

Welcome to the first edition of ConsultCIH news and views

Engage is a regular update for clients, partners and colleagues. It contains a blend of news and comment on our current and future work.



Working with Wulvern

ConsultCIH completed a major governance review for Wulvern Housing, a leading Cheshire based housing association.

The project followed on from earlier work including Board member appraisals and training, and consisted of a thorough review of Wulvern's governance policies and procedures.

The ConsultCIH team worked with the Governance Group of Board members, to examine all of the governance systems together with current and emerging issues. This included Board remuneration, size and structure, constituency representation, reporting levels, delegation, succession planning, growth and diversification.

Sue Lock, Wulvern's Chief Executive, said: "The ConsultCIH team has a wealth of knowledge of governance. The team includes people with experience of operating at Chief Executive and Chair of Board levels. The project, completed ahead of schedule and within budget, gives us the confidence that Wulvern's governance arrangements are fit for the future as we embark upon a major growth and diversification strategy".



Living with Derwent Living

Peter McCormack takes up his new role as Chief Executive of Derwent Living in March 2008, moving to the East Midlands from his current role as Chief Executive of Acton HA, part of the Dominion Housing Group.

ConsultCIH have worked with Derwent Living on a number of talent management projects over the past year.

Duncan Smith, Chair of Derwent Living, said "Faced with a number of issues relating to the Association's management, Derwent's Board had no hesitation in turning to ConsultCIH for assistance; they supported us in a thoroughly professional way reflecting a full understanding of our problems resulting in satisfactory outcomes all round."

Sentiments echoed by Allan Bate, Chair of the Remuneration Committee "2007 was a very busy year, in which we commissioned an Executive Team remuneration review and a Chief Executive recruitment programme. Both were completed by Janet Hale of ConsultCIH, on time and to an agreed budget; the outcomes are now successfully implemented. I found these consultants very focused, committed and professional, and I would have no hesitation in recommending using them again."

For more information about ConsultCIH's talent management activity contact **Janet Hale**.

Salvation Army Partnership

ConsultCIH have been working very closely with The Salvation Army providing a range of advice on its social housing services.

The Salvation Army has recently become a Housing Corporation investment partner and has submitted "bids" to develop a number of housing schemes across the country. The Army is also working in Scotland and Wales to develop much needed housing for vulnerable people.

Customer Insight

An introduction to customer insight by
Andrew Gray, Managing Director



Understanding your customers is key for any company, and it is vital to the success of an organisation. If you are a small housing association or a large multi-national company, knowing who your customers are, what they think, what services they want, how much they cost, and what they want in the future is key to being successful. This knowledge is often called Customer Insight.

What is Customer Insight (CI)?

Customer Insight (CI) is not just about gathering information about who our customers are, it is a process which demonstrates an organisation's commitment to being customer focused. It goes much further than just data gathering and aims to help organisations gain a deeper understanding of customers' behaviours, attitudes and aspirations and using this information to better inform the way an organisation delivers its services.

The Customer Insight (CI) framework has five key strands:

- Setting clear aims and objectives
- Research – collecting the appropriate information about customers (who they are, what they do and what they aspire to)
- Turning data into insight (by combining this information you can group together individuals who may have similar values, needs, wants and behaviours etc)
- Translating the insight into outcomes
- Monitoring and evaluating effectiveness

The list of possible uses for CI in a housing environment is endless. It can be used to make small changes to operational processes for example office opening or rent payment methods, as well as more strategic approaches including developing home ownership options for existing tenants. Once CI has been gained it will support the organisation and staff at all levels to help deliver excellent service.

Done well, CI not only identifies what different groups of customers want and value, but also identifies a framework through which receptive communication with different groups can be made. It can be used to provide different services to different groups of residents in an efficient and effective way.

ConsultCIH has co-written a soon to be published good practice briefing on CI and is working with organisations to help implement successful strategies to find out more.

Recognition and adoption

It is essential that organisations recognise CI as a business activity, and not just a research activity. Using CI to support public or private sector organisations to strategically plan and deliver services to an excellent standard, and provide the choices and options that customers want.

Organisations must be willing to act on the CI once it has been obtained. This will involve changing hearts and minds to recognise

that the experience of the customer is key to measuring performance, rather than purely measuring performance in terms of processes and performance indicators.

Organisations need to embed insight into their operational and strategic thinking. Learning from customers by understanding them better means organisations can provide better services more suited to customer needs, not services based on the organisation's perception of what customers want or services that are convenient to the organisation.

Why engage with the Customer Insight (CI) process?

The increasing demand for greater customer focus in the public sector is partially being driven by the changes set out by the private sector over the last decade. CI has been successfully used by the private sector to meet competitive pressures and respond to increasing demand from consumers. The public sector however is beginning to catch-up. Government has established the Customer Insight Forum which coordinates activities across the public sector. The health service amongst others is fully committed to using CI to improve its service and has a Director of Customer Insight to drive through change.

Customer Choice...do the terms really fit the housing sector?

Within the housing sector the term 'customer' to describe tenants or residents has been viewed uneasily. However, their expectations of how services are delivered to them should not be considered any less important or different to the services they receive from any other organisation, such as services from their telephone provider or insurance company. In this respect the term customer has equal importance. One thing is certain, tenants and residents will continue to judge the services they receive from their landlord using the same criteria that is applied to all other companies which they come into contact with.

High customer service versus great Customer Insight (CI)

Traditionally housing services have been delivered using a one size fits all approach applying a consistent level of provision across the board to all tenants. Changes in demographics, attitudes and the wider social polarisation within the housing sector over recent decades have meant that the expectations of social housing landlords has changed, making the old approach less effective. Communities are made up of very different groups of customers, with different needs and aspirations, and levels of satisfaction; while at the same time large groups of the community have become more difficult to engage with, making their needs difficult to be heard and responded to. Social landlords need to adopt more sophisticated approaches to targeting different customer groups to avoid focusing service provision around the 'average' customer.

Customer Insight and housing

Although the use of CI by the housing sector is relatively limited at the moment, it is gathering momentum to meet the mounting government pressure on social landlords to put customers at the heart of their business.

A large number of organisations have started to collect demographic information about their customers and many have used this information to improve service provision, particularly improving communications. They have created profiles based on this information which again has been used to further develop services.

People's expectations are changing faster than organisations are, and housing has no option but to rise to the challenge of providing more customer focused services and to start understanding their business through the customer's experiences. Without good CI, landlords and housing organisations will find it difficult if not impossible to meet these challenges.

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE – taken from the CIH Good Practice Briefing – Customer Insight

Genesis Housing Group undertook a whole organisational approach to customer insight, which it called Building Futures. It wanted to understand the attitudes and aspirations of its customers in response to the growing challenges and pressures facing the housing sector. It wanted to provide the vision for how the organisation can become an agent for change and invest in the communities in which it works.

The survey asked customers about their aspirations and opinions towards home ownership, to identify their personal circumstances, to test awareness of home ownership options and to test opinions of the current service they receive and the future of social renting.

Overall the survey revealed that customers were positive about renting, but many aspired to owning and that there were significant barriers to achieving their dream of owner occupation particularly given low earnings and high house prices. Customers wanted a more mature relationship with their landlord and supported the idea of paying more or less rent in return for different levels of service. They also supported the idea of providing incentives for people to take more responsibility.

In addition, to the Building Futures research Genesis also undertook a survey of the customers of PCHA and Springboard, part of the Genesis Housing Group, called "Your Say, Your Way". The survey was sent to 13,000 general needs customers in 2006. A follow-up telephone survey of non-respondents is currently being undertaken. Overall there has been a 25% response rate.

From Building Futures, Genesis has now created the Your Place project with the aim of creating a new landlord tenant relationship. It provides tenants with a stepping stone for home ownership, a reward scheme for responsible tenants and employment and training opportunities for all.

Achieving resident-driven accountability and excellence

The CIH has just published its report *Leading the Way*, achieving resident-driven accountability and excellence.

Leading the way is a policy proposal made to housing organisations, residents, and the new regulator for a way to increase residents' empowerment to drive accountability and excellence that can link into and benefit the operation of a new resident-focused system of regulation. It:

- aims to help housing providers and the regulator to achieve resident-driven accountability and excellence in services and decision making
- Sets out an effectual system of resident-led self-regulation that housing providers can use to ensure that their internal processes for managing performance and business decisions are resident-centred
- shows how the system can be made sufficiently robust that it commands the confidence of internal and external stakeholders
- suggests how the system could operate within a new system of regulation to ensure effective performance and accountability to customers and to inform regulatory activity conducted by the Office for Tenants and Social Landlords.

This new approach to regulation and accountability has, in the words of CIH President, Paul Diggory "The power to transform housing organisations' businesses and relationships with customers."

ConsultCIH is currently working with colleagues at CIH to develop a comprehensive implementation strategy for organisations. To find out how we can help your organisation to introduce this new approach contact Andrew Gray.



Unlocking the Potential

The 'Places' team is currently undertaking an Options Appraisal Study for Bolsover District Council, a study which has been designed to tease out the future for three clusters of prefabricated Tarran Bungalows, which were built between the two world wars to provide 'homes fit for heroes'. The option appraisal involves detailed research into the condition of over 100 properties, together with extensive consultation and engagement with the older people who live in them. The Places team is exploring all possible options for the future from retention and comprehensive refurbishment through to demolition and redevelopment, potentially to include other

adjacent pieces of land. Richard Medley, Director of Regeneration, says "the outcomes of the study will take into account projected housing needs within the District and, like all of our work within existing communities will be appropriately shaped by the people who live in the properties". The Tarran Bungalows study incorporates many of the work areas in which the Places team has developed a particular specialism. Councillor Alan Tomlinson, Cabinet Member for Regeneration at Bolsover DC, said "ConsultCIH is undertaking some very important work for us. The Council has been in a dilemma for some time about the future of the Tarran Bungalows, not least because of their popularity amongst the existing residents, many of whom are elderly. The report from ConsultCIH will give us the tools and the evidence base to go forward."



Liverpool Mutual Homes

Congratulations to Steve Coffey, newly appointed Chief Executive (Designate).

ConsultCIH managed a robust attraction and assessment process to recruit an Executive Team for Liverpool Mutual Homes, the tenant-led housing association set up to transfer over 15,000 properties from Liverpool City Council. Steve Coffey is the first member of the team to take up the reins, starting in January 2008.

Steve's view of the process was, "from my own direct experience I can say that everything, from the initial contact through to job offer and contract negotiations, was conducted in a high quality and thoroughly professional manner. As a consequence, I had total confidence in ConsultCIH when they were engaged in helping LMH to appoint the rest of the Executive Team and am delighted with the outcome of the process as a whole."

Steve was Director of Regeneration for Knowsley Housing Trust Group prior to his appointment.

Bill Lacey, Chair of LMH said "In appointing ConsultCIH the Board was aware of their professional reputation and their considerable experience in working for all types of housing organisations. We were impressed with their role as recruitment consultants and had the added assurance of their wider knowledge when advising the Board throughout the process."

For more information about ConsultCIH recruitment and selection contact **Janet Hale** or **email recruit@consultcih.co.uk**



Steve Coffey, newly appointed Chief Executive and Bill Lacey, Chair of Liverpool Mutual Homes.



Community Engagement in Housing Led Regeneration

Richard Medley, Director of ConsultCIH, comments on the CIH's Good Practice Guide: Community Engagement in Housing Led Regeneration.

It has long been recognised that the key to successful regeneration is effectively engaging with communities so they can shape and, more importantly, take ownership of the future for their own areas. However, it's not always that easy to put the policy into practice.

The Guide sets out some standards and principles for engaging residents in plans about the future of their homes. It contains many practical examples and valuable check lists based on the experiences of practitioners and residents and explores why seeking the engagement of communities in plans to demolish, re-furbish and build new homes is so important and so Richard Medley comments, "in our 'Places' consultancy, ConsultCIH works with communities across the UK. We listen to local residents and develop options based on their comments and feedback. This is an integral part of our work in producing workable proposals for the future of areas of tired housing".

ConsultCIH is currently engaged by Miller Regeneration to assist it in taking forward the development of hundreds of new homes, open space and community facilities in Knowsley.

Naturally, ConsultCIH is very much using the guidance on engaging at a neighbourhood level, overcoming barriers to engagement and keeping people informed throughout the process.

ConsultCIH offers a comprehensive range of solutions to both the public and private sectors. For more information contact richard.medley@consultcih.co.uk.

The Guide is available as a free download from the Chartered Institute of Housing website at **www.cih.org/publications**.