

The Housing Improvement Partnership – the Caerphilly approach

The Housing Improvement Partnership (HIP) will be a valuable mechanism to support service improvements. It should not be a stand-alone project but needs to be an embedded activity that adds value to the service by helping Caerphilly Homes shape its services and the way in which they are provided.

It is important that our process has a focused approach that places the effort of the HIP's activity in line with tenant participation and must be focused on the tenant outcomes and experience.

It is important that the correct methodology is used that makes effective use of officer and tenant resources and produces outputs that can inform decision-making to achieve service improvement. The HIP will concentrate its effort on "what matters to tenants" and not examining "behind the scenes" processes. It is important that our chosen approach reflects the needs of the Council, our current position in relation to tenant participation, and our service improvement activities.

Our Approach

The work of the HIP should assist the housing service with understanding what matters to tenants and officers dealing with the organisational process. The Caerphilly approach should be designed to allow tenants to work with us to identify opportunities for enhancing the tenant outcomes of our service provision. Our framework will produce outcomes that will add value to our services and it also borrows from the principles of the WG Delivery Outcomes (for self-assessment) and the principles of Results Based Accounting (RBA) to ensure that our process is in line with the outcomes and experiences of the tenants.

There are many techniques that can assist such a process. Our approach will concentrate on the major and basic issues that matter to tenants and not create a rigid and over complicated process.

- **Current capability**

Our proposal reflects where we are in developing our tenant participation approach and is an additional mechanism that will help in supporting our services improvement activities. It is recommended that we do not create a framework that seeks to evaluate and redesign major landlord or maintenance activities at this stage and accept that our programme must reflect the current capabilities of the Council.

- **The Caerphilly Approach – The tenant experience**

This paper sets out an approach that challenges the tenants involved in the process to work with us to improve services. The Housing Improvement Partnership (HIP) will concentrate its work on services that are important to tenants. These need to be manageable projects and aligned to the tenant

experience. The HIP process should have an emphasis on the “tenant touch points” so instead of re-designing a major service, the outputs of the HIP’s work will focus on “requesting a service” and “receiving the service”. Tenant ‘Handbooks’ will be the result of the tenant scrutiny process. Each handbook will be titled after that service. (Note: not to be confused with our tenancy handbooks: the term ‘handbook’ in this report has been used to describe the outputs of the HIP’s work)

The Tenant Handbooks

The Tenant Handbooks (outputs) will use evidence to identify the factors that add value to tenants at each point of service delivery. The following structure will be applied to every process:

The HIP will identify the purpose of the service. Using the evidence they have they will work out what tenants expect to receive from that service. For example, they could look like this:

- Complaints service: “Review my complaint impartially and inform me of the outcome and any action you will take”
- Repairs service: “Fix the repair at the first visit and leave my home in a tidy condition”
- Anti-social behaviour: “Make the behaviour stop”

The HIP will then identify the value that tenants would expect to see at each point of service delivery and the experience they would like to have. An illustrative example of a ‘handbook’ is attached.

The tenant outcomes and experience will be recorded at each stage of the service delivery:

Stage 1 - Request: how the tenant would like to report the issue and how it is facilitated

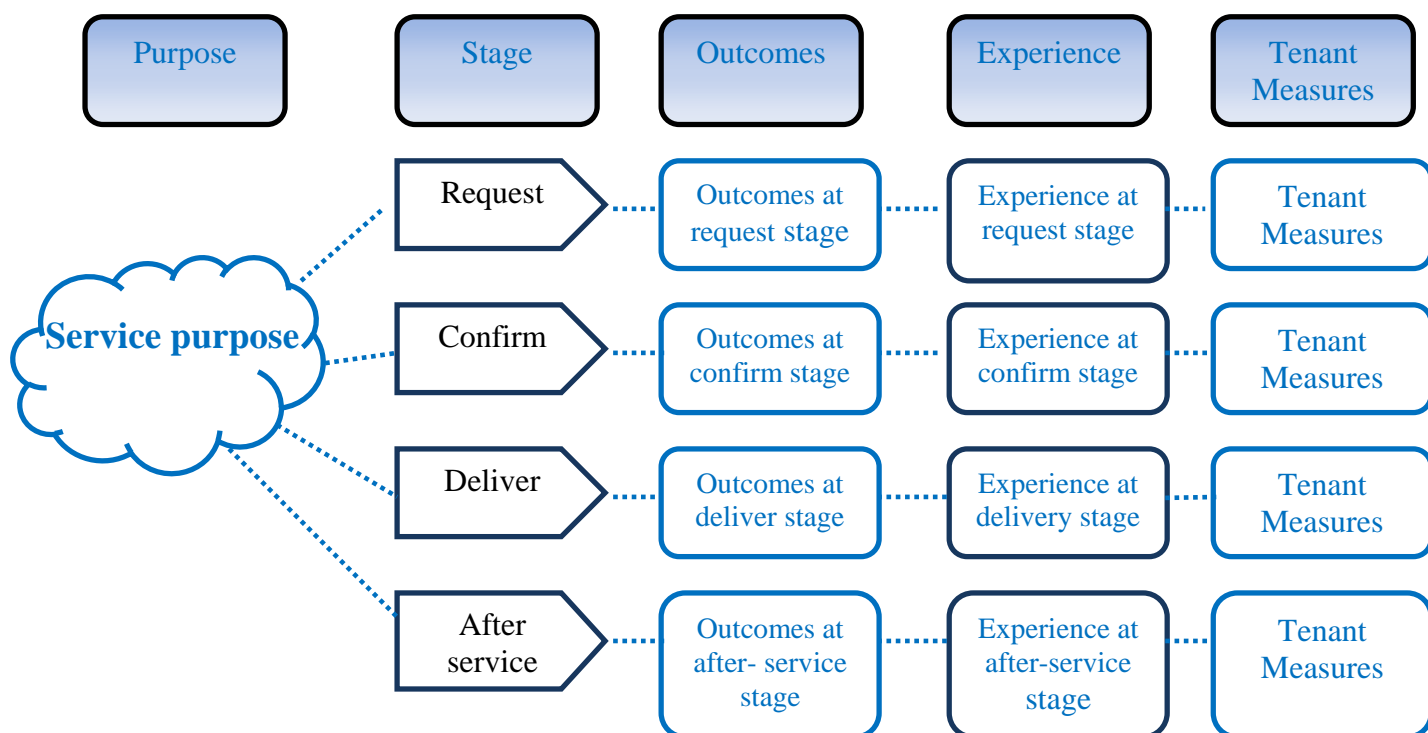
Stage 2 - Confirm: when we tell the tenant what we will do

Stage 3 - Deliver: when we do what we said we would do

Stage 4 - After-service: Support and feedback mechanisms

The HIP will use evidence of existing service delivery to identify the important tenant experience at each point of service delivery. This may take the form of a set of customer service standards. Illustrative examples are included in the handbook in Appendix 2.

Tenant Handbook Format



The service improvements will be the outcomes from the process. The evidence will be performance against the measures developed through the tenant handbook process. These measures will be embedded through our routine of working. For example, if the “outcome” of the request stage of the service is “the tenant understands what will happen next” then this will become the measure and the call handler at the point of service delivery will ask “are you happy that you know what will happen next?”

The HIP will use information from real service contacts as its evidence base. It will consider the wider evidence base in its work, which will avoid the outputs being the views of a small number of tenants. The HIP will focus on tenant outcomes from the service and not examine internal processes, structures and systems involved in delivering services. The HIP will concentrate its work on how a good service should ‘feel’ from a tenant’s point of view. This will involve asking questions that focus on customer experience and ‘touch points’. By understanding how it feels for a tenant to experience a service (the journey), Caerphilly Homes will be able to better understand the impact of our activities and work to improve that journey. Customer journey mapping can be a very effective technique for understanding how we deal with tenant service requests and our customer service performance. This technique involves following the workflow of real service requests to understand what really happens when a tenant requests a service. This involves studying all interaction from the moment the tenant calls the Council asking for a service, through the delivery and conclusion of the service. When studying a number

of real 'journeys' within the same service the HIP will be able to build up a real picture of actual service delivery and performance.

The 'handbook' will not be concerned with the mechanics of service delivery. – this remains the responsibility of the officers and the challenge to officers is to deliver the tenant expectations identified by the HIP through the 'handbook'.

- **Tenant measures**

A tenant measure will be developed at each stage in the process to assess the effectiveness of the service. These measures will not be designed to duplicate or replace operational performance indicators that inform Caerphilly Homes of the effectiveness of our processes but measures that sum up what matters to tenants in each service. To achieve this, the measures must be aligned to the "purpose" of each service and will need to actually measure what is of value to tenants at each stage of the service delivery. The measures will align with the principles of RBA and the WG approach to delivery outcomes. The HIP will develop the tenant measures and the service delivery team will embed the appropriate measures within their routine work processes. For example, the call handler should get the feedback at the point of service delivery. The service team will be the audience for the measures, as the delivery team they are responsible for the analysis of the measures and any resultant actions. This will be operational activity that will sit beyond the scope of the HIP project and remain a routine service delivery activity. Tenant measures will be shared with the HIP and wider body of tenants.

- **Evidence gathering**

Caerphilly Homes will employ a critical friend approach (through an independent consultant) to enable the HIP to define how a service should feel. The approach will keep its work focused on tenant outcomes. The objective is not to redesign the service based on a small sample of tenants and our approach will ensure that the HIP members do not rely solely on their own experiences. Caerphilly Homes will facilitate the HIP having access to the experiences of the wider tenant population. A successful method of achieving this is to record (on paper, by transcribing real service request calls), the exact words of tenants during different stages of a service request and service delivery, for example a tenant complaint in their words, our response and their feedback. Confidentiality will be protected.

- **Independent support**

As discussed, the results of our approach will be the 'handbook'. The handbook will be the HIP's report. Ideally, the handbook will be written independently by the HIP but this is not essential if the HIP retains full editorial control. In order to achieve this, independent consultancy support will be given during the early stages of the HIP's activities. This support will take the form of guidance, mentoring and administration and will also enable the HIP to retain a certain element of independence from routine operational activities. This support allows the HIP to concentrate on its core activities of identifying

what outcomes and experiences tenants can expect from each service. This type of impartial support also demonstrates a genuine commitment to the HIP, wider body of tenants and staff that the process is independent. The consultant will also assist with facilitating meetings and generally supporting the group through the early stages of the project.

- **Organisational support**

The aim of the HIP's work is to deliver achievable improvements quickly and effectively by undertaking the work and showing the results. In order to keep staff up to date, we will circulate a communication by email (and staff newsletter) ahead of the pilot and communicate the outputs to those staff involved directly in the service delivery. It would be advantageous if the pilot was in a high profile but small centrally operated service.

- **Tenant support and training**

The HIP will be using their skills as tenants (consumers) to produce the tenant 'handbooks' and help Caerphilly Homes improve the services we provide. This means that they will not need continued support in the form of expert (Officer) knowledge as they will already have their knowledge as tenants. However, they will require support to structure their work, manage their programme and produce their outputs (the handbooks). Initially, it is proposed that an independent consultant provides this support.

In addition to having the skills to do this well, the use of an independent consultant will also provide the process with a degree of independence that will be important during the early stages of the programme. In the longer term the reliance on this support will diminish and an additional role of the consultant's work will be to support the evolution of greater self-sufficiency. The Tenant & Community Involvement Team will continue to support the process after the conclusion of the work by the independent consultant.

Additional Considerations

If the HIP is to achieve its purpose and improve service delivery there are a number of principles that must be met prior to taking the project further.

- **Selection of the Partnership:** to undertake the role effectively it is vital that the tenants involved in the HIP are completely independent of any other tenant participation activities. This would include involvement in the Housing Task Group and working groups currently in operation as this involvement could prevent effective review of the service area and be viewed as a conflict of interest. It is also important to protect the integrity of the HIP, individuals and Caerphilly Homes and facilitate a transparent and independent process. It is not suggested that we exclude our core group of tenants from being involved in the HIP (if they wished), it may be that a decision would need to be taken to resign membership of current group(s) in order to be involved in the HIP. As highlighted, existing tenants have a conflict of interest and given that they have invested heavily in their learning and

development, they may be best placed and prefer to remain involved at a higher level.

- **Skilling:** our approach does not require the HIP to undertake extensive training. Instead, the HIP members will need the skills they already have as tenants (consumers) to help us define what the service should be achieving. There will be the need to up-skill those tenants involved but this should be focused on the understanding of their role on the HIP. The tenants involved will need to demonstrate a level of understanding of the role of the HIP as well as an ability to work well in a team. Appropriate training will be provided.
- ± **Selection of pilot:** this needs to be realistic. The pilot should focus on a less complicated service area that allows us to test the methodology and allow us to deliver the output of a handbook. It will not be possible to tackle a major service area as a pilot and it would be advisable to never seek to “change” a large service area in one review
- **Governance:** the HIP will not alter the governance protocols of the Council. The HIP will produce outputs (the handbooks) that will be advisory in nature. The handbooks will not be a decision but will be evidence to support service improvement decisions made within our existing governance structures. Consideration needs to be given to the reporting mechanism. Any subsequent adopted recommendations will then be referred to the Caerphilly Homes Task Group through an implementation report.
- **Feedback:** The work of the HIP will generate outputs that are advisory. It may not be appropriate or possible to implement all the recommendations for organisational reasons. The HIP will be informed of the planned actions resulting from their work and the justifiable operational reasons why any recommendations cannot be implemented.
- **Project Management:** The Tenant and Community Involvement Team will project manage the HIP process and the consultancy support will facilitate the work of the HIP. Regular review meetings will be held to assess progress against the project timetable and objectives.
- **Information:** It is proposed that Central Consultancy provide a presentation to Caerphilly Homes Task Group and Tenant Information Exchange on the Housing Improvement Partnership.