



plus dane group



Resident involvement in the competitive
**Procurement Commissioning Team and
Asset Management Engagement Group** for
Plus Dane responsive repairs, out of hour's
emergency works, packaged repairs, work
to void properties and gas servicing.

The Contract

£32 million contract for responsive repairs, out of hour's emergency works, packaged repairs, work to void properties and gas servicing to 7,000 properties.

About Plus Dane Group - A Neighbourhood investor

An experienced, innovative and responsive organisation, Plus Dane Group describes itself as a Neighbourhood Investor (NI), setting ourselves the mission of doing everything we can and using all available assets to improve quality of life, choice and opportunity for the people living in our homes and neighbourhoods.

Plus Dane delivers 'seven promises' which were developed in partnership with residents and it is these promises that form the seven key objectives of the Plus Dane Group:

- **Increase investment in existing homes**
- **Create great places to live**
- **Increase community safety measures**
- **Provide further support to vulnerable people**
- **Support resident involvement**
- **Create local jobs**
- **Increase the supply and choice of homes available**

With over 30 years' experience of working with urban and inner-city communities in Merseyside and over 10 years' experience of working with rural and urban communities in Cheshire, the group has over 16,000 homes in ownership and management, employs over 500 people involved in delivering neighbourhood management, employment interventions, economic development and quality housing in 13 different neighbourhoods spanning 6 Local Authority Areas, has an asset value in excess of £500M, a combined development fund in excess of £200M and an annual turnover of £52M.

Using a powerful combination of physical development, neighbourhood management, community engagement and social enterprise, Plus Dane Group strives to improve social and economic well-being, create sustainable communities and direct wealth into some of the region's most challenging neighbourhoods. Plus Dane is experienced in supporting resident led initiatives to deliver new and improved homes and regenerated neighbourhoods and the delivery of the above contract was a new and innovative approach to involving our residents more.





Our Story - Why this service was innovative

*As told by Alan Griffiths,
Plus Dane Resident since 1989*

The Promise to Residents

Supporting resident involvement is at the heart of what Plus Dane do and everything from the content of the resident magazine to major procurement projects comes out of engagement with the people we serve.

So when the contract was up for renewal, we recognised very early on that in order to 'get it right first time', nobody was in a better position to guide and inform Plus Dane about resident needs and aspirations than us, the people who live in the homes and neighbourhoods and it was us residents that would decide who were the best people to deliver the contract.

"I feel privileged that as a tenant I was asked to take part in the selection process. We got to pick the right team to carry out the repairs to our homes - it was vital that our voices were heard"

Des Finley, Resident

The work of the Procurement Commissioning Team

Previously delivered by a number of contractors who bid alongside other companies for future work, the procurement of this contract was unique for a variety of reasons.

12 resident volunteers from the **Asset Management Engagement Group** gave up a total of **250** days of their time in the procurement process, it was not an easy task and a lot of valuable time and commitment was required. The work of the group included;

- Establishing a **Procurement Commissioning Team** that involved intensive training and support to assist residents through the procurement process.
- Measuring the current service and setting the standards for future service delivery to customers and their homes.
- Procurement; short listing, scoring, interviews, presentations and site visits to a number of shortlisted companies across Merseyside, Cheshire and Staffordshire to speak with the staff and existing customers of those firms.
- The interview, site visits and presentations was quite a surprise for many of the bidders who found their carefully put together presentations picked over by people with a passionate stake in their homes, who asked direct questions and expected direct answers.
- Ongoing and Future Involvement; as residents we will be involved in the ongoing performance management of the contract through our **Asset Management Engagement Group**. Progress is reported on the successful mobilisation of the contract, the transition, induction of staff involved in TUPE, the ongoing management of repairs and maintenance services and the satisfaction standards expected from residents.

“You don’t often have the responsibility of deciding peoples jobs and lives, it was only when it was all over that we reflected on the enormity of it and I feel we did the best for our fellow tenants”

Resident - Lillian Hazel

Lillian has been a resident for almost 11 years, originally a resident of Dane Housing since the stock transfer from Congleton Borough Council, now a tenant board member of Plus Dane Group for 3 years.



Benefits - What we wanted from the winning contractors

As a resident I have been previously involved in a partnership of working with contractors who were managing the Plus Dane repairs and maintenance contracts through the Asset Management Engagement Group, so I was one of the first to volunteer to be part of the commissioning process for this tender.

I am proud of what we have achieved as part of the Procurement Commissioning Team, and the staff at Plus Dane has ensured that we as residents have been involved in every aspect of the procurement process, making sure that what we wanted and expected as a standard requirement from the repairs and maintenance service and we were able to set those standards.

- We wanted the winning contractors to 'Buy in' to our Neighbourhood Investor (NI) values and promises Plus Dane Group has made to its customers
- We wanted a clear customer led delivery focus, in which contractors had to show how they would improve on the existing high levels of customer satisfaction levels we were achieving
- We wanted value for money without cutting quality
- We wanted more resident involvement in the contract and performance management of the winning contractor

Training - Building the skills and confidence to ask the right questions

Being involved in the procurement process enabled us to ensure contractors met the key criteria from the residents view point. Through our training we were confident and able enough to ask direct questions to prospective contractors, we wanted them to be aware of our needs and high expectations as residents and that our involvement in the process did not end at contract award stage, but would carry on throughout the lifetime of the contract, ensuring standards are maintained and residents are involved in decisions about our homes and the services we receive.

Awarding the Contract

A total of 22 contractors submitted tenders and after a lengthy and intensive process we successfully appointed Plus Dane 'in house' DLO team in Cheshire, which currently enjoys a 98% satisfaction rate among tenants in the country, and two other contractors (Smiths SD and Penny Lane Builders) to deliver attentive responsive and voids repairs in accordance with our Neighbourhood Investor (NI) model.

New Staff - New Culture Change

As a result of winning the new contract 56 staff was TUPE transferred over to Plus Dane from two of the previous contract holders and a detailed mobilisation plan was delivered.

Two induction days were held at Aintree Racecourse for existing and new staff, including our 12 residents involved in the procurement process. The days were a way for all staff and residents to get to know each other, an introduction for new staff to Plus Dane Group and how we deliver our Neighbourhood Investor promises. All the new staff were issued with new uniforms and tools and as part of the induction days we introduced a fleet of new vans.

What was different about this process is how it has been 'stepped up a gear' and the intense involvement in residents to have more of a say in the decision making process and training us in order to empower us to make the right decisions. This was a real eye opener for me and reassured me that the commitment and promises Plus Dane have made to its customers are real.



Plus Dane Story

*As told by Adrian Pennington
– Head of Commercial Business*



Why our resident involvement process was innovative

Residents were fundamental to not only being involved in the procurement of the contract but **owning the service** to ensure it is fit for their purpose. The level of scrutiny that was involved in the process was very detailed and intense and the resident training before the process started enabled them to understand the different aspects and complexity of how to pick the right contractor.

Our residents knew that bidders could not just put a 'tick in the box' to say they comply with our standards of service; they wanted bidders to provide the evidence to back up what they were saying on paper.

They were there from day 1 in a central role at the centre of all discussions, support planning, interviews and site visits. The training we provided allowed them to learn and understand how to score bidders and how to ask the key questions that mattered to them.

What was so special and innovative about the approach our resident took was the way they structured the questions and the site visits, for example at interview they asked bidders; **Tell us what you do?** And at the site visits they asked; **Show us what you do?**

How the service has improved for residents

With the previous contractors our residents were very often visited by different trades people for different jobs. The new contract has allowed us the freedom to create several **Neighbourhood Trades Teams** who work only in a specific neighbourhood on the same properties. The benefit of this approach to our residents means that they are not visited each time by a different tradesperson and they can see a familiar face all the time and have a dedicated trades team that serves their neighbourhood area.

Our trades team are now able to do other jobs at a residents home besides the job they have been called out to, for example, if a trades person attends a property to fix a repair and notices it needs an another repair or additional work they have the tools and equipment to carry out that work without the resident having to phone up the call centre, book another repair appointment and wait for another tradesperson to come and do the job.

Through this method and by jobs not getting passed over to sub contractors we now have a speedier response time to customer's repairs, meaning we have better time control response systems in place and have reduced time delays.



Financial Benefits

In a time when there is financial uncertainty within the economy and many organizations are making efficiency savings and job cuts, we have been able to create new jobs and apprenticeship placements within Plus Dane Group to deliver this contract. Not only have we created vacancies within the trades team but also a new team for quality checking and customer service.

We have made efficiency savings by being able to do more planned works in resident properties, reduce duplication, improved cost control and the added bonus of saving Plus Dane more than £500,000 in annual efficiency savings with a further £150,000 annual savings following the increase in VAT from January 2011 as a result of bringing the work in house. This money will be used to further increase investment in the communities we serve as well as providing better training for our staff, new tools and equipment and increase van stocks.

What made this process work

What made our procurement process so different from others was the involvement of our residents right from the start of the process and not just bringing them in at the 11th hour to say we had resident involvement. We had our residents involved at the beginning by making sure they understood the legalities of contract management, this process was a learning curve for us all, with our main aim to improve the standard and quality of service our residents receive in order to live in decent homes and neighbourhoods and I can confidently say we have achieved this goal.



“People are going to notice the difference and can feel a lot more secure in how their landlord delivers repairs and maintenance of properties. The whole thing is very inspiring; tenants are driving a better service as customers”

Resident - Shaf Choudhary

Setting the standard for other organisations to follow

Our procurement process and working with our residents to set their own high customer standards for contractors to meet, has ensured that the residents experience was a positive one.

We hope others can replicate our model of customer care and involvement and use our model as a golden thread that is central to the delivery of services and is embedded across all work streams when tendering contracts and/or delivering services to customers.

In December this year we have been asked to take part in a Procurement Facilitation event organised by RLK Partnerships, using our procurement process as a model of good practice. We have been asked to join a panel of 'experts' that will advise both suppliers and other organisations of how we delivered our procurement process for the repairs and maintenance contract, know their capabilities and the services they can offer, how best to understand customer needs and involve customers in the process.

As part of the event we will also be leading a workshop around the following themed discussions based on the practical issues of bidding for and procuring contracts:

- How to get your first contract, your first step on the ladder
- Quality standards – debating the pros and cons for small suppliers
- Community engagement activities – how do I get my ideas taken up by RSLs?
- How to sell the benefits of being a local supplier
- Supplying staff development activities – what is the best route?
- Advice for local suppliers – selling local benefits
- Added value – what do procurement officers want to see in these questions – some good examples.
- What are the most common tendering mistakes?

Our resident involvement does not end at contract award stage and we ensure that all our customers and stakeholders receive a high quality, value for money service. And it is within this ethos that we hope to use this event to lead the way for other organisations to see the benefits of customer involvement to ensure they carry out their duties as a good and conscious landlord/contractor; **with customers at the heart of their business.**

