

Housing News

Information Bulletin from Wigan and Leigh Housing

No. 39, July 2005

A good service



On 26th May the Audit Commission published their report into the recent inspection of the housing service provided by Wigan and Leigh Housing. The result is that the services provided by the ALMO have been judged to be a "Good, two star" service. The second judgement made by the inspectors is in respect of our prospects for improvement and these are judged to be "uncertain".

Front facing services to customers came out well in the inspection with some, such as planned maintenance and resident involvement being judged excellent. The main criticisms were around value for money issues.

The judgement that we are providing a good service is a fair one in that services overall are better than in 2002 when we were last inspected but the two star threshold has increased considerably since then. The second judgement is a disappointment although the

inspectors were at pains to point out that "uncertain" prospects does not mean that they think we won't improve.

To put things in perspective, in the housing sector as a whole 80% of inspections result in a rating of one star or less. The ALMO sector is higher with an average of two stars.

The issues raised by the inspectors were largely valid and the Wigan and Leigh Housing Board has agreed that we will use the report to focus on what we need to do to become excellent.

Contact: - Tony Gerrard ☎ 01942 486509

Tenants prefer the personal touch

During May and June we carried out a survey of all our Council tenants to establish their preferred method of contact with the organisation.

The survey revealed that seven out of ten tenants now prefer to contact us by phone or to have a home visit rather than call at a housing office.

Last year we began to move away from the traditional office-based system of dealing with repairs in favour of a more personal one-to-one service. We opened our new contact centre where tenants can ring for assistance and in just ten months it has taken over 100,000 calls.

The next phase of our plans for the area housing offices has now been implemented. From 4th July a further seven area housing offices have moved to part-time opening hours, joining the four that already operated two days a week. The remaining six "super" offices will continue to open 5 days a week offering a full range of housing services. The "super" offices are based in Atherton, Leigh, Platt Bridge, Ashton, Pemberton and Wigan.

Contact: - Tony Gerrard ☎ 01942 486509

Rent incentive scheme

Patrick (Paddy) McGuinness, one of the stars of the television programmes "Phoenix Nights" and "Max and Paddy's Road to Nowhere" helped to launch our incentive scheme for tenants who keep a clear rent account.

We will be holding a free draw twice a year for all tenants with a clear rent account. The first prize will be £500 and there will be two runners-up prizes of £250.

We spend a considerable amount of time sending letters and visiting tenants who owe small amounts of rent arrears. We hope that the free draw will encourage some of those

tenants to clear their small debt and maintain a clear rent account. The incentive scheme will be evaluated in two years time to determine whether it has had an impact on rent arrears and the payment patterns of tenants.



Paddy is pictured with Peter Gee, our Chief Executive, and Mrs I. Hynes from Wardley Square, Tyldesley, the winner of the £500 prize in the inaugural draw.

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Board member elections

The rules of Wigan and Leigh Housing Company require that Tenant and Independent Board Members serve a 4 year term of office, although they can offer to serve for a subsequent term or terms.

Retirement of Board Members is staggered to ensure continuity in board membership. This year half of the Tenant Board Members must stand down and an election process will take place for a fresh 4 year term.

None of the serving Members chose to stand down. The 2 Leigh Board Members were only appointed temporarily to replace retiring

members and, therefore, must seek re-election. The 3 other Board Members required to stand down were chosen by lots. The following Board Members will stand down at the company AGM in October if they are not re-elected.

- Reg Holmes – Leigh Board
- Crys Nehls – Leigh Board
- George Barlow – Wigan Board
- Kath Lowe – Wigan Board
- Mick Baines – WALH Board

All tenants will be invited to consider applying to be a candidate for the Boards. Elections will take place during August/September and the process will be managed by an independent company.

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Modern apprentice of the year awards

The second annual awards evening for our modern apprentices was held at the Investment Centre on 27th May. Over 80 people including Board Members, assessors, staff from our partners ProCo as well as the apprentices and their parents attended the event.

This year's awards were presented by 5 times world swimming champion and triple Olympian James Hickman.



Gemma Yates and Karl Littler were joint

winners of the top award of Apprentice of the Year.

Contact: Louise Taylor – ☎ 01942 486513

Neighbour nuisance annual report

The annual report on neighbour nuisance and neighbour complaints shows that 1,227 complaints were received in 2004-05, a decrease of 164 (11.8%) on the previous year. There have, however, been some very serious cases of nuisance, anti-social behaviour and criminality during the year which has meant that the average time spent on each case is increasing.

Noise nuisance continues to be the main source of complaints with 40% of all complaints. Significant numbers of complaints were also received about violent/abusive behaviour, children, animals and the condition of properties.

Legal action instigated with our partners resulted in 4 evictions, 8 imprisonments, 4 injunctions, 10 notices of seeking possession, 4 notices to quit, 4 ASBO's, 42 Good Behaviour Agreements and proceedings were issued in 16 other cases.

76% of customers were satisfied or very satisfied with the neighbour nuisance service, an increase of 12% on the 2003-04 figures.

Mediation and intervention are key themes in our approach to dealing with anti-social behaviour and neighbour nuisance and these approaches have proved very successful in resolving a number of

The Neighbour Nuisance Steering Group, comprising of staff and tenants, met 5 times during the year supplemented by two special meetings with a Youth Group and an Anti-Social Behaviour Consultation Event.

Two residents living on Council estates in the borough were nominated and, subsequently, received "Taking a Stand" awards from the Home Office in recognition of their efforts in standing up to nuisance and anti-social behaviour.

Overall the service performed well. This was recognised in the recent Audit Commission inspection report that found the service to be "strong".

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Marketing week success

Our second annual marketing week proved highly successful with good crowds attending several of the events, significant publicity in local newspapers and positive feedback from customers who attended.

Highlights included:

- Patrick "Paddy" McGuinness presenting prizes to the winners of our "Where I Live" colouring



and drawing competition entered

by over 5,000 primary school children in the borough;

- The world dance and Meet, Eat and Greet events both drawing large crowds at Hilton Park,



Leigh;

- A crown green bowling pairs competition for tenants and staff won by one of our IT staff partnering Brian Hodges, a tenant from Okell Grove, Leigh;
- The Battle of the Bands, a keen competition for local school bands that drew an enthusiastic crowd of over 120 young people accompanied by parents and friends to the Beer Engine in Wigan. The successful band, Branded a Fool from Golborne High School, have been invited to play at our company AGM later in



the year;

- And the final event a 40's tea dance at the Monaco Ballroom in Hindley attended by over 120 people and including a guest appearance and a few tales from local Dad's Army celebrity, Colin Bean, who played Private Sponge in the popular television comedy.

Contact: - Vicky Bannister ☎ 01942 486534

Students begin summer placements

We have recently appointed 12 young people who will be participating in our student placement programme over the summer. This is the third year that we have operated the highly successful scheme.

Students are placed in different sections of the organisation and provide cost-effective support for permanent staff over the holiday season. In return the students get paid experience in a work environment.

This year we received 53 applications for the 12 posts solely by advertising internally, on our website and through local colleges.

Previous student placements have gone on to apply successfully for permanent jobs with the company.

Contact: Louise Taylor - ☎ 01942 486513

Domestic violence co-ordinator

Domestic violence is a problem everywhere. In 2004/05 there were 6,074 incidents recorded by the police in Wigan, of which 3,075 were repeat incidents. In the same period 258 cases presented as homeless to Wigan and Leigh Housing as a result of domestic violence.

There are many other facts about domestic violence that indicates that it is a complex issue. It cannot be

tackled by agencies working in isolation – a multi-agency approach is essential.

In Wigan a multi-agency group, the Domestic Violence Executive, on which Wigan and Leigh Housing is represented, is taking forward the drive to tackle domestic violence. One of the recent successes of the Executive was the appointment of a Domestic Violence Co-Ordinator funded by the Douglas Valley Partnership and the Children's Fund. The post has made a significant difference to the progress of initiatives in the Domestic Violence Strategy and inter-agency working in this area.

The previous postholder has recently left to take up a similar post closer to her home. The Domestic Violence Executive has suggested that the new post be based in Wigan and Leigh Housing as the host organisation. Although the post is to deliver inter-agency objectives, there will be mutual benefits because of the close links into housing and homelessness.

Interviews have recently been held and the new Domestic Violence Co-Ordinator, who will be based at Unity House, our company headquarters in Wigan, is expected to take up her post in August.

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