

Wolverhampton Homes – Decent Homes extra care



Client best at meeting residents' needs



Wolverhampton Homes

“ Providing people focused excellent services
and good quality housing according to individual
needs and choices wherever possible ”

NATIONAL HOUSING MAINTENANCE FORUM AWARDS 2009



Delivering Decent Homes and supporting vulnerable people

BACKGROUND

Wolverhampton Homes is the largest social landlord in Wolverhampton and is responsible for managing 23,600 council homes.

Our mission is 'Providing people focused excellent services and good quality housing according to individual needs and choices wherever possible'.

Our Decent Homes programme was launched in 2008 to deliver a £400m investment over five years in partnership with three contractors, Bullock Construction, Frank Haslam Milan and Thomas Vale. Wolverhampton Homes manages this programme for all council housing in the city (including properties managed by Tenant Management Organisations). We have worked to make this programme, the biggest investment in social housing for many years, as inclusive as possible to meet peoples' individual needs. It makes a huge impact on the quality of life for tenants.

We know that building work can be very disruptive and so by looking at our tenants' age, disability or ethnicity we can tailor work to suit their needs and support them more closely during the programme.

Wolverhampton has an aging population with a growing number of elderly people over 85, an increasing number diagnosed with dementia and a significant percentage of tenants have a long term condition including physical or sensory disability, mental illness or a learning disability. The community is diverse. In recent years we have seen an increase in the black and minority ethnic population (BME tenants only at 13%) and a reduction in the non-BME population. Some areas have a higher percentage of new migrant and ethnic minority residents.

We also recognise and embrace our responsibility to contribute to the wider aspirations of our tenants and wider residents of the city. The Decent Homes programme has major benefits for the city as a whole, through the contribution to the local economy, creation of employment and training opportunities and improvements to neighbourhoods. Each year we take on 30 apprentices and 15 trainees generally who have not achieved curriculum targets.

Wolverhampton Homes manages homes in some of the most deprived parts of the city. Many council tenants are amongst the most disadvantaged groups, a number of families with children have complex and challenging needs and a minority have drug and substance abuse problems.



DELIVERING LEADING CUSTOMER SERVICE TAILORED TO INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

Since Wolverhampton Homes was launched our tenants have always come first and our customer ethos has driven the arrangements for delivering our Decent Homes programme through our partnering contractors. We knew there was a range of vulnerable tenants with diverse support needs, and there was a risk that without support they would not be able to cope with the upheaval of major works and there could be a high rate of refusals.

We fully understand nobody likes upheaval in their home. A major challenge was to ensure our three partnering contractors, their managers and operatives and their sub-contractors were able to deliver our Decent Homes improvements in a way which is responsive to tenants' individual needs. We want to make sure the refurbishment of tenants' homes is a positive experience for tenants and disruption to their routine is kept to a minimum.

Before the programme started we worked directly with tenants so they could tell us what was important to them. From this we put together a number of communications packages to help our tenants understand the Decent Homes programme and the amount of work that could be carried out in their home.

DVD Students from the local Wulfrun College were involved in producing a Decent Homes DVD in English and eight community languages with subtitles showing tenants what is involved. The tenant liaison team arranges for tenants to view the DVD in their own homes before the start of work. (This was highly commended by the Audit Commission in 2007).

Decent Homes tenants information pack

A highly informative Decent Homes Tenants Information Pack (available in large print or another language if required) is given to tenants before the work starts. This includes: -

- A step by step guide to all works from start to finish
- Explanation of the roles of the site team
- Important telephone numbers including out of hours
- Health and safety advice
- Photographs showing the extent of the work
- Advice on cleaning and maintenance after the works
- Fridge magnet showing useful numbers
- Security and bogus caller advice
- Energy saving hints and tips
- Advice on home content insurance
- Debt advice
- Pension Service referral to help vulnerable older people to maximise access to the benefits they are entitled to and to get debt and pensions advice



Skilled tenant liaison team We have delivered training workshops for all tenant liaison officers (TLO) to make sure through the partnership this team has the skills and competency to deliver excellent Customer Care Plus service.



Identification All our operatives wear a high visibility yellow vest or jacket and photographic ID badge. In response to customer feedback, the tenant liaison team wear orange so they can be easily recognised by tenants.

House diary This is used to communicate with tenants while work is going on in their home. It includes a section to be filled in by the site team at

the end of each day to say which trade is coming in next and when they will arrive. This keeps tenants informed on a daily basis of the on-going work.

Occupational therapists There are two occupational therapists who do assessments in the tenant's home before work starts and make recommendations that take account of health, disability or sensory needs. This has been vital for us to deliver a better adaptations process for our tenants to enhance independence and improve quality of life.

Tenant profile A tenant profile form is completed for everyone on the Decent Homes programme to identify their individual support needs. Work can be fast-tracked minimising disruption or we can make special working arrangements for tenants who work unusual hours or have medical appointments.

Information sharing Customer profile and vulnerability data is shared with our partnering contractors so they are aware of tenants' needs.

Vulnerability toolbox talks Wolverhampton Homes' equalities officer put together a toolbox talk presentation with a range of optional inserts designed to guide site teams and operatives so they can better understand and be responsive to different health and cultural needs. This information is given to all site personnel so everyone is informed before works starts.



“The vulnerable tenants guide along with the extra care and attention afforded by the tenant liaison officers were considered to be exceptional and unique.”

Inspectors summary report of the Considerate Construction Scheme August 2007 – April 2009. Wolverhampton Homes is the only client partnership to receive Considerate Construction accreditation.

Audit process Rob Mason, tenant auditor, is auditing the exchange of information, one of his priorities is to check tenants' information is being kept secure. He said: “I am impressed with the tenant profile form and the tenant liaison teams have a high level of commitment and they really care about tenants.”



Cleanliness High levels of cleanliness are required at all times, actions plans have been put together to provide improved floor covering, dust sheets and dust extraction. All materials also need to be cleared away at the end of each day, we incentivised certain KPI's which were tenant priorities. This led to lean construction principles being applied to reduce the amount of time spent in tenant's homes.

Arrangements for respite We have set-up joint funding arrangements with social services to provide respite placements for vulnerable tenants who need extra care.

Tenancy sustainment Proactive arrangements are in place to deal with dirty and unhygienic properties to encourage and support tenants to meet the conditions of their tenancy. Feed back from colleagues is also used to initiate tenancy audits.

Clutter Storage options are available and through Community Transport there is a free collection service to re-use and recycle unwanted good quality furniture and electrical goods.

Aftercare decorating scheme Decorating is automatically carried out when we replace a bathroom or kitchen and decorating grants are also



available for other rooms. We have also launched an aftercare decorating scheme for vulnerable, elderly or disabled tenants. In partnership with Wolverhampton College and Timken Training Centre we train recruits to decorate. This is very popular with tenants. It also provides training and employment for local people usually who have not achieved curriculum attainment levels or need additional support post qualification.

Making improvements We have used lean construction principles for constant monitoring and review to reduce timescales for carrying out work in each property from 25 days to an average of 13 days.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO THE CLIENT?

We tailor our Decent Homes work to the tenant's home, kitchens are designed to take account of tenants own appliances. Tenants themselves have helped to shape the choice of materials we use and the colour options.

Tenants have influenced the scope of works, leading to the fitting of over bath showers allowing for water, energy conservation and cultural preference which fits in with our equality agenda.

Our scope of works reflects a Lifetime Homes Strategy making sure we are responsive to the needs of an ageing population. Light switches, electrical sockets and fuse boards are being fitted to an agreed height.

We apply a zero defects standard and tenants are involved in signing off completed works. We have product warranties and a 12 month defect liability period giving reassurance and peace of mind while reducing the impact for ongoing repairs and maintenance.

Tenant satisfaction is monitored for workmanship, cleanliness and service. We value and act on the feedback received from tenants. Examples include the cleanliness action plan and house diary mentioned above. We also arrange for tenant volunteers to 'mystery shop' so we can make sure all our services are to a high standard.

Our tenant board members take an active interest in Decent Homes by regularly attending operational meetings where they play a key role in shaping and monitoring the delivery of the programme.

Satisfaction figures for the quality of work have always been above 90 per cent showing we are meeting the needs of our tenants.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO THE CONTRACTOR?

We are helping our contractors to gain access to tenants' homes by effective upfront planning by the customer liaison teams and early identification and resolution of potential difficulties. This makes it easier for contractors to stick to their programme and complete work in target timescales.



We share advice from our alert register so our contractors know if for example there is a recommendation to visit in pairs, this keeps staff safe.

With our contractors we have held special women in construction days to get more girls and women into the industry. Some tenants do feel uncomfortable with an all male team working in their home, especially women of a Muslim faith or victims of domestic violence.

A number of colleagues from across the partnership are also participating in NVQ training in Business Improvement Techniques, again this is the first in the Country developed with Wolverhampton City College.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO THE RESIDENT?

Supporting inclusion and equality and diversity is key to Wolverhampton Homes. This contributes to the wider corporate agenda for supporting inclusion by reducing and preventing vulnerability among adults and families.

We identify and help people who are not coping with their current circumstances. We know tenants can be vulnerable for a variety of reasons and work with other agencies to offer them help and advice.

Mr Bell

Mr Bell, age 78, lives in a sheltered accommodation and was assessed by our occupational

therapist. The kitchen was ergonomically designed to give wheelchair access, optimum reach and comfort using low level pull down baskets and base units for easy access, a side opening oven and hob with front controls.



Mr Bell can now wash himself rather than relying on a carer thanks to a new level access shower with special flooring.

The new adaptations have helped him live more independently without the need of carers which has improved his quality of life.

Mrs A

This 87-year-old had a new ramp installed as her carer was struggling to lift her wheelchair over a six inch step at the front door, and inside the house sockets have been raised and a level access shower installed. Mrs A thanked us for carrying out all the work so quickly and she was very pleased with the adaptations to her home environment. Everyday tasks are easier and has lead to a sense of well being and recovery.





Mrs Potter

She has been through modernisation works before, but now at the age of 90 and with health and mobility problems she was worried how she would cope. The tenant liaison team joined forces with the local estate manager to do an early visit, they arranged help with packing and the site team helped to set up a living area in the bedroom whilst her living room was redecorated. The occupational therapist recommended some extra grab rails, special door handles with thumb turns and additional safety chains fitted on her new doors.

She said: "It has been really beneficial to have this work done. With my disability, I don't get out much. It is lovely to sit in fresh new surroundings. I'm really pleased with everything they did."

Mr Saunders

He sadly lost his wife just before the Decent Homes works and was vulnerable due to his age, mobility and hearing impairments. He uses walking aids and has a stair lift to access his first floor.

We postponed the works until he felt able to cope and his property was slotted back into the programme easily. The tenant liaison team helped with packing and now Mr Saunders is delighted with his new kitchen and newly decorated living room.

Paula Walker, TLO, said: "If the team hadn't paid extra attention to detail and met the requirements

of a disabled and an extremely vulnerable tenant, the outcome may have been a lot less positive."

TLO Kirsty McDonald used PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) to communicate with a tenant who is deaf and has speech impairment. This was useful when the sign language interpreter was not present.



The PECS system enables pictures or symbols to be linked with words and is a useful tool to aid communication with people with speech problems or who have difficulty reading English. We've found PECS is also effective for tenants with sight impairment by using enlarged symbols, pictures and lettering. We have had very positive feedback and PECS was well worth the investment.



WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO THE NEIGHBOURHOOD?

Steve Daniels, Director for Bullock Construction, said: "Our passion for exceeding customer expectations is the driver for our corporate social responsibility activities. We seek to build communities, not just buildings and leave a legacy of skills, community facilities and economic benefits following completion of our work."

Just a few examples of community projects supported as part of the Decent Homes work are: -

- Staff at Frank Haslam Milan donated £500 to the Champion House Tenants and Residents Association, Heath Town, towards their disabled boat appeal
- Pupils at Bushbury Hill and Fallings Park Primary Schools have learnt the importance of recycling thanks to Bullock
- To celebrate the completion of the refurbishment to The Acres sheltered housing scheme in Finchfield, Frank Haslam Milan held a celebration for tenants with light refreshments. They also donated some garden furniture for the communal gardens



- Thomas Vale have said 'thank you' to tenants by revamping and decorating Stowlawn community room
- A number of school visits have been made by Wolverhampton Homes and partners. Also work experience has been offered to a number of pupils
- All three of our partners are offering assistance with the development of production facilities to allow students to learn construction skills at the Timken Centre
- Local jobs for local people
- Our contractors and their supply chain are supporting our National Skills Academy Training and Apprenticeship Scheme providing employment opportunities for local people from some of the most deprived areas of the city
- Decent Homes Partnership half marathon raised over £8,000 for local charities



WHAT WERE THE FINANCIAL COSTS AND CASHABLE BENEFITS?

From the outset of the project we understood the challenges facing us both financially and socially. Although the financial aspects are important, our first priority was to support individuals and families.



We are acutely aware of the pressures on revenue income and capital funding. It's important for us to make sure the programme is deliverable and to be prepared to weather a time when there will be less capital to spend and greater demands from tenants and communities to fulfil. The task of shaping services and budgets to the new reality is both hard and pressing.

The financial aspects of Decent Homes' delivery form only one part of the company's overall efficiency drive.

Shaun Aldis, director of property services, said: "It is in the day job to work out better and smarter ways of getting things done. In times of diminishing revenue/capital funds and increased demand, resource allocation becomes even more difficult.

"We believe the efficiency drive and the achievement to ration scarce resources in a way which fulfils the needs of many and is seen as ultimately fair by all is now becoming a reality."

The Collaborative Working Centre UK Ltd (CWC) carried out a strategic and Value for Money review of the Decent Homes programme and they identified the following:-

- Efficiencies are being achieved through improving productivity by working smarter and using 'lean construction' principles to reduce wasteful processes - this has resulted in high levels of tenant satisfaction
- Due to a hands on approach by the Senior Management Team the prices achieved and sustained for boilers, bathrooms, kitchens and major components are the keenest CWC have seen nationally

- The Wolverhampton Homes Refusal Protocol is robust and is achieving a top quartile refusal rate of 5% which is exceptional
- We have done well to curtail the commissioning costs to 2.7% of total construction cost which is in line with top quartile performance
- Minimum delays and disruption have helped to achieve a reduction in prelims, overheads and construction costs of 20% saving in the region of £9m per annum over the remainder of the DH programme.

HOW RELEVANT IS THIS AS AN EXAMPLE THAT MIGHT BE FOLLOWED BY OTHER ORGANISATIONS?

Our approach to dealing with vulnerability developed for Decent Homes has been rolled out to Wolverhampton Homes' other procured contracts including the recent new city wide gas servicing and maintenance contract.

We have found all our contractors have embraced this and different contractors have come up with new initiatives which are relevant to their work. One contractor has introduced enlarged ID cards to show to tenants with a visual impairment and simplified user guides in large print.

There is a lot of potential for developing improvements that can be rolled out across the maintenance and construction industry using some or all aspects of the measures we have implemented.

For more details please contact Sue Eynon on 01902 550461.