
THE FUTURE OF TENANT AND RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT IN WIRRAL

The Association attended a meeting on 18th May 2009 in Birkenhead arranged by Wirral Borough Council on the future of tenant & resident involvement in Wirral.

The meeting was called because Wirral Borough Council have a responsibility to assist in the development of resident involvement and they feel that the current arrangements are not adequate. During the meeting a number of organisations were discussed. In order to understand the content of the meeting it is important to understand the roles of various key organisations.

- 1) **VCAW (Voluntary Community Action Wirral)**
This was formed in 2008 following a merger of Bebington CVS, Heswall & District VCS, Hoylake & District CVS and Wallasey CBED. This organisation is responsible for supporting the voluntary sector in Wirral. It is notable that Wirral CVS chose not to merge and still exists independently.
- 2) **The Network**
The Housing, Regeneration and Homelessness Network sub group is trying to build up a Network of people interested in Housing, Regeneration and Homelessness and that would like to be consulted in the future. The group reports to the Local Strategic Partnership.
- 3) **LSP (Local Strategic Partnership)**
The Local Strategic Partnership is an organisation designed to bring together all the key stakeholders operating in Wirral. It has representation from many organisations including; Wirral Borough Council, Merseyside Police, the Primary Care Trust, private businesses and representatives from voluntary & community groups. The aim is for the stakeholders to work together to help solve common problems.
- 4) **The Federation (WFTRA – Wirral Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations)**
The Federation was set up to co-ordinate the various residents associations for Wirral's Council Housing. All of the Councils housing stock has since been transferred to Housing Associations. Following the stock transfer the Federation continued with its role with financial support from Wirral Partnership Homes and the Council. However, the Council believes that the Federation is no longer the most appropriate vehicle for communicating resident's views.
- 5) **Area Forums**
Area Forums allow any Resident to raise specific issues with local stakeholders including; Councillors, businesses, faith organisations, Police, the Primary Care Trust, Fire Service, Streetscene and Council Officers. They are held three times a year.

(Continued)

The Meeting

The meeting was called to discuss a proposal that in future the Network, with the help of VCAW would communicate issues to and from the LSP. The aim of the proposal is that all residents, via their Network contact could feed issues to the LSP through the Network and receive feedback from the LSP through the Network.

At present there is no defined structure to help Residents Associations communicate with the LSP. There was consensus at the meeting that communication was lacking between Residents Associations and the Council, VCAW and the LSP. The Council believes that the whilst the Federation previously carried out a similar role, as membership of the Federation has dwindled, and its roots are in Council Housing it is not best placed to take on the role of VCAW in the new proposals. It was suggested that the Federation could take on this role but there was no significant support for this proposal from the residents who attended the meeting.

Much of the meeting was taken up with various Residents Associations representatives highlighting historical communication problems, distrust of the Local Authority and raising concerns regarding funding.

Following lengthy discussions it became apparent that whilst the proposals did not have universal support, no viable alternative was suggested. It was finally agreed that further consultation would be carried out and then another meeting would be held to give more detail into how the proposals would work.

Impact on the Association

The proposals are designed to enhance resident involvement across the Borough, not to replace existing resident involvement initiatives. The Association's Customer Panel will continue as before. Whether our Customer Panel could join The Network in the future is not yet clear.

Next Steps

Once the Council has undertaken a further consultation exercise, a further meeting is to be arranged to discuss the proposals in more detail. A further update will be produced following this meeting.