

Using the right contractors to improve homes



In the April edition of Let's Talk, we told you that we would soon start to employ contractors to bring homes up to the government's Decent Homes Standard.

We have now started the process of choosing contractors and are involving customers in the selection process. The contractors we choose will have vast experience and a good track record of working as well as being chosen for their competitive pricing.

The Asset Management sub-group, has overseen the process from the start and were involved in designing the resident consultation and customer care questions that we asked the contractors.

Their responses and prices (tenders) were returned to us at the end of July and officers and customers then spent

four days reading the submissions and looking at their prices.

At the beginning of August, a large group of customers and officers visited these contractors on their sites, to talk to other customers and check that they are working in ways they said they would do in their submission. This gave us an opportunity to make sure we are using the best contractors to improve homes.

Following that, the same group interviewed the contractors asking questions the customers on the sub group came up with.

We are hoping to make the appointment of 4 contractors by the beginning of November.

You may ask why this has taken so long? Firstly, because the contracts are big, the European Union insists that we follow a certain method of choosing our contractors which takes a long time. Secondly, as we will be in partnership with these contractors for a number of years and their work is so important to you and your home, we want to make sure that we explore all aspects of them and their work, in order to make the right choice.

The chosen partners will start work in January 2010. If you are due to have any work done, the contractors will write to you to introduce themselves and make an appointment. All of the works to be done are part of the Decent Homes programme. This does not mean that everyone will be getting a new kitchen or bathroom. In fact this represents a small part of the programme which also includes heating, some new windows and some rewiring.

We will let you have further information on the programme of improvement works in future editions of Let's Talk.





Welcome to the new look of customer involvement

In the last edition of Let's Talk we told you about the changes being made to our customer involvement groups. We are now pleased to introduce you to the new look of customer involvement at Places for People.

There are lots of different ways you can now get involved to help us improve our services to you and for you to influence our management decisions.

Here is a list of things you can get involved in:

The Area Customer Liaison Panels have now split into two new groups - **Regional Customer Forums (RCF)** and the **Regional Customer Experience Panels (RCEP)**

● **Regional Customer Forums (RCF)**

Open to all customers, this group challenge and hold us to account. They

influence policies and business decisions that affect customers by meeting regularly and working at a local level. They also promote the way we involve customers.

● **Regional Customer Experience Panels (RCEP)**

This group works with us to improve the services customers receive. They tell us what it 'feels' like to be a customer and make suggestions about how we can improve. They look at improving the services locally.

● **Residents' Associations**

Residents' associations are run by people living in the community. They

hold regular meetings and discuss local concerns and run community events.

● **Voice**

Voice is a group of customers who give us their honest feedback on different topics.

The great thing about Voice is that it is a 'virtual' consultation group. You can comment in the comfort of your own home, by email or post and there are no meetings to attend. It's arms length consultation to suit your lifestyle!

The feedback that you give us is shared with Senior Managers so they can make improvements with your comments in mind.

There are lots of different ways you can now get involved...

● **Futures Group**

This group meet up to 2 or 3 times a year to think about how we should be preparing for housing and neighbourhoods in the future.

This group moves away from what is affecting the 'here and now' and focuses on the 'what if'. The more creative and forward-thinking we are, the more we can prepare for our ever changing environment.

● **Virtual Futures Group**

The virtual futures group looks at all the same issues and challenges as the main Futures Group but is for those customers who are unable to attend meetings. All interaction is by post, email or on-line.

● **Mystery Shoppers**

Do you want to tell us what our services are like by mystery shopping us? This could simply mean popping into your local office, visiting a neighbourhood, checking out our telephone service or seeing how we respond by e-mail. Mystery shoppers who take part each month will be entered into a prize draw to win £25 store vouchers.

● **National Editorial Panel**

The editorial panel looks at the different ways we communicate with customers. The panel make sure that our content is relevant, interesting and easy to understand. This may include looking at standard letters, customer newsletters, booklets or even the website.

Most of what this group do takes place on-line or by post, so you don't even have to leave home to get involved.

● **Estate Walkabouts**

Our neighbourhood officers like to keep on top of current issues by visiting our neighbourhoods to carry out Estate Walkabouts.

Any customers can take part in these walkabouts which are publicised locally.



A list of estate walkabout dates are scheduled each year. To find out when your next walkabout is taking place, please contact your local team.

● **Community Involvement Week (CIW)**

Every year Places for People hold a Community Involvement Week.

There are a range of events to choose from which brings customers and staff together to have fun and also improve neighbourhoods. It is an opportunity for our staff to get out into the community, talk to customers and gather feedback about Places for People.

We welcome any customers who would like to suggest, volunteer to help organise, or actually run the events.

● **Young People Count (YPC)**

It's important for us to be able to know what customers of all different age groups think about things. YPC is for our customers between the ages of 16-25 who directly receive our services or are children of our customers living in one of our neighbourhoods.

We come together in a relaxed atmosphere to chat about the issues that affect young people today and how we can help. The members of this group are the ones who decide how we do things. We are always looking for new members and fresh ideas.

● **Homeowners Forum**

The Homeowners Forum works closely with the Homeownership Unit and discusses the issues that are specifically related to our homeowner customers i.e. service charges.

The group links directly into the National Customer Forum and regular reports of its activities are given.

● **Customer Inspectors**

These customers carry out regular internal inspections of our services to make sure that we are consistently delivering an excellent service to our customers. Inspectors delve deep into our services and give us their opinions on what is working well and what and how we can improve.

● **Individual Support Focus Group**

The Individual Support Focus Group gives our sheltered and extra care customers the chance to get involved in national issues that directly affect them including gaining their views on new products and services as well as how to improve existing products and services.

● **Home Focus**

This group feeds directly into the Individual Support Focus Group, but is for those customers who cannot or do not want to attend meetings. They give their feedback on the same topics but from the comfort of their own home.



If you would like to be a part of any of these groups just contact your Neighbourhood Officer or telephone the Contact Centre: 0800 432 0002

Star Award Nomination Form

To nominate your Star please complete the form below and freepost to:

**FREEPOST RSBE-BCKG-ZCLJ,
Karen Lee, Customer Relations,
Places for People, 18 Craven Drive,
Preston PR5 6BZ.**

Or if you prefer you can go online and complete the form at: www.placesforpeople.co.uk/starawards.

We will contact you if we require further information.

Your Name:

Your Address:

Your Telephone Number:

I would like to nominate (staff member's name):

Reason: (Continue on separate sheet if necessary)

If you would like further information about the Star Awards please contact: Karen Lee, Customer Relations Officer on 01772 667018 or email: karen.lee@placesforpeople.co.uk



Nominate your Star

Do you feel you have received an excellent service from a member of our staff?

Has an employee gone out of their way to make a difference to you?

If you think that they have, then it's time for you to nominate them for a 'Star Award'!

The Star Awards is a scheme which gives us an opportunity to recognise the great work that goes on by staff around the Places for People Group. It's down to you to decide who should get a Peoples Choice Award!

This award is about great customer service, positive attitude and those people who truly make a difference to our customers. We look for the following qualities in our members of staff:

- Treated people with courtesy and respect
- Is approachable and supportive
- Dealt with concerns and complaints with seriousness and sensitivity
- Communicated with care
- Got the job done and seen it through to the end
- Demonstrated a real understanding