



East Midlands Housing

RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT

IMPACT ASSESSMENT 2008

Report from the Tenants Impact Assessment

2008 – OUR RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

A message from Christine Ashton – Managing Director of East Midlands Housing Association.

“In 2008 the new East Midlands Housing Group (EMHG) was set up and East Midlands Housing Association (EMHA) became an operating business that is part of this partnership. This change has given us the opportunity to review and improve our Customer Involvement Strategy. The strategy has been written in response to the views that residents have expressed.

In 2009 we hope to build upon the success of 2008. We have two customer representatives on the new EMHA Board and this will enable residents to have a high level of influence on the key decisions that we make as an organisation. We pride ourselves on the wide range of options for involvement that will suit the diverse needs of the people who use our services.

I hope that you find this review interesting and that it shows the high degree of impact that customer views have had upon the way that we work.

If you have any thoughts or ideas, or if this review has inspired you to get involved , please get in touch as we would like to hear from you.”

Your Voices, Your Views 2008

This review of resident involvement over the past 12 months details the ways in which residents have worked jointly with EMHA to give their views, change the services we deliver and help us to improve our service to all our customers. We are grateful for their untiring effort and support.

We are always keen for our residents to tell us what impact our involvement activities have had on them and whether they think the activities offer added value and value for money. We held two focus groups on 5th and 7th November 2008 to ask our residents about this. Their views are incorporated into the impact assessment.

Activities to Increase Involvement

Your Home Are You Satisfied Survey

Six to eight weeks after a customer signs a tenancy agreement with EMHA they receive a 'Your Home Are You Satisfied Survey'. This survey the resident's feelings about their new home including its design and the tenancy sign up process. In January 2008 a new question was included at the end of the survey asking if residents would be interested in finding out how to become more involved with EMHA. If the resident ticks this box a letter and information about different groups is sent out. This has increase the number of active residents by nine members during 2008.

We felt that take up from these surveys was low and a different approach was called for to encourage more active involvement. We began to write personal letters to new residents asking if they would like to have the opportunity to influence the decisions that affect them. We gave examples of how other residents were involved. During January and April 2008 we sent out 157 letters. This prompted just five responses. The cost to the organisation included postage, staff time to produce the information and to fill the envelopes and therefore it was decided that this was not a cost effective way to encourage customers to become more involved with us and we would have to try some different methods.

Targeting Young and BME Residents to Become Involved

Each year we look at the make up of our resident involvement groups including the Customer Excellence Panel (CEP), Sounding Board (SB) and residents groups to assess whether they are representative of the communities we work with. We found that the majority of participating residents in our groups were over the age of 55 and whilst we are encouraged by the interest of these residents we acknowledge that we need to encourage involvement of younger residents too. In May 2008 we began to actively target residents between the age of 18 and 44 years old.

We wrote to approximately 2,500 residents aged between 18 and 44 asking them if they would like an opportunity to influence the decisions that affect them. They were offered a choice of methods from meetings, to telephone conversations and text messages and advised that they only need be in contact with us perhaps once or twice per year. We discussed the possibility that asking residents to join up to groups like the CEP may be overwhelming and people with families and busy lives may not feel that they could give up their time to attend meetings or complete surveys. We thought that by offering a lower level approach this may encourage residents to work with us and perhaps in time they would like to participate more fully. Of the 2,500 letters that went out 122 people advised that they would like to work with us.

Building on Promises Open Day Event

Each year EMHA and sister company Foundation Housing Association (FHA) hold an event where residents from both organisations can come and give us their views on our services and learn about how we deliver our services. The 2008 event was held at Leicester University and included workshops, displays, activity bus and crèche. Attendees received a reusable bag (designed by one of our young residents in an environmental competition we ran earlier in the year).

EMH News

The newsletter is produced four times a year and contains articles encouraging residents to become more involved. Some examples were:

- mystery shopping
- joining a user group to look at giving advice on rent arrears
- helping us review our complaints procedures
- helping us to develop a customer satisfaction questionnaire for gas servicing
- joining a group to look at the recharges policy

Leaflets in Reception Areas and Tenancy Sign Up packs

A further way we encourage residents to become involved in what we do is through a leaflet. These have a freepost tear off strip which residents can return asking for more information about different ways in which to work with us. The return rate for these in 2008 was eight, but these continue to provide a steady stream of new residents wanting to become involved and also provide information about the different groups. We will be reviewing these leaflets during 2009 to reflect the changes to the EMHG and resident involvement structures.

New Initiatives for 2008

Emerald Project Competitions

The Emerald Project is our environmental project which involves EMHG staff and residents pledging to take six simple steps towards sustaining the environment.

A quarterly newsletter with tips on how to reduce energy usage, save money and with competitions goes to members.

Foundation Housing residents also signed up to the project in February 2008 and representatives from the Three Oaks Homes Tenants' Federation (formerly Blaby District Tenants' Federation) also signed up during 2008.

In January 2008 two children who won a tree planting competition as part of the Emerald Project, planted trees in the National Forest, Sence Valley Park at Ibstock. The children won the competition by telling us how their families are environmentally friendly. The tree planting ceremony was reported in Inside Housing, the trade magazine for housing associations.

David Powditch a resident from Connelly Court won our Bag for Life competition. Residents were asked to send in their designs and the winning image would be printed onto a re-usable cotton bag. All emerald project members received a bag, as did residents who attending the "building on promises" open day event during the summer.

In our February edition of the Emerald Project News members were asked to let us know if their communities could do with a spring clean. It was intended to carry out litter picks with residents, members of the local community, Groundworks - the national environmental charity, and the local authority. Despite offering training, equipment and staff to help out with the litter picks, no residents volunteered their scheme.

Emerald Project members were also invited to enter a sunflower growing competition to win tickets to the Eden Project in Cornwall. Unfortunately no entries for the competition were received.

During the year, the Emerald Project cost £960. The largest proportion of these costs were the bag for life and the tree planting prize. This project does encourage younger people to be involved and take an interest in EMHA.

Food Composter

In our bid to become more environmentally friendly and not just rely on our tenants efforts through the Emerald Project to reduce our carbon footprint, we installed a food composter in the garden area at our Head Office, Jubilee House. This allows us to dispose of food waste that would normally go to landfill. Food waste we dispose of includes meat, fish, bones, pasta, dairy produce, coffee grounds and tea bags. The main cost for this initiative was the cost of the unit and its installation at £40.00.

Kaleidoscope Customer Group

EMHG's Kaleidoscope Strategy details our approach to diversity. It aims to define the diverse range of people and needs served by EMHG and to put in place policies and procedures to ensure that we monitor how we work, eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity.

EMHG already has a staff working group to steer the Strategy but it was felt that residents should be at the heart of it. In late 2008 a customer group was set up to ensure continuous improvement in line with EMHG action plans and to give feedback, ideas and solutions to the Kaleidoscope Working Group.

Although the group has only met once (it intends to meet quarterly) the members of this group have devised their own terms of reference and are also intending to look at different ways of promoting the group. Their aim is to look at good practice examples from other organisations and suggest ways that these could be used to the benefit of EMHG residents. It is too early to evaluate the success of this group.

Footprints Challenge

In September 2008 EMHG signed up to North West Leicestershire District Councils Footprints Challenge. This is a project that promotes environmental awareness across the area and over 25 organisations such as Morrisons Supermarket and East Midlands Airport have signed up to the project and will promote a variety of different initiatives to their staff and customers. Some of those are initiatives are:

- Green travel week
- Energy saving week
- The big switch off
- National tree week
- Green Christmas (which EMHG were main sponsor of)

The Footprints Challenge will hold an awards ceremony in April 2009 when the Council will look at the impact everyone signing up to the project has had.

The main cost of £1500 for this initiative was the sponsorship fee.

We asked residents attending our focus groups to score this initiative 3 stars for excellent down to 0 stars for poor. 70.6% of residents said this initiative deserved a 3 Star rating. In particular residents Dot Honey and Marion Quinn both thought it was a worthy project for EMHG to sponsor. George Edwards also appreciated its potential and told us: "It's for the future – we have got to start somewhere". Residents thought it would be a good idea to promote and publicise our involvement with Footprints more.

Clockwise Partnership

Clockwise is a Leicester based credit union and advice agency that during 2008 EMHA built links with to provide advice and help to residents experiencing financial difficulties. Clockwise provides assistance to our customers in ensuring that they are claiming all the benefits they are entitled to whilst providing them support and advice in how they manage their finances. This is seen as an additional resource which will help EMHA to continue to provide the help and assistance needed to build stable and sustainable communities.

The main cost for this initiative is a one-off cost to print the leaflets of £280.

EMGold

EMGold is a new scheme where tenants have the chance to win prizes as an incentive for being a good tenant.

A monthly prize draw is held and tenants can win £50 by simply keeping their rent account arrears free. This draw is held in the first week of each month and 4 tenants will win £50.00. Twice per year (June and December) one lucky tenant will win £150 in High Street Shopping Vouchers. To qualify, tenants need to keep their rent accounts arrears free. Tenants who are on housing benefit are also entered so long as their rent account is clear when the benefit is paid in. The prize draws are open to all tenants and licensees of EMHA including supported housing residents.

If tenants are leaving us we are always sorry to see them go and even more so when their home is not left clean and tidy. It costs EMHA thousands of pounds each year to clear and clean properties. The EMGold scheme will reward departing tenants with £150, when they follow a few simple rules which means they leave their home clean and clear. Tenants have to :

- Leave the property without damage and clear of rubbish (especially white goods and televisions).
- Leave the home clean and tidy so the next tenant can move in straight away.
- Give EMHA 4 weeks' notice
- Provide EMHA with a forwarding address
- Leave no rent arrears

The main costs for this initiative is estimated at £4,800 per year including the direct debit prize draws, rent incentives, void incentives and the publicity for the scheme.

Residents at our focus group said they thought this initiative deserved a 2 Star rating. Denise Traore thought it was a great way for EMHA to potentially save a lot of money. Both Marion Quinn and Barbara Davis were keen to find out how the scheme had progressed so far and if there was any evidence of savings being made and whilst it is a little early to assess the impact, this will be done once it has been running for a year.

Residents asked for clarification on whether everyone that was already paying by direct debit would be included in the prize draw. They were informed that as long as their account was not in arrears they would be automatically entered into the draw.

Four Free Energy Efficient Light Bulbs for each EMHA Household

The Housing Corporation, eaga (a green support service) and EDF Energy teamed up to help housing association residents reduce their carbon emission by giving out energy efficient light bulbs to each households of each housing association who has signed up to this initiative.

EMHA signed up to this project in September 2008 as it has close links with our own 'green' aims we are promoting through the Emerald Project. We want to help residents become more energy efficient and reduce costs of lighting their home at a time of rising energy prices.

The light bulbs will be sent direct to our customers so there isn't a need for storage or distribution of the light bulbs. This means that there is no cost to the organisation.

Consultations

Sounding Board

This is a group of over 70 EMHG residents and their relatives who have expressed an interest in becoming involved in the way that we work.

Examples of different service areas the Sounding Board (SB) covers are:

- Day to day repairs
- Service Charges
- Customer care and standards of service

Members become involved with as few or as many topic areas as they want from a choice of 22. Members also choose their preferred contact method such as postal, e-mail, telephone, meetings and forums.

The SB aims to ensure that residents have input into new and revised policies and procedures. In the last 12 months eight surveys have been carried out. These include rent arrears advice, diversity promises and the proposed Group structure.

76.5% of residents consulted stated that they thought this initiative deserved a 3 Star rating. Residents reacted positively to EMHA's Sounding Board, but thought it could benefit from being promoted more so that more people could get involved. Helen Blyth said that: "Residents have appreciated that they can be involved", while Marion Quinn stated that: "EMH do listen and I like that!"

Customer Excellence Panel

This is a core group of residents from across the EMHG who meet every two months to give feedback on new initiatives, best value reviews, continuous improvement initiatives and policies. The main aims of the group are to influence policy and practice throughout the EMHG, to help develop initiatives that directly affect customers and provide practical advice and ideas about how our services impact customers.

There have been a number of successes in 2008 including consultations on:

- tenant led improvements and budget capping
- the use of audio equipment for translations
- choices for kitchens
- qualitative standards to be reported back to customers
- rent statements
- EMHA News
- former tenant arrears policy
- debt recovery policy

The main cost for this initiative is mileage and childcare costs which amount to £1200 for 2008.

76.5% of consulted residents gave this a 3 star rating. Many residents used the word 'Excellent' to describe CEP. It has continued to be one of EMHG's most successful methods of consultation. Some concern was raised about the group's diversity as there was a lack of younger people attending and that we should look at ways of overcoming this. Edna Dewison suggested that we contact youngsters via email to canvass their views and opinions. This could help where they might be reluctant to attend meetings and if necessary we could hold separate meetings for younger residents. We advised residents that a new initiative that EMHA is considering is supporting local youth clubs and hopefully this will offer another avenue to interact with young people and gain their input.

Leasehold Buildings Insurance Consultation

This one-off consultation was designed to ensure that leaseholders and shared owners understand the jargon used in the building insurance leaflet and to make update the leaflet. The consultation consisted of three, one-to-one consultations with two leaseholders and one shared owner. The residents had been given the leaflet to read before the meeting and asked to highlight areas that were difficult to understand. During the meeting the EMHA representative went through the sections which had been highlighted as difficult to understand and worked with the resident to make the language in the leaflet more straightforward. The changes were incorporated in a new leaflet that was printed in August 2008. The format and layout changed considerably, from a leaflet full of jargon to a user friendly booklet, which also includes a fridge magnet with the emergency number on it. The new style booklet is easier to read and understand.

There was no cost for this initiative as the insurance company covered the cost of re-design and print of the leaflet.

Strategy Shaping Sessions for Resident Involvement in 2009

These Strategy shaping sessions were held with residents from across the Group to find out what residents wanted to see in their Resident Involvement Strategy for 2009. EMHA residents told us what was important to them and these ideas are being incorporated into the new Resident Involvement Strategy.

The Strategy for 2009 will be in place in early December 2008.

The main cost for this initiative is mileage costs of £110.

Resident Conference Decision Making Group

EMHA holds a large scale annual event for residents each year. These often take different formats such as formal conferences or regional bus tours. In 2008 it was decided that after the success of 2007's formal conference a similar event would be held in 2008, learning from the lessons of last year.

Residents were invited to join a working group to look at organising the conference. In April, a group of eight residents met to look at the options available. The first decision the group had to make was which venue to use; they had a choice of four. They based their decision on the best location for all EMHA and FHA residents. They took into account the cost of hiring the venue and the suitability of the venue. One issue arising from the 2007 conference was that the venue was not easily accessible, many residents found the stairs difficult to use and the lift was not quick enough. Residents therefore decided that accessibility was key to choosing a venue for 2008 and they picked Leicester University as all areas were on the same level.

Other financial decisions that the residents from the conference decision making group had to make included how much was spent on corporate gifts (the freebies given away in the bags) and also how much to spend on the incentive prizes and what they were.

Residents were asked if they wanted to have workshops and a guest speaker like last year. The group agreed that they didn't want a guest speaker as the breaks in the speech where it was translated meant that the speech did not flow and residents lost interest. Much of the feedback from last year's conference supported this opinion. The group felt the time would be better spent if residents had the opportunity to participate in a second workshop. This was also backed up by the feedback from last year's conference where residents had said that they would have liked to have been able to attend more than one workshop.

In preparation for the meeting staff had been asked to plan out 8 topics for possible workshops, residents at the meeting chose four topics and decided that it would be best if each workshop ran twice.

The group also chose the date and times of the conference. They were very keen to encourage families to attend as there were very few in 2007. They decided that if the event were held in the school holidays and childcare facilities were provided on site this may encourage more families to attend.

The main cost for this initiative was mileage costs of £110.

When we consulted residents about the success of the planning meeting their views were split. 52.9% of residents consulted stated that they thought this initiative deserved a 3 star rating. We felt that giving residents the opportunity to plan a conference helped them to understand what is involved and all the different issues we face including how to promote the conference and the difficulties in choosing venues suitable for everyone. It was agreed by residents that the decision-making group was the best way to ensure that the conference could continue to be a success by taking lesson learned from previous events and listening to what residents actually want. Ian Walters suggested that any residents involved in the decision-making process should talk to as many other residents as possible to gather a wider opinion.

Supported Housing Resident Meetings & Coffee Mornings

Supported housing schemes staff hold regular meetings with residents to obtain views on issues relating to the scheme. The coffee mornings provide an informal setting for interagency working and resident involvement. Residents choose subjects for discussion and staff facilitate or invite a guest speaker or trainer to the schemes. This approach enables and encourages vulnerable residents to interact and have access to wider community services helping to empower the individual and raise the profile of the scheme.

The cost for meetings is mainly staff time and refreshments for the residents and is approximately £10 per meeting or coffee morning.

Access Team – Resident Involvement

The Access Team is responsible for providing our disabled adaptations service. No two adaptations are the same, they are specifically tailored to meet an individual's needs and to facilitate this the team undertakes one to one assessments and consultations with residents throughout the process.

The consultation process includes a thorough assessment of an individual's needs but also takes account of the needs of other people living in the home and carers. These needs include complete resident involvement and choice. Choices include various things like the type of external railings, colour of bathroom floor/wall tiles, height of units etc.

When contractors are on site they clarify customer requirements before commencing work in case anything has changed. Any request that differs from the original recommendation is then considered through discussions with the resident, contractor and Access Team at this point to ascertain if alterations can be made.

The total Access Team disabled adaptation budget for 2008 was £360,000.

70.6% of consulted residents scored this service as 3 stars. There was a lot of praise for the Access team as many residents attending the focus group had benefitted from the service or knew of others who had benefitted from it. Denise Traore commented that EMHA should be proud of the service as she had a friend who received assistance and had commended the team. It was queried whether EMHA promoted the service enough. The Neighbourhood Liaison Officer assured all that there is a feature on it in most of our newsletters. George Edwards suggested that the Housing Officers could be more proactive with its promotion as they are in a position to explain more about the Access Team to residents who are eligible to benefit.

Neighbourhood and Community Involvement

Neighbourhood Inspections

2006/7 saw the commencement of formal Neighbourhood Inspections which form part of our commitment to engage directly with our residents on local issues. Residents, Councillors and the community Police are invited to attend the inspections with the Housing Officer and have an opportunity to discuss any concerns. In 2008 the level of attendance from residents in the North Area has been low but those that did attend said they thought the process and the actual inspections were a good idea. The inclusion of community Police at the inspections did much to reassure residents who had experienced low level anti social behaviour.

In total the area housing teams carried out of 90 estate inspections during 2008. The findings from some are shown below.

Residents in Cavendish Road, Carlton (North area) who attended their local inspection highlighted the poor condition of steps used by elderly tenants and as a result we were able to liaise with the Local Authority maintenance department and achieve a speedy repair. The majority of concerns raised were minor repair items or landscaping problems which were followed up the housing officers immediately after inspection.

In the East area, turnout varied with higher numbers attending sheltered schemes inspections. In the Highfields area of Leicester turnout was low but good links were made and ideas were shared with the local policing unit. In general residents are happy with their properties and main concerns centre around youths and anti social behaviour issues which are being tackled.

The South Area Office had no attendance for five of their inspections but 53 people attended in total for 17 other inspections. Local councillors attended five of the inspections as well as Police Community Support Officers at two. This is an increase on last year and it is hoped that we can continue to build on this. The vast majority of concerns raised were minor maintenance issues relating to communal areas that residents had not previously reported. One scheme identified a repair which was felt to be of an emergency nature, regarding damaged electrical cabling and this was reported and repaired immediately. Two schemes raised issues regarding their communal green space. One group asked us to look at converting the spaces into car parking areas and one asked for them to be revamped and designated children's play areas. The housing officer is consulting with both sets of residents for their views before we move forward. The Area Housing Manager for the South area said that "the inspections have been successful because of the continued cooperation between maintenance and the housing officers in getting issues resolved swiftly."

In the West area 50% of inspections were attended by residents and other guests. Seven inspections were attended by local councillors (three at Coton Park) and a further seven were attended by local Police officers. The best attendance overall was at Bardon Close where 15 people attended including local police and councillors. The range of issues at our largest scheme in Agar Nook, Coalville, included graffiti, damage to retaining walls and missing drain covers. At all schemes there were issues about minor repairs to communal areas or landscaping issues. The issues raised were followed up by the housing officers after inspections.

The main costs associated with estate inspections is staff time and travelling expenses but it is considered to be a vital part of our estate management role.

Residents were asked to give a score for this initiative between 3 and 0 stars with 3 being for an excellent initiative. 41.2% of residents consulted stated that they thought this initiative deserved a 0 Star rating. The main concern of the residents that were consulted was that in their experience no action plans were developed, therefore nothing changed. They did state that in principle of the idea was a good one. A number of residents also said that they had never had an inspection or that it had been done very quickly. Graeme Stewardson (Head of Housing) apologised and said that he would feed back specific concerns to the relevant Housing Officers. A number of residents were also unaware that the inspections were an annual event. Doreen Waite said that on estates where there was a high turnover of residents they should be held more often. Graeme Stewardson agreed and said that this was already the case at Agar Nook. Helen Blyth said that she had never seen any action plans appearing from the inspections. The Neighbourhood Liaison Officer agreed that this may be a good idea. The process of action planning following the estate inspections will be addressed and feedback to residents on this will be given.

Tenant Led Improvements

The Tenant Led Improvement programme continued in 2008 with £27,000 set aside for project bids from tenants to improve their neighbourhoods and communities. This year, two panels were held to give tenants the maximum opportunity to get their bids approved. It was the decision of the panel (made up of tenants) to assess and agree if the project or bid should be approved.

Examples of the bids that were successful in 2008 are:

- a pool table for the communal room at one of our supported housing schemes for vulnerable young homeless people in Melton Mowbray;
- new locks for fire doors at a scheme in South Derbyshire;
- an awning to provide shelter from the sun at an older persons scheme in Northampton.

This year £27,000 was set aside for tenant led improvements.

47.1% of residents consulted stated that they thought this initiative deserved a 3 Star rating. Marion Quinn said that this was a good idea and Denise Traore agreed. George Edwards asked where residents could find out about the scheme. Graeme Stewardson said that information and application forms could be obtained from Housing Officers.

Supporting the FHA “One Group”

One of the ways in which we learn from other companies within the EMHG is to attend their meetings and share information about projects. In November 2007 FHA staff held a meeting that was open to all FHA residents. During this meeting FHA residents had an opportunity to let staff know what information and advice they would find useful. Residents were asked how often they would like to meet and what information they would like. Residents voted to have regular six weekly meetings and gave staff a wish list of areas that they would like to know more about.

In January 2008 the programme of meetings was rolled out. Many of the areas that residents were interested were outside the remit of FHA staff and so they invited outside agencies (like the police) to come and deliver presentations. Staff from EMHA including the Neighbourhood Liaison Officer and the Head of Asset Management gave presentations on different topics such as how to set up a constituted residents group, what the CEP is and its benefits to tenants and information about the Decent Homes Standard.

The main costs involved in running this group for EMHA are time and travelling expenses for staff.

Major Repairs

EMHA plans to spend a budgeted £13 Million over the next five years through its capital reinvestment programme. This programme is primarily driven by the Decent Homes Standard, the need to address environmental issues and the essential requirement to maintain demand within the stock. The works include replacement kitchens, upgrades to central heating systems, fuel swaps, installation of double glazing, electrical periodic testing with associated works arising, and roofing replacements complete with top up of loft insulation where required.

All residents are consulted prior to the commencement of any works to ensure that they are fully aware of the scope of works being proposed, and to give them the opportunity to have their input in terms of colour choices, styles, layouts and to assess the necessity to decant. The scope of choices made available for residents on kitchens and UPVC windows and doors have been consulted on through our CEP. Once works are completed, residents are invited to pass comment on our performance through an incentivised customer satisfaction survey, the results of which are used to feed back into the process and are monitored through Performance Review Group (PRG) and Regional Committees.

Residents Groups

EMHA encourage residents to set up their own constituted groups so they can work together and set up their own activities and to give them a collective voice.

Two new groups in the Leicester area and two groups in the Northampton area were constituted in 2008. Some of the activities that these groups have carried out over the last 12 month included trips out, entertainment afternoons, cinema evenings, barbeques and coffee mornings.

Each year funding is provided to groups who can produce minutes of their Annual General Meeting and their financial records.

Formally recognised groups are not desired by all schemes, and so we actively encourage schemes to continue or establish non-constituted groups if they so choose. EMHA does not provide an annual grant to these groups, but we still recognise them for consultation and involvement purposes.

The cost of funding these groups is approximately £500 per year.

Connelly Court and Chester House 20th Anniversary Celebrations

On 13th June 2008 staff and residents got together to celebrate the anniversary of the re-opening of a 19th Century factory as flats. Staff and residents from Connelly Court and Chester House dressed in period costumes to mark the milestone 20th anniversary. This event brought together young and old as Connelly Court is a sheltered housing scheme for older people and Chester House is a general needs scheme.

The main cost of £540 for this initiative was the advertising, buffet lunch and the framed montage photographs for the scheme.

Brookside Meadows Fun Day

In July 2008 residents from ASRA and EMHA got together with members of community, Police, local authority and local businesses to have a fun day.

The event took place in a car park of Brookside Meadows with lots of stalls where residents could find out about the two housing organisations EMHA and ASRA, recycling in Northamptonshire, how to stay safe in your home and on the streets with the local police. There were children's entertainment and ice creams and food.

The event was designed in partnership with ASRA to encourage residents to come out of their homes and talk to housing staff and residents from both housing associations. It was hoped that a joint residents group may emerge from the day. Unfortunately only a handful of residents from EMHA attended the event although these have attended meetings to discuss setting up a joint group since.

The cost to EMHA was not high as it was joint funded by ASRA. EMHA provided funds of £300 which went towards the barbeque and the residents committee to put towards other costs for the magician, children's entertainment and refreshments.

Warning Zone

One of the ways that EMHA helps to give something back to the community is by giving staff time during work hours to carry out volunteer work where it can make a difference to the local community and our residents. One such project is Warning Zone, a children's safety education centre in Leicestershire providing interactive facilities aimed at Year Six children (10 to 11 year olds) who attend schools in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. The children experience a variety of thought-provoking and memorable situations including scenarios that look at anti-social behaviour (ASB) like underage drinking, criminal damage and arson.

The Neighbourhood Liaison Officer volunteers her time to guide the children through the facility and teach them about the effect ASB has on other members of the community.

The main cost for this initiative is the staff time when the Neighbourhood Liaison Officer is volunteering, which is 2 mornings a month.

Residents were asked to give a score for this initiative between 3 stars being the best service EMHA could provide and 0 stars being the poorest. 76.5% of residents consulted stated that they thought this initiative deserved a 3 Star rating. Marion Quinn asked what the Neighbourhood Liaison Officer got out of it. Polly Cox replied that she found it very rewarding and that it was a good use of her time. Everyone agreed that making children think about their attitude and behaviour could only be a good thing. George Edwards said it was commendable that the Neighbourhood Liaison Officer had volunteered her time to do this.

Agar Nook Football Team Sponsorship

EMHA sponsored the Agar Nook Football team to help improve the community spirit and also the health and fitness of residents. The residents who have benefited from this sponsorship are the young men aged 17 to 35 who are participating in the activity and also the supporters, who come from the whole community. The team has been successful and the numbers of residents attending the practice sessions has increase and so has the numbers of supporters.

The main cost of £300 for this initiative was the sponsorship of the team kit. Matched funding from self generated funds and other sponsorship is also generated. The potential benefits are significant so it is good value for money.

Day Trip to Skegness

Len Hollis Court, Wakerley Court and Scarborough Court in Leicester are sheltered housing schemes in Leicester. Residents had asked staff at their coffee mornings to arrange a day trip out. Staff advised that they were happy to help manage the day trip, but funding would have to come from the residents themselves. Residents at the schemes were asked if they wanted to go and 50 came forward saying that they wanted to. Staff helped the residents by looking into the cost of hiring a coach, this cost was then split between each resident who bought a ticket and went on the day trip.

EMHA paid for two tickets so staff could accompany residents and help them. EMHA also contributed towards refreshments on the coach.

Residents enjoyed themselves when they got to the seaside, they sat together for a picnic in the park before going their separate ways to explore Skegness. Some residents enjoyed an open bus tour of the town, some went in the sea and some, who aren't as mobile, sat on benches on the promenade.

The cost for this initiative was the 2 coach seats and refreshments for the residents - £50.

Elmhurst Court Tidy Up

Residents at Elmhurst Court in Northampton were getting fed up with the anti-social behaviour that was occurring near their homes. A big problem was an area of land next to their scheme that was overgrown with plants and a large hedge. The plants were causing problems because young people were using them as a hiding place to drink alcohol and this was causing problems for residents who lived at Elmhurst Court and other members of the community.

The community warden, probation services and EMHA knew that something needed to be done and funding was needed to clear or tidy up the piece of land. They looked to businesses and the local community to help sponsor this project and were rewarded when Barclaycard came forward.

As part of world environmental awareness day, Barclaycard paid for a team of volunteers from their offices to work with the local residents, staff from EMHA and the probation services to cut the plants back and landscape the surrounding areas.

The main cost of this initiative was staff time.

MYST Lodge Free Gym Induction and Reduced Rates for Gym Use

Melton Mowbray Leisure Centre offered a free gym induction for all residents at MYST Lodge, 80% of residents took up this opportunity which encouraged them to think about their health. It was also a good opportunity for social interaction. This service was free to EMHA as it was funded by the MYST Lodge Liaison Group. Residents of MYST Lodge were also offered reduced rates at the gym although most residents do not take advantage of this service.

Supported Housing Bread & Cakes Donation

Staff at Durban House in Coalville and MYST Lodge and Westbourne House in Melton Mowbray, projects that house vulnerable single homeless people aged between 16 and 25, approached the Bakers Oven to ask if they could have the leftover food each night for these residents. The Bakers Oven agreed and this kind donation helps tight budgets of residents at the projects. Every evening a group of residents from the projects drop into their local bakeries to pick up the day's unsold bread and cakes. There is no cost to EMHA.

MYST Lodge move on grant

All residents who originate from the Borough of Melton and who have been a resident at MYST Lodge for longer than 4 months are eligible for a grant of up to £250 of equipment such as bedding, lighting, plates and other new property when they move into a new home.

The grant is administered by EMHA staff but is funded by the MYST Liaison Support Group and therefore has no cost to EMHA.

Supported Housing In House Training and Education

Training sessions have been held for our residents who live in our supported housing schemes. Issues such as, safety in your home, the affects of second hand smoke on children and assertiveness and confidence building have all been very popular. This has helped residents develop skills and encouraged them to enter into education and training. These small steps are helping them to reach their own targets and their own independence.

The cost for this initiative is mainly staff time and refreshments for the residents which amounts to £10 per session.

Governance and Management

Blaby Stock Transfer

During 2007, following a lengthy consultation, information and ballot process, EMHA was selected as the stock transfer partner for Blaby District Council. EMHA residents have been involved in the process through the newsletters, Sounding Boards, Customer Excellence Panel, Regional Committees and Board of Management. As part of the Stock Transfer process, EMHA is establishing a new group structure which residents were also consulted about. We received lots of positive feedback about the Stock Transfer and residents who had contact with tenants of Blaby District Council throughout the process have made them feel very welcome. EMHA residents have shared information about EMHA, our customer service standards, our policies and procedures and what it is like to have EMHA as a landlord. This helped Blaby staff, tenants and Councillors to decide to partner with EMHA.

Residents were asked to give a score for this initiative between 3 stars being the best service EMHA could provide and 0 stars being the poorest. 52.9% of residents consulted stated that they thought this initiative deserved a 2 Star rating. David Watts asked if Three Oaks Homes (TOH) was a new organisation and if it was part of EMHA. Jeff Pallet asked if they were going to be separate from EMHA. Graeme Stewardson responded to both questions by saying that TOH was a new organisation created for running the former Blaby housing stock and that it was a part of the new EMH Group. Denise Traore commented that as it widened the umbrella it could only be a good thing. George Edwards asked what the condition of the stock was. Graeme Stewardson replied that it was not good but that the money was there to make the necessary improvements. Helen Blyth gave the opinion that it was good that TOHTF had a strong view. Edna Dewison asked if EMHA and TOH would share accommodation. Graeme Stewardson replied that we were currently reviewing the allocations process.

Resident Board Member Recruitment

As part of our Group restructuring we have established a new Board of Management for EMHA that will primarily be responsible for the provision of high quality customer and neighbourhood services and aiming for upper quartile performance in all key performance indicators. A vacancy for a Resident Board Member who could combine their experience of being a resident of EMHA with drive and commitment to shape the future of EMHA and make a difference to fellow customers existed and so a recruitment process was undertaken. The recruitment process was open to all residents to encourage people with a wide variety of skills and experience to apply and so an advertisement was placed in EMH News and on our website. We had 14 expressions of interest, which were followed up by 10 applications. We recruited resident Sid Jeewa who has a disability consultancy background.

The costs of running the recruitment process including the production of information for applicants and staff time for discussions and interviews to be £500. There is also currently a salary of £2000 per annum for the position.

Residents were asked to give a score for this initiative between 3 stars being the best service EMHA could provide and 0 stars being the poorest. 52.9% of residents consulted stated that they thought this initiative deserved a 3 Star rating. Tony Pitcher asked how many people were on the Board and how many of those were residents. The Neighbourhood Liaison Officer replied that there were 12 Board members of which 3 were residents. Mr Pitcher then said that we needed people on the Board of different ages and from different areas so that we had a good cross section. Graeme Stewardson replied that this was one of the considerations being taken into account during the recruitment process.

Continuous Improvement

Resident Representation on External Support Group

Residents at Veronica House continue to be invited to attend the bi-monthly support group meetings for Veronica House. The Veronica House support group is chaired by the local church and attended by members that organise fundraising activities to buy practical items for women staying at the refuge. The group benefits from a resident perspective and the resident is able to influence future change and decisions relating to the scheme.

Outcomes for residents include the empowerment of vulnerable women and that they are able to influence non-housing related support delivered at the scheme.

Diversity Promises

Our diversity promises have been developed to support the customer service promises and as part of our approach to having tailored promises that relate to an individual's needs. These diversity promises were developed jointly by staff and customers via the 2007 staff conference, the Sounding Board and Customer Excellence Panel to ensure a consistent service delivery that meets customer expectations and therefore improves resident satisfaction. These diversity promises not only relate to our residents but all customers of EMHA, which include, staff, contractors, applicants and other stakeholders.

Charter Mark

In February 2008, EMHA received reaccreditation of the Charter Mark, Customer Service Excellence award. This award aims to demonstrate the high standards of customer service EMHA strives for and how it continues to work with residents to improve services throughout the business. During the reaccreditation process, the Charter Mark assessor met with residents from several schemes and groups to hear their views on our homes and services. It is this feedback and our written evidence that the assessor uses to determine whether we meet the criteria to be awarded the Charter Mark. Being a Charter Mark holder helps us stand out from the crowd. It helps customers and business partners to see how important they are to us. It also enables us to have a regular independent review of our customer services and helps us to identify where and how to make improvements.

This year's cost of reaccreditation was £1777.

Disability Service User Group

EMHA has an Access Team who process and arrange adaptations to residents' homes to allow them to continue to live comfortably in them. This includes adaptations relating to access, bathing and generally moving around the home. The Access team set up a user group who give their views on the current level of service and how they would like to see it change.

The aim of the Service user group is not to discuss personal disability issues, but to look at how EMHA can provide quality service to disabled people by working in alliance with the Access Team.

EMHA services the group and provides staffing resources, refreshments and travelling expenses. The cost of this is approximately £300 per year.

Sheltered Housing Code of Practice

Residents from our sheltered housing schemes were involved in the working group set up to achieve the Sheltered Housing Code of practice. Their role was to give a customer perspective on the current service and to suggest ways we could improve it. Achieving the code allows us to compete against other service providers and demonstrates that we are providing a high level of service for sheltered housing residents.

Residents were asked to give a score for this initiative between 3 stars being the best service EMHA could provide and 0 stars being the poorest. 52.9% of residents consulted stated that they thought this initiative deserved a 2 Star rating. Preparation for achieving the Code of Practice was started in 2007. A number of questions were raised by residents and answered at the time. The main concern this time around was how we maintained accreditation and how often we had to reapply. It was explained that we would be regularly assessed on progress against our action plan and that this could happen at any time. It was felt that Scheme Managers needed to talk to residents more about what it was all about.

Mystery Shopping

Mystery shopping is one of the ways in which EMHA tests service promises. All residents are given the opportunity to become a mystery shopper for EMHA. Each resident who opts to become a shopper receives training to give them the skills and confidence to be able to carry out this task.

In 2008 seven EMHA residents received one-to-one training to become mystery shoppers and all were asked to carry out a minimum of ten shops over a six week period. Residents completed a total of 20 shops. Unfortunately, of those trained, five decided not to undertake any 'shops'.

The results of the mystery shopping suggest that:

- Our staff are polite, helpful and courteous - shoppers stated that overall EMHA is providing a good customer service.
- Our staff are upholding our service promises - often going above and beyond the stated promises.
- Regular refresher training is needed to ensure that we continue to provide a good service.

The exercise provides a continuing insight into service provision within EMHA and will inform the operational and customer care training at EMHA.

Residents were asked to give a score for this initiative between 3 stars being the best service EMHA could provide and 0 stars being the poorest. 47.1% of residents consulted stated that they thought this initiative deserved a 3 Star rating. Ian Walters asked if there might not be some confusion as to what Mystery Shoppers were and what they actually did. Marg Pallet added that some people thought it was something to do with Tesco. Everyone agreed and suggested that perhaps the name needed to be changed and that afterwards it was advertised again. The Neighbourhood Liaison Officer said that she would look into asking residents for a new name. Everyone also agreed that perhaps people would only do it if they were paid more than just costs.

The Neighbourhood Liaison Officer asked how we could recruit more Mystery Shoppers. Doreen Waite asked how many were needed. The Neighbourhood Liaison Officer replied that the more we had the fewer scenarios each would be asked to do. Marion Quinn suggested that members of the Sounding Board and the Customer Excellence Panel were asked. Denise Traore added that we could send out a letter asking for volunteers to a random selection of residents each month.

Jackie Johnson said that she only had a mobile phone but would be willing to come into an EMH office and use a phone or email. This prompted the Neighbourhood Liaison Officer to suggest that perhaps we offered to provide mobile phones or telephone cards for volunteers.

Residents Open Day Event 2008

Each year EMHA holds a resident conference last year and this year it has been in partnership with FHA. A resident panel was set up so residents could decide what was to happen at the 2008 conference. The format for the day was also decided by residents and there were a variety of workshops that residents could choose to attend in the morning and afternoon session. The workshop sessions were aimed to impart information about our service and consult residents about changes to processes.

Childcare for the under eights was provided by Leicester Children's Services and for older children the Vibe Bus parked up outside the venue so older children could use the computer facilities and learn to DJ and MC. Although over 45 children attended many of them came with grandparents or one parent brought their own children and their friends children. This meant that although we had many children attend we still did not have many young people attend and the majority of those who did come were again aged 60 and above.

The Conference was attended by over 70 EMHA and FHA residents who were encouraged to attend by EMHA and FHA staff and through the EMHA and FHA news along with key staff such as housing officers and repairs staff, and also a number of tenants from Blaby District Council, who attended to obtain a view about what being a tenant of EMHA is about.

Feedback from the event told us that the residents liked being able to attend more than one workshop and also that the whole event was on one level, although residents would have preferred a location where the restaurant for lunch was in the same building.

The main costs of £10,000 for this event were venue, childcare, incentives and transport to and from the event for residents.

Residents were asked to give a score for this initiative between 3 stars being the best service EMHA could provide and 0 stars being the poorest. 41.2% of residents consulted stated that they thought this initiative deserved a 3 Star rating, 29.4% thought it deserved a 2 star rating, 23.5% thought it deserved 1 star and 5.9% didn't think it deserved any stars at all.

The discussion centred on how to attract more people to any further such events and how to make them relevant and interesting. Some residents who attended said that they enjoyed the day but did not think it was a success. They thought that others just saw it as a free day out. Doreen Waite felt that if we were spending £10,000 on the event - especially in the current economic climate - we should be attracting at least 400 residents.

Helen Blyth thought that the localised tours from 2007 were a good idea. Everyone agreed that people would be more interested in local events. Doreen Waite suggested that maybe we should have a tent at one of the local shows e.g. Ashby or Mansfield.

Ian Walters suggested that maybe the way forward was to just get all the active residents together - after all it was mainly the same people who attended every year. George Edwards thought that we should look again at what we needed out of it. Geoff Pallet agreed – if we had bus trips we may just attract residents who wanted a day out.

Surveys

A traditional, yet valuable method of obtaining residents views, EMHA use a variety of different surveys throughout all areas of the service including lettings, repairs, customer contact, satisfaction.

A response rate target of 25% is set, but unfortunately this is rarely achieved for surveys such as lettings and satisfaction with process such as complaints or anti-social behaviour. It is more often achieved on individual scheme surveys that are used following major repairs works such as new kitchens.

A new research strategy was developed in 2008 called “Customer Feedback – Strategy and Guidance”. This procedure was developed with resident input to ensure a consistency of approach. This means that we can compare the different services we provide against each other. It will also ensure that the feedback received is used and action plans or strategies are developed so changes are made and policies are modified and altered where necessary.

Typically surveys include incentives for return and these are often prize draws. The estimated cost of conducting surveys including the prize draws is £5000.

Supported Housing exit interviews and satisfaction surveys

These interviews are held with as many residents who are leaving our schemes as possible. It gives an opportunity for residents to have their say, and to provide feedback on the quality of services provided. The suggestions and feedback is then used to improve services. This process also enables the service user to have a voice and express their views and gives a sense of belonging to a community

Neighbourhood Liaison Briefings

Each month the Neighbourhood Liaison Officer meets with each area team to update staff on progress that is being made in different regions. A briefing paper is produced outlining all the resident involvement work currently being carried out by the area teams and the Neighbourhood Liaison Officer.

These regular briefings give staff the opportunity to learn good practice from other teams which they can then go on to replicate. The Neighbourhood Liaison Officer also offers support to staff at these briefings and is able to encourage and assist them in reaching their own targets for resident involvement.

Information

EMHA News

EMHA produces a 12 page A4 newsletter four times per year for its tenants and homeowners. The newsletter comprises of corporate articles, for example opening times and policy consultations. It also includes articles about activities that are happening in our different regions for example Chesterfields' Connelly Court 20th anniversary celebrations, Durban House and MYST Lodge (supported housing) bread and cakes donations and the Leicester sheltered schemes day trip to Skegness.

Our aim is to communicate with residents on a regular basis and ensure that they receive information of importance or potential interest to them.

The target of four newsletters per year is met and these are seasonally produced. The newsletters are edited to ensure timely information is given. Articles from residents have increased in the last year and we always encourage residents to write in and become more involved with us. Area teams are also encouraged to write or give ideas for articles that feature the residents and schemes.

The cost of producing the newsletter is £32,000 per year however readership is 94% and this communication with our residents is invaluable and far out ways the financial cost.

Translations

We aim to provide information required by residents in a variety of formats to meet their individual needs. Information is translated or placed in alternative formats that benefit as many residents as possible, taking a value for money approach and preventing translated documents from 'sitting on shelves'.

We also subscribe to Language Line, a telephone translation service where over 100 languages can be translated at the point of need. We also have staff who provide verbal translations at point of contact and we pay an enhancement to their salary for this.

In 2008 the Customer Excellence Panel approved the proposal to buy recording equipment so translations could be recorded in-house rather than be sent off to a specialist translation service. This cost of equipment provides good value for money because staff can translate any document needed in an audio format at no extra cost (apart from the initial cost of equipment). Previously we had to pay for a document to be translated each and every time.

Performance Information

EMHA provides a variety of performance information to tenants throughout the year. The 2007 Charter Mark assessment identified that we should review the format and detail of the information given to residents, which we did by consulting our Customer Excellence Panel. In April 2008 we continued the process by consulting the Customer Excellence Panel, this time asking them which Qualitative Standards they thought should be reported back to residents. The panel looked at the following areas;

- Repairs and Maintenance
- ASB and Estate Appearance
- Customer Care
- Lettings and Empty Properties
- Rent / Service Charge setting, collections and arrears

They advised us which areas we should report back on, some examples are;

- Percentage of decent homes
- Percentage satisfied with new home
- Incidence of ASB by type
- Spend per property on site cleaning and landscaping
- Satisfaction with staff at reception – promptness, politeness and courtesy
- Satisfaction with lettings process -conditions of void (empty property)
- Percentage of rent collected
- Tenancy turnover
- Comparative rents and service charges of local providers

This information is now reported back through the EMHA News in the check point sections of the newsletter.

There are no cost implications to this.

Resident Involvement in 2009

In 2007 residents asked if they could have more involvement with spending the resident involvement budget, helping plan the resident conference and more service user groups like the Customer Excellence Panel.

All three of these suggestions were taken on board by EMHA during 2008 and residents have had a say about spending the resident involvement budget, a panel was set up to assist with the decisions to be made about the resident conference and new groups like the Kaleidoscope Customer Group were developed.

At our resident involvement focus groups we asked residents their views on the following topics:

Incentives – what do you think?

When we first asked our residents to work with us the numbers of active residents were relatively low. This was because this was a new way of working and it took time for us to be able to publicise and recruit residents to work with us. At the end of that first year we gave each resident who had worked with us a High Street shopping voucher as a token of our appreciation for the work undertaken by them.

As more residents have taken the opportunity to work with us the cost of these tokens of appreciation have risen and last year we opted to give each resident who had worked with us a box of chocolates instead. This was met somewhat negatively and some residents complained. It also cost us in staff time to wrap, deliver or post the chocolates.

We would love to continue to provide residents with a token gesture of our appreciation for working with us, but the costs of doing this are increasing as more people get involved. We therefore asked our focus group residents if they thought we should continue to do this. They told us:

Marion Quinn said that she just wanted to be heard. Denise Traore added that people came because they wanted to make a difference. Everyone agreed that EMH should not be spending any money on this and that a Christmas card saying thank you was reward enough.

What Tenants Want – areas of good practice - what do you think?

Map the “What Tenants Want” report against EMHA Practice

We also asked tenants about what they wanted us to do in 2009. We explained that we had looked at the ‘What Tenants Want’ report and we explained that we had mapped this against current EMHA practice to identify the gaps and learn from the good practice of other housing organisations.

The areas of good practice that EMHA already carry out are:

- Service Promises
- Customer Excellence Panel
- Focus Groups
- Mystery shopping
- Community Garden
- Liaising with public bodies
- Giving residents’ choice in home improvements
- Tenant Board Members
- Sounding Board

Areas of good practice that EMHA could develop in the future are:

- **Repairs and Maintenance Pact** that sets out the responsibilities of resident and contractor and offers tenants a 2 hour time slot for appointments, if the contractor fails to attend they pay the tenant £15 and tenants must pay £15 if they are not in.
- **Respect and Reward Scheme** where young people are rewarded for respecting each other and their environment by taking them on a trip of their choice.
- **“You Said It – We Did It”** regular newsletter article telling residents what the organisation has done in response to surveys throughout the organisation.
- **Performance Related Pay** – pay is linked to customer satisfaction ratings.
- **Design Panels** – consult local tenants at an early stage before any plans are submitted to the LA. Tenants sit with staff on the panel to shape the look of the homes and neighbourhood and consider the environmental impact. Tenants also have a choice over internal design of the home including style, layout, colours and fittings for kitchens, bathrooms and doors.
- **Customer Reward Scheme** – tenants opt to have repairs and gas servicing on a Saturday.
- **Home Ownership Workshops** – tenants attend to get one-to-one advice about buying a home, looking at mortgages, savings and debt advice.
- **Outreach Workers** – work directly with outreach workers to engage hard to reach tenants.
- **Local Community Radio** – support is given to the radio station and staff have regular broadcast slots and weekly phone-ins so that residents have a direct say and are kept informed of what is happening in their area.
- **Engaging Young People** – young people themselves train staff on how to engage young people.

In 2009, we are particularly keen to increase the work we do with younger tenants and are developing a Youth Strategy to help focus our attentions on this. We are also looking to do more financial inclusion work, and feel that as the economic climate is worry for our residents we want to ensure we are working closely with them to help them through any difficult times ahead. The launch of our new Resident Involvement Strategy will begin in early 2009 and this brings with it new challenges and opportunities for residents to become more involved in different ways and we hope residents will take the opportunity to do so.