as the amount of time they are required to commit. Our residents can now get involved in a number of ways, such as:

Trust User Group (TUG)
TUG is the main group representing EHT residents. TUG is consulted on EHT’s policies and service delivery and has a formal role monitoring how well the Trust is performing.

Service Improvement Panels (SIP)
There are a number of Service Improvement Panels which meet regularly and help to monitor and improve a number of services including Access to Services, Resident Involvement, Anti-social Behaviour, Communications, Estate Services and Repairs. For example, Paragon recently appointed a new repairs and maintenance contractor. The procurement and mobilisation process was overseen by a number of involved residents who gave up a lot of time to ensure that they were happy with the implementation of their new service provider.

Elmbridge Retirement Accommodation (ERA) (SIP)
This is a panel for residents living in Elmbridge Retirement Accommodation to give their ideas and opinions on how they can help improve and develop the Trust’s ERA service.

Mystery Shopping
A mystery shopper is someone who uses our services and tells us what can be improved whether we are getting things right. This could involve visiting our offices, making telephone calls, or sending letters and emails and also carrying out the same activities across the Paragon group. Mystery shopping allows EHT and Paragon to develop our service standards to customers.

Contract Monitoring
Contract Monitors look at the cleaning service provided by contractors on behalf of EHT on a quarterly basis to ensure the contractors are providing the service they are being paid for and to a standard that residents are happy with.
How will you ensure that your approach to community cohesion is sustainable?

The Menu of Involvement makes us accountable to our residents and indeed our regulatory body the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) it clearly states what we do, how much time commitment is required and how frequent the meetings are. It also states what the aims and objectives of that particular group is and how the decisions made within this group impacts on the day to day running of the business. This gives great transparency in what we do and how we operate.

Up until the start of this year, we had a separate magazine for each subsidiary and we consulted with residents to create a succinct Group magazine to replace this. We utilised our Reading Panel and some of our other involved residents to consult on the design and implementation of a new Group residents' magazine. Also, by publishing residents stories in our new residents magazines (eg. July 2010 – Morrison update – resident case study), all of our residents can see that we are open and honest in our decision making processes and that we are inclusive of residents’ feedback.

The Menu of Involvement clearly states the objectives of Resident Involvement for Elmbridge Housing Trust and indeed, Paragon Community Housing Group. If we don’t deliver on these objectives, we are open to a visible failure thus making the initiative more accountable to our residents.