



Notes

For the Housing Services' Forum

on Friday 29th May 2015

Attendees

Cadwyn HA Charter Housing Association Ltd	John Briggs Steve Evans	Merthyr Valleys Homes NPT Homes	Maria Lewis Dale Barlow
Community Housing Cymru	Liam Townsend	Newport City Homes	Rebecca Hunt
First Choice HA Hafod HA Ltd	Donna Lloyd-Williams Lesley Mower-Hill	North Wales HA Ltd Pembrokeshire Housing	Sian Edwards Jane Robinson
Hendre Group Ltd	Corinna Mantle	Taff HA Ltd Tai Ceredigion Cyf	Rhodri Thomas Buddug Lewis

Apologies

CT Cantref	Carl Woodhouse	Grwp Cynefin Monmouthshire Housing Association	Heulwen Jones Cheryl Tracy
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Introductions & Update

Steve Evans

- Loudest message from last session was to make sure you know what your costs are now
- Conclusions from brainstorming in last session:
 - Restructure services
 - Understand what tenants want/need
 - Deal with the root causes of arrears
 - Procurement efficiency
 - Relationships with regulators and local authorities – could be helpful
- VFM – tick box exercise? – this appears to be the case in England

- Asset management – are organisations taking a holistic view? E.g. seeing properties as assets to a community

VFM Round Table Discussions

Steve Evans

- Tinkered with it – there are different definitions
- There is a need to think about what VFM is – where to focus, where to start
- Want to avoid VFM being finance driven
- Focus on sustaining tenancies – this could tie-in more with VFM
- Our asset management has been very traditional – it doesn't consider sustainability, let-ability, anti-social behaviour (18% of anti-social activity is centred on just 5% of the stock)

John Briggs

- The problem is that there is no holistic view
- Nobody's joining up the dots, there's no common thread

Rebecca Hunt

- With a new CEO our VFM statement and strategies have probably expired
- We need to make sure VFM is fully integrated
- No real evaluation of pre-tenancy work – we could talk about what is effective and how it affects tenants

Lesley Mower-Hill

- We have done 3 exercises to test VFM – it is a huge undertaking
- Longer-term, we need to incorporate it into service review
- The social value of VFM is the hardest thing to get head around

Steve Evans

- The measurement tools are complicated

Lesley Mower-Hill

- You get it when you read it, but it's harder to apply

Steve Evans

- If you speak to the regulations team at the Welsh Assembly they won't have a VFM strategy, they just want to see that VFM is taken seriously

Breakout Session – Consider how to achieve/improve VFM

Group 1

John Briggs

- Pre-tenancy training
- Housing management services – lot of money to be saved there
- ‘Cash-back’ credit cards

Jane Robinson

- We shared procurement with local authority – skills brought in from council’s work
 - Introduced cash-back credit card – made savings of £30,000 a year
- Pembrokeshire’s merging Care & Repair with Ceredigion

Steve Evans

- As a sector we’re not very good at stopping things – what are we not going to do anymore?

John Briggs

- Collaborate when training – all training for upcoming events (UC)
- Come together to achieve VFM
- Share procurement of IT
- Community benefits – challenging, hard to measure
 - Housing & Health – how do we measure the benefits?
 - Benefits in health agenda with RSLs
 - We can save the NHS thousands through preventing bed-blocking, etc
 - How do we get reflected glory?
- Asset management – we’re looking at properties with high turnover
 - Is it time to sell off unpopular assets (e.g. bedsits) and invest in more popular assets?

Steve Evans

- We assess viability but this is not followed through – do we need to change our assumptions in the future?

John Briggs

- What would we do with the savings?
 - Put it back into communities, improve services
 - E.g. Train people who are out-of-work, Cadwyn repurposes furniture

Donna Lloyd-Williams

- Look at HR costs, staff retention and recruitment are big spends
- We have a 0% turnover in staff due to job diversity
- Diversity in training and roles means that jobs don’t need replacing and finding cover is much easier

John Briggs

- Share Welsh language skills – there are different issues across HAS
- Technology – great potential for savings here

- Most services offered by banks are available online
- There's a growing use in smart phone access
- IT systems – procure more efficiently, 1 system could possibly work for all of us – we could share development costs
- Apps – digital inclusion provides fantastic opportunities for VFM

Group 2

Lesley Mower-Hill

- Obtain information from tenants then profile – what are the costs?
 - Too many surveys? – 'death by survey'
- There's a big drive now on sustainability
- Asset management strategies – Taff housing has converted a lot of larger properties into smaller properties
- Communication – are letters necessary? Are there adult literacy issues?
- VFM needs to be embedded – regulations are quite scant
- Undertaking VFM as a separate exercise would in itself defeat VFM
- NPT Homes has a raft of KPIs – 10 VFM indicators, only 4 are collected

Rhodri Thomas

- Click View – reporting tool, saves time on issuing reports
- It's being used now as a predictive tool, we can look at trends and can focus then on tenant's needs
- Big Data Project
 - Departments not joined up, project collects data and provides one source of information – joins up information

Maria Lewis

- Garden project
 - Pilot with small budget, spending up to £3,000
- If a tenancy is in breach in terms of their garden, housing officers offer assistance, e.g. by removing rubbish
- Over 6 cases, the average cost was about £300
 - Longer-term, 5/6 were successful and did not reoffend after we offered assistance – we ensure that tenants receive adequate support

Steve Evans

- In Portsmouth, 97% of people were in arrears because they couldn't pay, not because they won't pay – their system failed because it assumes that those tenants 'won't pay'
- They redesigned their system
 - Allowed for quick proceedings against those who wouldn't pay
 - Arrears figures are now good
 - Eviction figures are low

- Collection staff were up-skilled to deliver debt advice – specialist advice still sign-posted
- Culture change from 'enforce' to 'support'
- Tenant involvement – quite a cost is spent on relatively few people – does it benefit the general tenant population?
 - Meetings are generally unrepresentative

Rhodri Thomas

- We have done work with disability groups – they raise their own money and are self-managing

Donna Lloyd-Williams

- We apply soft measures for feedback – we have friendly conversations with tenants which provides more reliable feedback

Rebecca Hunt

- Scaling back groups, time spent in the community
- We want to know what tenants want us to do

Donna Lloyd-Williams

- We expect our finance officer to talk to people – participation is a part of everyone's role

John Briggs

- Social media – need to do more, we're behind some in the private sector

Rhodri Thomas

- Need to give tenants a reason to engage [with our social media] – we're not very good at that

Rebecca Hunt

- We don't talk enough about VFM, individually or in groups

Steve Evans

- Cuts and local authority cuts – top-slice, across the board cuts vs. Conversations about tenants' priorities
- It would be useful to have this debate with other groups
- Make connections about topics that overlap – VFM is a good example where groups can overlap

Notes from Group 1:

- Pre tenancy training
- Procurement – use of cashback credit card
- Build homes for sale – profit to social housing
- Tailoring services to profile
- Pooling training
- Bringing IT together
- Using other RSL services
- Community benefits? Hard to measure?
- Asset management
 - o Holistic view incl. Turnover/DTD repairs, component accounting
- Housing + health
- Savings – used for:
 1. Service improvement
 2. Putting money back
 3. Social enterprise
- Staff upskilling/retention/recruitment
- Welsh language services
- Online services
 - o Repairs
 - o Help videos
 - o Handbook
- IT services
 - o Procurement partnerships
 - o Assistive technology
 - o Apps
- Payment methods – direct debit

Notes from Group 2:

Value for Money/continuous improvement

- Obtaining information about tenants:
 - o Reviews
 - o Surveys
 - o Profiling
- Asset management strategies used to ensure properties used in the best way (large props converted in some areas)
- Communication strategies including IT/information portals
- Overall VFM needs to be within the culture of each organisation
- KPIs used to report VFM – 190 measure to be included (NPT Homes)
- Click View used as a predictive behaviour system to prevent tenancy failure
- “Garden project” – use of support in place of tenancy enforcement action has been an effective reduction in costs and sustained tenancies