

### HOUSING FOCUS GROUPS – BACKGROUND INFORMATION

#### Background

The Housing Focus Groups replaced the long standing and successful Community Panels in 2007 as the local consultation and involvement framework for tenants.

A force for change was the introduction of Neighbourhood Forums and Boards by the Council and the Community Safety Partnership. The broader topics covered by these meetings were also being covered by Community Panels. In order to prevent duplication, the Housing Focus Groups were jointly created to concentrate on issues with the housing service provided by Derby Homes. Housing Focus Groups were initially held at the Tenants Resource Centre in the City centre but attendance began to subside, so the decision to run them in more local venues was implemented in late 2008.

#### How the Housing Focus Groups (HFGs) work – an overview.

The Housing Focus Groups are a radical departure from the Community Panels that operated rather like a committee. It had become quite clear even before the recent arrival of the Tenants Service Authority (TSA) that tenant empowerment is defined by the resident influenced *outcomes* of involvement, not by evidence of tenants holding positions (such as Chair) within involvement structures. It is what the meetings achieve, not who is in charge that matters.

- There are five meetings per financial year in each of the five management areas (25 meetings per year), running from March to March, year to year.
- Meetings in the dark months of December, January and February are avoided because of the low turn out endured with the Community Panel system and also challenging weather conditions at these times of the year.
- The meetings are rotated in each area within a set number of local venues so as to give as many people as possible the opportunity to access at least one meeting close to their home. Other tenants can use the free taxi service to attend if they face a longer journey in their area to a venue.
- The meetings are not chaired but facilitated by tenants with the help of officers.
- There are no annual general meetings or voting - the meetings are about issues and outcomes, there are no meetings about meetings.
- Local housing staff attend the meetings half an hour before the meeting starts so that tenants can talk about personal aspect of the service in private.

- The Agenda for each meeting is set by tenants at the previous meeting.
- The meeting in two parts. The first part is always about giving tenants the opportunity to raise issues with us about the housing service in their area. The second part of the meeting is where Derby Homes asks tenants for their views on items it is working on.
- The meetings are interactive – we use IT to deliver high quality easy to understand visual presentations about issues and environmental bids to tenants.
- We enable tenants to vote privately on issues by using voting buttons to enable tenants to make decisions on local estate pride bids. Results from these decisions can be fed back to the meeting within seconds.
- We also use the voting buttons to enable tenants to give us instant feedback on their satisfaction with the meetings.
- Some parts of the old Panel system were retained such as the TP Team making visitors a drink for taking the time to come along (customer service).
- Issues brought up at the Housing Focus Group meetings are logged on the Customer Service Module (CSM) so that resolution of tenant issues is monitored and managed. Reports are generated for the Local Housing Boards. We can measure how many issues the HFG meetings resolve as an indicator of value for money.

Since the Housing Focus Groups have been running, we have made changes as we have learnt what works and what does not. For example, tenants wanted to acknowledge apologies so we built that into the format of the meeting. The TP Team also now pre-prepare the area the meeting is taking place in a week before it is held by leafleting it – we have found that this helps to reach more people and may have helped to build up attendance at meetings.

### **Housing Focus Group Lites**

Housing Focus Group Lites work with the Housing Focus Group meetings by enabling TP staff to access people who do not want to come to meetings.

Since 2009 we have carried out 4 HFG Lites in Alvaston, Derwent Darley Abbey and Mackworth. Sixteen tenants invited us in for chat and we generated 9 cases on the customer service module. We would like to do more of this kind of outreach work.