

Report of West North West homes Leeds WNWhL

Report to Inner North West Area Committee

Date: 25th October 2012

Subject: West North West Homes Leeds Involvement in Area Committees

Are specific electoral Wards affected?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): Hyde Park & Woodhouse Headingley Kirkstall Weetwood		
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number:		
Appendix number:		

Summary of main issues

1. WNWhL provide a range of housing management services in the West and North West of Leeds. The Inner North West Area Committee area is coterminous with the 'Inner North West' housing management area comprising 6456 properties in the Kirkstall, Weetwood, Hyde Park and Woodhouse Wards. Tenancy and Estate Management services are delivered locally from our offices located in Kirkstall and Little London and we also operate a number of Outreach Surgeries in the area.
2. Support services such as rent accounting, lettings and property repairs are delivered through a centralised structure, however all customer enquiries can be made locally at the Kirkstall Neighbourhood Office and at the Little London Neighbourhood Office or via the Council Contact Centre.
3. This report seeks to advise the Area Committee of activities undertaken by WNWhL which impact on local communities, and more Corporate activities and achievements which affect the wider community.
4. This is the first of two bi-annual reports, agreed by Area Committee in 2011, to provide an update of activities and services undertaken by WNWhL.

Recommendations

Area Committee Members are asked to note the content of this report.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 To outline the purpose of West North West homes Leeds (WNWhL) involvement in Area Committees, and to explore ways of making that involvement as meaningful and productive as possible.

2 Background information

- 2.1 An introductory report was submitted to the Inner North West Area Committee in September 2011 outlining areas of mutual interest and opportunities to promote collaborative working for the benefit of communities in Inner North West Leeds. The report recommended that WNWhL should provide further, more detailed, reports on a twice yearly basis; it was agreed that these reports would fall into the Autumn & Springtime cycle of meetings.
- 2.2 WNWhL delivers services to customers through a combination of centralised and decentralised structures. Generally speaking, estate and tenancy management functions are delivered locally by the Neighbourhood Housing Team based at the Neighbourhood Housing Offices at Kirkstall and Little London. Support services such as Lettings, Income Management and Repairs are delivered through a centralised structure, however enquiries for the range of services we provide can be handled at the local offices. The bulk of customer enquiries are processed through the Council Contact Centre, with whom WNWhL has a Service Delivery Agreement.
- 2.3 This report focuses on examples of joint working and activities which promote community involvement and well being within the Inner North West area. However, it is important to note that the Community Safety update report, submitted to the Area Committee, also features examples of collaboration and joint working between WNWhL, West Yorkshire Police, Area Management and other partner agencies.

3 Main issues

3.1 Environmental Management

3.1.1 Partnership working

The Neighbourhood Housing Team is a key partner in the monthly Multi Tasking meetings which take place with partners including; West Yorkshire Police, Community Safety Unit, Environmental Action Team, the Leeds West Anti Social Behaviour Team Area Management and Youth Services. The meeting is designed to share local information and intelligence and agree local priorities and joint actions for delivering service improvements. Local priorities primarily focus on crime and grime (environmental) issues.

Since the last Committee update partner action days have been held on the Hawksworth Wood Estate and this area is currently scoring good, moving towards excellent, in our Estate Grading process. There is a further action day planned for the Hyde Park Estate this month concentrating on the Thornvilles. The focus here will be to reduce crime, fly tipping and graffiti. West North West homes, the Police and the Environmental Enforcement Team will be taking part, with a further week of action

commencing the 29th October 2012 focussing on an environmental clean up with our Caretaking Team and Probation Services.

WNWhL has an active role in the delivery of local action days, including provision and delivery of promotional information, staffing resources through our Neighbourhood Management Officers and Neighbourhood Caretakers and where environmental improvements are required, we fund and provide skips. The Inner North West housing team have carried out a number of action days across the area since March, with noticeable improvements in environmental conditions. We currently do not have any estates graded poor, and are working on those estates that are currently graded acceptable, to raise them to good and above.

The local action days also include partnership working with the Police and the Environmental Enforcement Team. In August, an action day at Moor Grange Court was carried with a focus on gathering evidence regarding allegations of noise, drug use and communal area issues as well as environmental works to the communal areas surrounding the block. This has resulted in overall improvements for residents in the area.

Joint work with the Environmental Action Team has taken place in the Hyde Park and Belle Vue areas issuing fines for fly tipping to both private tenants and council. An environmental action day was held on the Lovell Park estate involving a new Street Champion. We have organised clean up days on the Carlton estate, the Servia estate, the Rillbank estate and the Iveson and Silk Mill estates.

As part of this years Tenancy and Estate Management Service Improvement Plan, WNWhL has also been carrying out action days visiting all residents living in our high rise flats in order for them to identify any issues and have a say in what their top priorities for action are. On the action day at Beevers Court we were joined by the Police and local Ward Members and feedback has been very positive.

By the end of October 2012, all 19 of the high rise blocks in the Inner North West area will have been visited and profiled. This will tell us the top 3 priorities for each block and will also help identify any cross area themes that can be addressed corporately for example prioritising investment needs in next years investment plan. We will keep our residents updated on progress with their priorities and hope to see improvements in both high rise grading results and in customer satisfaction levels for customers living in high rise blocks.

Locality Working has been piloted in the Outer West area and has been featured in reports to Area Committee by the Locality Manager. Building on the successes we are developing a similar approach in the Inner North West area, and during recent discussions, the Woodbridge area has been suggested as a possible location to extend the pilot in our area.

WNWhL is continuing to work with the Police on operation Optimal to tackle and reduce burglary in the area. Each week we receive details of burglary hot spot areas, this is shared with our NMOs and Neighbourhood Caretakers and their work patterns are arranged so we can have a visible presence in the area, wearing our high visibility vests and being extra vigilant which acts as a deterrent to potential burglars.

3.1.2 Neighbourhood Caretaking.

The WNWhL Neighbourhood Caretaking Teams provide a front line environmental service, patrolling estates and communal areas of multi storey accommodation daily, ensuring a high visible presence to deter illegal dumping, illegal entry, vandalism and other acts of anti social behaviour. The team act as the eyes and ears on the estate reporting and recording any illegal activity and breaches of tenancy. They provide a patrol service of estates on a planned basis, assessing and dealing with environmental issues in communal areas, such as ginnels walkways and communal land where hotspots exist.

The Neighbourhood Caretaking Team attend our local action days and have cut back shrubs and carried out litter picking in the Rillbanks, carried out a general tidy of the Lovell Park high rise blocks and cut back shrubs and tidied the car park area at Iveson Garth. Litter picking and shrub work has also been carried out to Norman Towers, the Clayton blocks, and Grayson Crest and clearance of the bin area at Woodbridge Gardens clearing refuse and overgrown shrubs has also been undertaken.

As part of this years Service Improvements, WNWhL has set up an Environmental Caretaker Apprenticeship Scheme. We are delighted with the recruitment of 4 apprentices fall from Leeds, and they started working with us on Monday 17th September 2012. The apprentices will work primarily on our Vulnerable Persons Gardening Scheme and as they develop their skills we aim to introduce a new Handyperson Service for vulnerable customers. One of our existing caretakers was successful in applying for the Apprentice Mentor Supervisor role and he is already progressing this work with the new team.

In their first week the apprentices were provided with Personal Protective Equipment, uniforms, tools and a vehicle. They have each passed a number of Health and Safety and other E learning courses to gain their first certificates, have been out on estate inspections, met the MP for Pudsey and are now ready for action.

3.1.3 Estate Inspections & Gradings.

In line with our published service standards WNWhL arranges regular Estate Inspections which take place on a monthly basis for each area; and quarterly Estate Gradings for each area. Estate Gradings are promoted on our website and WNWhL welcomes the opportunity for customers, partners and other representatives to attend the inspections and grade the areas for us.

Issues identified may be the responsibility of other Council Departments e.g. Highways, Parks & Countryside and the Inspections provide an opportunity for other agencies to contribute to improving environmental conditions and quality of life for local people. Members of Area Committee, and colleagues within Area Management, are invited to contact the author of this report should there be any interest in attending one of the estate inspections.

Findings from the estate inspections are used to identify where improvements are needed and link to our Local Neighbourhood Action Plan and Area Panel Funding

process to help with funding in addressing some of the issues. For example in the Hyde Park and Marlborough Neighbourhood Plan litter is an issue and the NMO is working with partners to identify a new way to collect rubbish which will go to Area Panel for funding.

3.1.4 Service Improvement – Out of Hours Team

Through customer feedback we identified concerns particularly from residents living in high rise flats, of vandalism and Anti Social Behaviour after 5pm and at weekends. WNWhL made a decision to invest in a new Out Of Hours Tenancy Team to work during evening hours 4pm until 12pm from Tuesday to Sunday each week. The team was launched in July 2012 as a pilot for 3 months, consisting of 4 Officers working in pairs carrying out various Tenancy Management functions including home visits, identifying abandoned and sub let properties and providing covert surveillance of our MSF at weekends in order to be able to provide witness statements in Anti Social Behaviour cases. The officers have been well received on the estates and customer feedback has been very positive to date as the officers have increased our visibility on the estates providing reassurance to our customers. The new service is due to be officially launched soon.

3.1.5 Grounds Maintenance

A new contract commenced on 1 January 2012 with Continental Landscapes LTD. As part of the new ways of working WNWhL has vastly extended the amount of monitoring of the contract in empowering all our Neighbourhood Management Officers at the local level to take responsibility. A new process has been implemented which is more robust than previously, focussing on contractual compliance and quality.

After an anticipated shaky start and the wettest summer on record, feedback from customers and performance information suggests performance is on target and delivering successfully against the contract. Continental have achieved over 90% of grass cut right first time and 99% of grass cut to specification overall. The cutting season is nearing conclusion with the last cut in October, and we will be able to present a fuller picture of performance in future reports.

3.2 Area Panels

WNWhL has four Area Panels, which have the same boundaries as Leeds City Council's Inner and Outer West and Inner and Outer North West Area Committees. The Area Panels have an active role in setting and agreeing local priorities using local Community Partnership Agreements. They have a delegated budget and are able to approve bid submissions for issues such as:

- Environmental schemes
- Community safety schemes
- Tenant involvement schemes

This year funding has been agreed for various schemes across the area including additional signage to Moorgrange Court and Norman Towers to improve floor signage and a new Community notice board at Norman Towers; seating to the communal areas

of Queenswood Court and Moor Grange Court; low level fencing to the bungalows on Cardigan Lane, which will improve security and safety for the residents; and fencing to the garage site at Silk Mill Gardens and round Iveson Lawn.

3.3 Neighbourhood Improvement Plans

As part of our journey for improving areas and making sure we are targeting our resources in the right places, we are developing four local Neighbourhood Action Plans for the Inner North West area, Little London and Woodhouse, Marlboroughs and Hyde Park, Kirkstall and Headingley and Weetwood. The draft plans have been shared with Tenant and Residents Groups and Partners and once agreed will be made available on our website.

These local Neighbourhood Plans will feed into larger plans such as the Corporate Burglary Reduction plan, the Hawksworth Wood Plan and the Hyde Park Plan and should identify opportunities for joint funding projects with Area Committee contributing to area improvements.

As part of strengthening our service capacity and generating more investment, WNWhL has appointed an External Funding Officer. The Officer has met with the NMOs and Tenant and Residents Groups and is currently exploring funding opportunities for a MUGA on the unused garage site at the Marlboroughs.

3.4 Community Engagement

WNWhL has a successful track record in community engagement and we have recently been awarded accreditation by the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) after scoring very highly on our assessment.

There are more than 15 different involvement methods that customers can access to become involved with WNWhL. These range from traditional Tenant & Residents Associations, of which there are 12 in the Inner West area, to innovative forums such as the Sheltered Housing Forum and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Group.

Some other examples of community engagement have included:

- Working with partner agencies during our Customer Involvement Week where we held a surgery in the Little London Community Centre to promote 'Immobilise' with the Police and CASAC.
- Holding local surgeries at some of our Sheltered housing schemes, Kendall Carr, Carlton Croft and at Queenswood Court, St Vincents at Weetwood and STEPS, St Andrews Church, Spen Lane. We also hold a surgery at the Children's Centre on the Hawksworth Wood estate.
- Attendance by Neighbourhood Housing Office staff at tenant and resident meetings
- Having a staff at the Kirkstall Festival and Hawksworth Wood Fun day..

We are currently awaiting the outcome of an assessment for the Social Housing Equality Framework (SHEF) and retain our Customer Service Excellence (CSE) award.

3.5 Financial Inclusion & Welfare Reform

WNWhL has an agreed Financial Inclusion Strategy which includes the strategic priority : Access to Housing Benefit and other Welfare Benefits. Using customer profiling data and the Deprivation Index, WNWhL plans 2 take up campaigns annually in parallel with our rent arrears campaigns. We are preparing for the Government's planned Welfare Reforms by collaborating with the other Leeds ALMOs, RSLs and the Leeds Benefits and Revenues Service. In terms of the 'bedroom tax' – a reduction in benefit entitlement for claimants under-occupying their property, we are implementing a home visit programme to raise awareness and discuss the options currently available. In the Inner North West area this amounts to approximately 900 visits, which are to be shared amongst our Customer Account Team, the NMOs, and Independent Living Teams. There are 251 visits to be carried out by the NMOs.

The Strategy also includes the priorities of Debt Prevention and Early Intervention, and Access to Support and Financial Services. In terms of support we continue to work with Leeds City Credit Union and promote their products and services, and signpost customers to the voluntary sector for advice in appropriate circumstances. A recent Service Improvement initiative has been the implementation of a Hardship Fund and tenants from Inner West have accounted for 24.5% of the cases referred, indicating the financial hardship and difficulties that many of our customers are experiencing.

As we review and develop our Strategy, the Unemployment and NEET agendas are adopting a higher profile, and it is envisaged that Worklessness may form a 4th strategic priority when we refresh the Financial Inclusion Strategy in the future. We already have partnership links with Job Centre Plus and this development will encourage and facilitate further joint working and collaboration with Area Management and other areas of the Council and wider Public Sector. We are promoting the worklessness agenda with our West North West Works project, and are seeking to appoint a Financial Inclusion Officer to further develop service delivery in this area.

Working with colleagues in LCC Customer Services, we are awaiting the outcome of a bid to the DWP that will provide additional resources at the Bramley NHO and Armley 1SC aimed directly at supporting and helping local residents deal with the implications of the Welfare Reform programme, for example being able to make benefit claims on line.

3.6 Repair Services

Area Committee members will be aware that WNWhL, along with Aire Valley Homes (AVH), commenced a new maintenance contract with Morrison FS in 2011. Problems have been experienced since the start of the contract due to a number of issues and WNWhL saw an increase in the number of customer complaints and enquiries from Ward Members regarding the completion of repairs to Council properties.

Earlier this year the Council and ALMOs jointly agreed a recovery plan with Morrison and this is being very carefully managed by senior managers & executives. Recent press coverage and statements from the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Communities indicate that whilst we are working with the contractors to achieve improvements in services, a very robust stance is being taken, with the Council

considering all options going forward. We are pleased to report that we are seeing some improvements.

Morrison provide a member of staff to attend the Kirkstall and Little London Office on a weekly basis as a means of support for customers and staff experiencing problems. In addition Morrison have established a secondary call handling centre at their Leeds HQ and communication problems are also starting to improve as a result of this initiative.

4.0 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

This report confirms the commitment of WNWhL to consult and engage with residents wherever possible. We also seek to consult with stakeholders including Area Management and other Council Departments where appropriate.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

The services and functions described in this report are consistent with the Council's and WNWhL's approach to Equality Diversity and Cohesion.

4.3 Council Policies and City Priorities

The content of this report is consistent with the WNWhL strategic objectives, and the strategic aims of the Council encompassed by the Vision for Leeds; Leeds Children & Young Person Plan; Strategic Health & Wellbeing Plan.

4.4 Resources and Value for Money

No direct implications, services delivered by WNWhL are within budget allocated through the Management Fee arrangements.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

No direct implications. This report is not eligible for call in, due to being a Council Function.

4.6 Risk Management

WNWhL has a corporate approach to risk management, with risks to business prioritised according to likelihood and impact. Risks are mitigated by action planning accordingly.

5.0 Conclusions

It is concluded that there are clear benefits and opportunities for WNWhL working closely with the Area Committee as outlined in this report. This approach provides the opportunity to develop services and deliver joined up solutions to support local communities.

6. Recommendations

Members are invited to note this report, and it is recommended that WNWhL provide a further six monthly update to Area Committee in the Springtime.

7. Background documents

None