

The best example of resident involvement in Managing Maintenance



Empowering the community

Resident's involvement Project for the Provision of Maintenance Services at Bournville Village Trust

As BVT is an organisation that exists to improve the quality of life for people living in communities, one of our guiding principles is to encourage residents wherever possible, to share in decisions affecting their communities. Empowering communities to be directly involved in the decision making process, has been shown to encourage feelings of inclusion, ownership and subsequently respect within the community context.

With this in mind, each public fronting department within our organisation has been working towards establishing truly resident centred services, working closely with representatives of the wider community. This ultimately enables officers of the Trust to establish exactly how best to deploy our services and ensure maximum value for our resources.

Three years ago the Maintenance Department decided that there would be significant benefit in appointing a panel of resident volunteers, to meet regularly with key officers of the maintenance team in a consultative forum. The brief was very clear - that this project would not just pay "lip service" to resident involvement, but over time a flourishing, experienced panel would evolve, setting its own agenda and having significant input into all major decisions affecting the delivery of the maintenance service. To achieve this level of resident involvement and sustain it over the long term was going to take a truly innovative approach, employing a range of techniques.

To commence this project, the panel was appointed following an advertisement in our local community news magazine, "The Outlook", a blanket general interest publication which is hand delivered to every household in our pepper-potted community. Given that Outlook is available in a variety

of formats, advertising here meant that we could be assured of equality of opportunity for all of our customers. In response to the advertisement, we were fortunate that our volunteers were an extremely diverse range of individuals, each with their own unique experiences and interests. It was at the very first meeting where as a panel we decided on our terms of reference and codes of conduct, formalising the way forward.

Having a clear constitution that all panel members are subscribed to from the start, ensures not only efficient chairmanship, but establishes altruistic goals.

As it was accepted by all involved that the success of this project would depend on a gradual deepening of resident involvement, the panel decided that early agenda items would be customer service based topics. This meant that the only experience required to be able to contribute was the experience of being a resident. Such items included; an audit and subsequent re-write of all of the different information brochures provided for residents in relation to the maintenance service. This gave the panel an opportunity to ensure that all such publications are easy to understand, relevant, and free from jargon – the brochures we provide now are effectively written by residents for residents – the only input from maintenance officers were the technical facts.

The next step was to begin the process of empowering the panel through training in order to develop wider understanding of not just the technical issues, but to learn how to contribute effectively. To do this, both formal and informal methods of delivering learning were employed. Firstly, the panel decided that a "job awareness event" should be arranged, for members to attend the maintenance yard where the whole operation is based.

Senior officers working in conjunction with panel members



Members of the Maintenance Panel networking at Tenant's Conference



The panel spent time in each section observing officers in their work, and were free to chat to staff about what it's really like being in the front line of service delivery. This meant that the panel in a relaxed, informal setting could develop a real understanding of how Reactive Repairs, Planned Maintenance and Void Modernisations all marry together and exactly what goes into the day to day running of these sections. For the panel to get involved in reviewing and formulating policy, having empathy for the reality of service delivery was essential. The job awareness scheme is now a permanent part of the induction of any new panel members.

Beyond this, the panel are periodically invited to visit void properties at various stages of progress, and have a guided tour from one of our surveyors. This helps to continually develop ever deeper levels of understanding on a technical front and observe first hand changes that they have made to BVT standard specifications.

On a formal basis, external trainers have been appointed for specific training tasks held at local training facilities, and formal off site nationally based training has been attended, on a number of occasions. Working in unison with our "Tenant Participation Department" useful contacts have been made within the "Tenant Participation Advisory Service" (TPAS) creating opportunities for the panel to visit "Beacon" associations in order to share ideas of best practice. In September 2006, our panel attended the "Tools of the Trade" TPAS event in Bristol designed to equip residents on such panels with skills to contribute to their fullest potential.

Given this primary training in the first year of the project, the panel felt confident enough to begin to make higher level decisions. BVT were very keen to extend the remit into the realms of policy and specification. To support this, the panel were invited to review all of the BVT standard specifications for capital improvements. This process culminated in a series of presentations from suppliers demonstrating the benefits of their products for the panel to select the best overall, in the context of performance & value. This was approached with such a level of enthusiasm from the panel that several major changes were made to our standard specifications, not least, a complete change to the bathroom suites used. Other changes included; increased amount of choice of wall paper, floor finishes, tiling schemes and taps to be utilised in kitchen & bathroom modernisations. This is now a permanent function of the panel, that no Maintenance Officer should alter a specification without panel approval, ensuring that our service is always tailored to meet our resident's requirements

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Resident panel members attending formal training



What is innovative about the service provided?

Given the level of enthusiasm that our emboldened panel were now demonstrating, coupled with the quality of their judgements and recommendations, it quickly became apparent to us that we needed to ensure that the panel were stimulated by subjects tackled. In turn, the value of their contribution would be ever augmented. To this end, we invited our tenant panel to form part of the management committee of our new “Eco House” project.

The BVT Eco House was a high profile project with a single aim; to fully renovate a century old property, trialling as many energy efficient materials, products, methods and finishes as possible and to assess their relative performance. In short, those technologies that were deemed to be a success would be incorporated into our standard specifications for major improvements and rolled out across our housing stock. Once completed, the Eco House was opened to the public as a demonstration house for eight weeks, and hosted a number of domestic sustainability awareness raising events for local schools. It was an integral part of the planning process to not just garner the opinion of our panel for the features we were intending to include from the resident's perspective, but for the panel to actively research and specify features themselves. A number of the panel's ideas were incorporated into the final project and they continue to monitor the long term success of all of technologies trialled in the home.

The panel decided that as a group with ten members, all with different areas of interest and expertise, there was scope to have separate working parties with individual remits. Several panel members expressed interest in getting involved in the process of recruiting external contractors. As the BVT day to day electrical repair contract was nearing expiration, there was an ideal opportunity for a working party of the panel to work with maintenance officers in choosing the right company for the job. A working party of two resident panel members, one a former head of logistics, the other a former BT engineer, worked with staff to begin the tender process. In order to equip our panel for such a task, a consultant trainer was appointed to deliver a “Recruiting Contractors” session. Giving an overview of the whole tender process, this session equipped the working party to evaluate contractor's presentations and decide on what basis they should be appointed.

Since choosing the day to day electrical contractor, the panel have formed working parties to choose the main Rewire contractor, and are currently deciding whether it would be in resident's interests to change kitchen supplier.

In order for the panel to make a decision on a contract so large, it became apparent that the whole panel, maintenance officers included, would benefit from developed understanding of EU Procurement law.



Senior Officers working in conjunction with pupils of year nine Kings Norton Girls School

To this end, BVT arranged for consultants from "Procurement for Housing" to provide a series of presentations to give an understanding of what the rules are regarding the tendering of large contracts and implications of a full Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) tender. Now this training has been completed, we look forward to receiving the panel's decision shortly, as to whether BVT does indeed change kitchen supplier.

Another working party that the panel decided to form was the "External Painting Panel". This sub panel made up of three resident panel members, a rep from the paint suppliers, and the painting Surveyor has developed into an integral part of the benchmarking process of the quality of work provided by the painting contractors. Meeting quarterly to carry out site inspections, the panel use a scoring system identifying the key criteria to judge the quality of workmanship. As the panel chose the criteria that they wanted to judge against, this benchmarking of quality measures the issues that are important to residents.

Since many of the BVT standard fittings used in modernisation programmes are Resident Panel approved, the panel agreed that an annual exhibition at the start of the Planned Maintenance Programme year would be of significant benefit to residents. Intended for those due for major renovations, the panel agreed that being able to see full sized samples of the choices of kitchens, bathrooms, windows, boilers, electrical hardware, and decorative finishes would give people the best chance of making the right choices for them.

And so the panel set to work. In conjunction with maintenance officers, January 2007 saw the first BVT Planned Maintenance Exhibition. As with all BVT initiatives, the effectiveness of the event was evaluated by the BVT "Business Improvement Unit", who asked all attendees to fill out an evaluation form before leaving, (and entering a prize draw for doing so!). The feedback was reported to be resoundingly positive, especially appreciated was the opportunity for residents to meet with the Maintenance Surveyors responsible for the works and ask any questions. The tenant panel even attended for the duration of the event to raise awareness of the panel's work, achievements and manned a "surgery" for suggestions and ideas from other residents in attendance.

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The latest innovation that BVT is about to launch in time for 2009 Planned Maintenance Programmes, is an interactive Information DVD. Intended for residents imminently due any major maintenance works, it covers all aspects of planned and cyclical maintenance, and will be issued in time for the exhibition. The initial cocept for the dvd, to provide high quality, in depth information for what can be quite stressful experiences for residents, was also conceived at a panel meeting. Bringing it to fruition relied heavily on the desire of panel members to make it as effective as possible in delivering the objectives. From editing the script, allowing their homes to be turned into film studios and even taking on starring roles, the DVD is real example of what can be achieved through meaningful resident involvement.



*On-site inspection of the Eco Home by
year nine King's Norton Girls School
and Senior Officer*

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What are the benefits to the client, the contractor and the residents?

Such is the level of respect commanded by the Maintenance Resident Panel after three busy years of input and influence, that their opinion is sought at Executive level on a regular basis.

The benefit of the having a panel that can generate ideas and deliver projects such as the information DVD and exhibition is huge. The DVD & information brochures for instance are invaluable tools for allowing our residents to see exactly what the implications of maintenance works are. The benefit to the resident in having access to a bank of information directly relating to what they will be experiencing provides reassurance. Living in a property whilst major renovations are carried out can be an extremely stressful experience, so the more that BVT can do to alleviate this discomfort, the better.

As the content includes full explanations of all of the available options, residents are able to take as much time as necessary in making choices that will maximise the positive impact of the works on their home. The DVD will be used to supplement and reinforce the information provided by Maintenance Officers during surveys; a resource that residents can refer back to as necessary.

These innovations also significantly save contractor time and subsequently money; the more a resident understands what will happen with any given job, and is at ease with what will happen then the quicker a contractor can get on with it.

The less time contractors spend on jobs, the cheaper they are.

The exhibition also gives residents the opportunity to meet the contractors who

will carry out the works and even book start dates straight away – saving more time and allowing for early forward planning for both resident and contractor.

On the Client side of the business, as far as the Maintenance Officers are concerned, the devolution of certain tasks in the tendering process to resident panel members has been a massively useful resource for delegation of duties. Given that certain panel members have professional backgrounds at management level and coupled with formal training, the standard of contribution has been exceptionally high.

For example, the panel working party designed scoring matrices, generated probing interview questions, and was responsible for 50% of the points to be awarded when scoring contractors submissions. This level of involvement directly alleviates some of the time pressure on officers in such time bound processes.

Such is the level of respect commanded by the Maintenance Resident Panel after three busy years of input and influence, that their opinion is sought at Executive level on a regular basis. Should the Executive Management Team require resident consideration prior to issuing policy directives, then resident involvement groups are useful consultation forums. Members of the maintenance panel have attended Executive Management and Housing Services team meetings to present reports and findings of the panel on range of subjects.



Residents meeting the officers responsible for works and choosing finishes



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- ## How to apply for funding
- Forms need to be completed and turned to your area office
 - Income & Expenditure details must be filled in accurately
 - Estimates must be provided
 - Letter of support from Housing Officer
 - visit from representative of Housing Services
 - Grants awarded at the discretion of the Allocations Committee



Panel -member presenting to Executive Team



What were the financial costs and cashable benefits?

Based on a budget of just £800 pa, the Tenant Maintenance Panel continues to thrive. Relying massively on the goodwill of panel members and officers to find the time to contribute, the project is only successful because those involved recognise that there are so many important qualitative benefits beyond simple cashable benefits.

Much of the activity of the panel doesn't cost much beyond basic refreshments. Informal training from internal experts in their field comes for free and sales reps are keen to give their time for product demonstration. The substantive part of the annual budget is spent on formal training and transport. Having a transport budget for panel members is crucial in ensuring equality of opportunity for individuals to get involved, for example, a number of panel members require a taxi service to attend meetings due to mobility impairments.

A coach service is also required when our panel meets its sister panel, based in Telford, which carries out a similar function, for BVT's Shropshire operation. This bi-annual convergence of the two panels is always an

enjoyable networking event, giving the panels the opportunity to discuss initiatives that have been tried and exchange best practice ideas in areas of commonality.

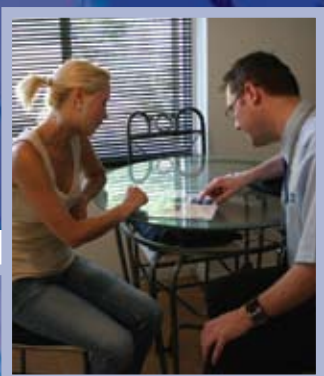
Although part of the panel's financial remit is to establish best value in maintenance projects, the panel plays a vital role in identifying expenditure priority. Utilising the expertise of our Business Improvement Unit officers, the panel were formally surveyed to establish what types of work were of the highest priorities from a resident's perspective. Presentation of the findings was made by representatives of the panel to the Executive Management Team, equipping managers with the knowledge to structure a budget request that reflects the priorities of residents.

With increased expenditure in areas of highest priority to residents and reduced levels to lower priority work types, this has already become reality. The latest example has been the window replacement programme; found to be of particular interest to the panel, an accelerated replacement window programme is now currently being reviewed.

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What lessons may be learned by other organisations?

Depending on the objectives of other organisations, there may be elements of our approach that could be adopted and the benefits replicated.

Given the objective of establishing a resident panel adept at making high level decisions and setting it's own agenda, our resident involvement project began with a simple but crucial premise; that the panel must be empowered and equipped to contribute at a meaningful level from the start. The only way to achieve this ideal was to accept that only a gradual growth in the level of involvement would sustain the interest of the panel and allow for individual's confidence to grow. To this end, training and development plans for resident panel members were drawn up. It is now part of the panel's terms of reference that any new members are invited to attend the same corporate induction as new staff.

Simply arranging external training though, is not enough; supplementary in house training to enable resident panel members to understand the nature of their own organisation is essential. It would be impossible for panel members to consider issues of policy without an understanding of BVT's systems and existing procedures. Both types of training should be ongoing, and build on knowledge previously gained.

Ensuring that the panel are given opportunities to get involved in intrinsically interesting projects has been an instrumental part of establishing and maintaining long term panel members. If an organisation is going to invest and develop a resident involvement panel, it is important that retention strategies are in place. The feedback from the panel as reported by our Business Improvement Unit in relation to their involvement in the Eco Home Project was overwhelmingly positive; the project captured the imagination of the panel and enthused particular individuals to such an extent that panel members volunteered to get involved in giving guided tours to members of the public!

Ensuring that residents have enough and the right type of information in relation to maintenance works is essential in managing expectations and minimising the emotional impact of potentially invasive improvement works. Who better to be responsible for the content of these forms of information than residents themselves? Our annual maintenance exhibition and interactive DVD are certainly tools that could be adopted by other organisations who wish to obtain the significant time saving benefits for client and contractor that BVT has.

Planned Maintenance and your...

To see how to plan for your planned maintenance just simply click on each section for more information

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