

Involvement and Empowerment Strategy 2010 – 2015

1. Background

- 1.1 Westcountry Housing believes that Resident Involvement is central to our culture. It is about residents working in partnership with Westcountry at all levels, to improve services both to residents and internally, to support us to operate a financially viable and efficient business achieving good value for money and to understand and meet the needs of our communities. To attain this we acknowledge that all staff and board members have a responsibility to listen to and respect residents' views on matters that affect them.

2. Aim

- 2.1 This strategy addresses the corporate aims of;

delivering excellence through meeting our promises by

- involving, empowering and engaging with residents & service users
- promoting positive local identity
- working with a wide range of partners
- promoting open and transparent communications and feedback

delivering better homes by

- incorporating the benefits of sustainable communities
- involving residents in designing homes where people want to live

providing healthier environments by

- raising the quality and extending the range of services to residents & service users
- encouraging user-driven and user-focused innovation

providing stronger, happy neighbourhoods by

- putting communities and their needs at the forefront
- encouraging employment and training opportunities particularly for Westward residents
- ensuring equality and diversity are fully reflected in all activities

2.2 This five year Resident Involvement Strategy sets out how we will widen the opportunities enabling all residents to be involved from a very local, individual level through to high level strategic decision-making and develop a diverse range of opportunities so every resident can be involved, if they wish, on their own terms

Satisfaction that views are taken into account 2008 (First RI strategy approved Jan 2009)	Satisfaction that views are taken into account 2010	Satisfaction that views are taken into account 2012
54%	61%	

2.3 There will always be some aspects of the business where because of legal or data protection considerations residents cannot be involved in a general role. For example legal arrears procedures or individual antisocial behaviour cases.

2.4 The Resident Involvement Five Year Strategy will be reviewed biennially to respond to the changing regulatory environment and to ensure that Westcountry are seen to be at the forefront of innovative resident involvement.

3. Links

3.1 Resident Involvement underpins every action in the corporate plan. Our services are delivered and shaped by current and future resident need and aspiration. To ensure that this is achieved the Resident Involvement staff will continue to work closely alongside colleagues to assist and support them in partnership with residents to set priorities for each coming year.

3.2 This strategy therefore links closely to and will be implemented alongside all other service delivery strategies.

4. Key Principles

- Residents will believe they can make their voice heard, on their terms and that they will be listened to.
- Residents will have an opportunity to be involved regardless of their life situation and choices.
- Residents will be involved in strategic decision making on their own terms and all residents aware of how and why decisions have been made.
- Westcountry neighbourhoods are areas where residents aspire to live, feel safe and have a real sense of ownership through their involvement
- Residents will be supported to develop the skills, where they do not have them, to enable effective involvement.

5. Residents will believe they can make their voice heard, on their terms and that they will be listened to.

- 5.1 We will ensure that our consultation and feedback events are carried out in a way that removes barriers to our residents and makes opportunities accessible to them. We will do this through maximising the service delivery model agreed and developed in partnership with residents
- 5.2 A staff training programme will underpin this, ensuring that the type and time of consultations and events are planned for the appropriateness and convenience of the residents.
- 5.3 Staff will follow a checklist developed by residents when using external venues for events to ensure that every venue is DDA compliant and the event meets the accessibility needs of residents.
- 5.4 Resident feedback highlights that feedback is currently a weak area. It is a priority that we improve these otherwise residents will be unaware of the impact they have. Further consultation with residents about how we should feedback about changes on a wider scale will be undertaken.
- 5.5 The annual Resident Involvement impact assessment day will be developed to highlight and celebrate the impact residents have had on services and the business with a much greater number of residents. The annual consultation day will also provide an opportunity for residents to

set the business priorities for the coming year and hear how residents' priorities have been met in the previous 12 months.

- 5.6 In addition, the regulatory framework states that 'Tenants should have the ability to monitor and scrutinise their provider's performance against all the standards'. The role of the Scrutiny Panel will be developed over the course of its 2 year pilot and a permanent role will be established in 2013 based on its development and the regulatory landscape at the time.
 - 5.7 We will also establish a range of mechanisms for residents to monitor performance at a service level and to report up to the Scrutiny Panel.
 - 5.8 To ensure that the resident community feels empowered to make its voice heard we will establish a procedure for a Community Call to Action which will work alongside our Complaints Procedure and enable the community to hold Westcountry to account when service delivery fails to meet agreed standards. The Community Call to Action will be considered and monitored by the Scrutiny Panel.
 - 5.9 We will also identify those areas of the business where residents are not currently involved in improving the service and will develop with them meaningful ways of involvement.
 - 5.10 Each resident involvement opportunity will have a clearly defined terms of reference, code of conduct and role profile so that residents are clear of what the expectations are of each opportunity. Residents can be confident that unacceptable behaviour will be addressed by the breach of code of conduct procedure that covers all resident activities.
6. Residents will have an opportunity to be involved regardless of their life situation and choices.
- 6.1 Resident involvement opportunities are advertised in Coast to Coast and are open to all residents to apply for. This includes all tenants, shared owners, leaseholders, freeholders and those resident in supported housing projects
 - 6.2 Residents can participate in the majority of the opportunities with no or minimal support and training. However there are some opportunities which require a level of specialist skill for effective involvement. We will operate a transparent recruitment process for these opportunities and the need for recruitment will be made clear at the time the opportunity is advertised. Training and support will always be provided to residents who may initially not have the skills but who wish to participate and this may result in a delay in them joining the group while training is undertaken. Where it is apparent that a resident will not be sufficiently

able to gain the necessary skills a more appropriate opportunity for involvement will be identified and agreed with them.

- 6.3 We will aim to provide a menu of opportunities for residents to get involved so that residents have choice as to when and how they wish to make their voice heard. Due to the wide geographical spread of our stock and the poor provision of public transport we will seek to widen to opportunities for residents to be involved in their own home and will tailor opportunities to residents preferred method of communication.
 - 6.4 Residents will review with us our Expenses Policy to ensure that it covers every out of pocket expense that a resident may incur by being involved.
 - 6.5 We will monitor the diversity of residents who are actively involved annually and each year will target opportunities specifically to address the needs of those residents not choosing to get involved. Initial monitoring indicated that we will focus initially on our young residents, residents in full time work and those who are rurally isolated.
7. Residents will be involved in strategic decision making on their own terms and all residents will be made aware of how and why decisions have been made.
- 7.1 Final responsibility for any decision making will always remain with the board. However, whenever possible decision making at this level will be in partnership with residents. We will support the Resident Auditor Team and the Scrutiny Panel to operate as independently of staff as possible, managing their own work and budget.
 - 7.2 Many other operational decisions could also be made by residents too and we will increase the range of local decision making by residents over the next 5 years. For each resident involvement opportunity the limits and scope of the decision making powers will be set out in the Terms of Reference of the group.
 - 7.3 The Scrutiny Panel pilot will run for the next two years, scrutinising the business decisions, governance and performance of the organisation at the highest level. They will work closely with the Westward Audit Committee reporting directly to them. They will also have authority to commission service inspections from the Resident Auditor Team.
 - 7.4 The Resident Auditor Team will continue to inspect our services and recommend improvements at both an operational and strategic level. We will work with the team to support the recruitment of new members and to enable them to become as fully independent of Westward as possible. This will include the development of both the current Resident Auditors

page on the website and a Resident Auditors section in Coast to Coast over which they will have full editorial control.

- 7.5 We will develop a group of residents with skills in interviewing so that the meaningful involvement of residents in the recruitment of staff at all levels and board members becomes routine.
- 7.6 We will provide residents with information about the cost of services and support them to make knowledgeable value for money decisions. We will develop ways in which they can meaningfully influence the budget setting process at a service level.
- 7.7 There are 3 resident board member places within the Westcountry Board one of which is ring fenced for a leaseholder in addition to the 2 social rented tenant members
8. Westcountry neighbourhoods are areas where residents aspire to live, feel safe and have a real sense of ownership through their involvement
 - 8.1 We will support and encourage the development of both local resident and wider groups within the Westcountry community. A staff training programme will provide Neighbourhood teams with the skills to develop and work alongside these effectively and residents will be supported by a comprehensive training programme and financial grants to ensure the group is run effectively.
 - 8.2 We will provide residents with a 'Guide to setting up Resident's Groups' which they can follow if they wish to set up a group independently. We will also offer the support and advice of our Resident Community Champion should they wish to take this up.
9. Residents will be supported to develop the skills, where they do not have them, to enable effective involvement.
 - 9.1 We will develop a comprehensive training programme open to all residents which will provide opportunities for them to gain skills for working at a local community level though to being an effective resident board member. This will support succession planning for the Resident Auditor Team, Scrutiny Panel and board membership.
 - 9.2 We will also seek to increase the opportunities for training that will assist residents in returning to work and regaining confidence.