

The Plan for Community Involvement

Introduction

Cartrefi Conwy is committed to our motto 'Creating Communities to be Proud of' in everything that we do- in particular this commitment is visible through our Community Involvement Team. As with anything, to get the best out of this team, it is important to have a plan- or a strategy to know where we are heading.

The original Community Involvement Strategy was written in 2008 following the tenant vote which resulted in the creation of Cartrefi Conwy. We agreed an updated community involvement policy in 2014 following consultation with colleagues, the Tenants Forum Management Committee & Cartrefi Conwy's Operations Committee.

Now in Cartrefi Conwy's 10th year, we need to look at Community Involvement from a new angle and make a plan that takes into account the changes that have happened in the world and the changes within our communities.

By answering a series of questions in this strategy we will be able to discover not only what is community involvement- but also where will it go in the future?

How did we pull this strategy together?

Let's start at the most basic level- What is community involvement?

One definition says it is "Any active and participative process that involves others in influencing the scope, development and standard of services, problem solving and decision making using a wide range of different methods and techniques and then uses their input to make decisions."

What a mouthful! What does that actually mean and what do tenants think community involvement is?

At our Family Day in 2018, we asked 150 tenants what they thought community involvement meant, and the top three answers were:

1. Making Friends
2. Being listened to
3. Being neighbourly

That certainly is direct and easy to understand. From that response alone we can see that there are 3 main areas that tenants feel we should be focusing on (Appendix 1). At this stage, it is important to point out, that while we mainly refer to tenants in this strategy, it also applies to the broader community including owners, other housing providers, and other people and organisations working in the area.

By taking into account all this information we have created a vision statement that describes what we do.

The purpose of community involvement at Cartrefi Conwy is to promote, encourage and support opportunities for communities and individuals with the aim to improve their personal lives, their communities and the services we provide.

With this purpose in mind, the next step in pulling together a strategy is to take into account everyone's views that have an interest in what we are doing. It might seem obvious that this would only need to be tenants' views, but there are a number of other factors that we need to consider both within Cartrefi Conwy and externally with other organisations.

To make sure that we have clear goals for the company, Cartrefi Conwy has drawn up a 5 year Business Plan with the future in mind. Within the Business Plan is a pledge to involve tenants to make sure that we deliver an excellent service and help our communities to grow. We must also make sure that we are getting good value for the money we are spending on community involvement.

The Welsh Government use the Regulatory Framework as a guidance for Housing Associations, and it clearly states that tenants should remain at the heart of our work. This Framework also states that Housing Associations must show that tenants are involved in shaping services and their decisions. It also states that services should be high quality and continually improving. Through this the Welsh Government checks every year that we are being open and transparent, that our Board and officers are proactive and focused, and Cartrefi Conwy are following a clearly set out business plan.

Another key factor that we have considered in developing our strategy is the "Well being of Future Generations" Act. The Act is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. It encourages organisations to think more about the long-term benefits and work better with people and communities to prevent problems and take a more joined-up approach. This will help us to create a Wales that we all want to live in, now and in the future. While the Act really only applies to public bodies, we feel that its vision aligns with our own and needs to be considered in this strategy.

What are the benefits of Community Involvement?

Now that we have set a clear purpose for community involvement, and understand the other factors that we need to consider in developing a strategy – we need to understand the benefits of doing it? We sat down with tenants and colleagues to find out what they thought. This simple exercise highlighted loads of benefits. We all agreed that Community involvement:

- helps to **create a better place to live** which **increases people's pride** in their homes
- **improves people's confidence** which can lead to positive changes for them
- gives people a **chance to use or learn new skills**
- provides an opportunity for **the community and Cartrefi to work together**
- **builds community spirit** and more able communities
- provides a way for **tenants to have their voice heard** to improve the way we work
- improves and **builds relationships** between Cartrefi Conwy staff and tenants
- **combats loneliness** and improves links between people
- **improves mental and physical health**
- produces happy and **healthy** tenants and **communities**

Everyone could see the benefits not only for tenants, but also for staff and for Cartrefi Conwy as a whole. This is an important point, as the real success of community involvement comes when we all work together for the benefits of all.

How can we reach these benefits?

We can reach these benefits by having a clear focus on what we need to do every day and by setting objectives that meet the needs of tenants, communities and Cartrefi Conwy. We all need to be striving for the same goal, so that there is a benefit for all, and because of that, we will all be committed to reaching the objective.

We agreed the objectives through consultation and they allow us to focus our work to:

1. **Improve** the way tenants and residents **take part in influencing and shaping how Cartrefi Conwy works.**
2. **Identify and develop opportunities** that **meet tenant needs and ambitions** to improve their skills and confidence
3. **Enrich tenant's everyday lives** and neighbourhoods by **working together** with them and other organisations.
4. **Encourage and develop opportunities** which will improve the **physical and mental health and well-being** of tenants

These objectives will not only help us to work better with tenants and communities, but they also link to Cartrefi Conwy's business plan and will help us to achieve the key aims below:

- Deliver excellent customer experience by developing and delivering services in reliable, accessible and innovative ways.
- To meet the diverse housing and support needs of our customers and contribute to improving their independence and well-being.
- Deliver a varied housing portfolio and environmental improvements to accommodate an increasing diversity of customers.
- Support community regeneration and make a positive contribution to improving our communities.

What difference has Community Involvement made?

All of this discussion of benefits and objectives sets the tone for the big question - what has changed as a result of what we are doing?

The objectives help us to focus our attention on 4 main areas of work or **themes**:

1. **Tenants Voice**- Improvements to how Cartrefi Conwy works and interacts with tenants
2. **Community Action**- Improvements in the community through support for local work
3. **Personal Development**- Improvements in people's personal skills to improve their life opportunities
4. **Health and Well Being**- Improvement to people's physical and mental health and general sense of well being.

Each theme has been successful in making positive changes which benefit tenants, communities and Cartrefi Conwy. To show that we have been successful in achieving the benefits highlighted earlier,

we have looked at each theme and made a short list of some of the opportunities and key outcomes that tenants have been involved in.

1. **Tenants Voice**- All the work we do may affect tenants in some way, so we think it is essential to have as many ways as possible to make sure their voice is heard and listened to. Some of the ways we have done this are by:
 - Appointing tenants to Cartrefi Conwy's Board or management committees, which, over the course of ten years has had 17 tenants represented on it
 - Being part of the Tenant Scrutiny and Overview Panel which has investigated 5 areas of the business- and made 42 recommendations
 - Attending less formal consultations on wide range of topics. Over the last three years, we have consulted on 15 different topics.

2. **Community Action**- The strength and determination displayed in our communities is always impressive, and sometimes it just needs a bit of encouragement to find a focus and help it flourish. By working closely with communities the following opportunities are in place:
 - Community groups in over 20 areas across the county working on a wide range of issues
 - Community Hubs or centres in eight different areas that form a base for work in that community
 - Over the last three years, the Community Chest fund has granted £53,000 to 41 different community groups and projects.

3. **Personal Development**- The impact of one person changing their life for the better can not only affect themselves, but also the people around them. For this reason, we feel that we need to place a lot of emphasis on helping individuals to improve their life chances. When we asked tenants what they felt was the most important concern facing them and their friends, the highest response by far was mental health. Some of the opportunities and outcomes have been:
 - Increasing the variety of activities and skills development available to tenants, to attract people that might not normally get involved. In the past year alone, nearly 100 community members have been involved in sessions like this.
 - Over 40 people have continued to grow in confidence and skills by getting involved in other opportunities.
 - Pulling together projects with partners (over ten times in the last three years) means we are reaching more individuals and have more funding for projects to continue.

4. **Health and Well Being**- We are recognising the negative impact from poor mental and physical health more these days, and the benefits of improving an individual's health can transform lives. Targeting health and wellbeing has led to opportunities and positive outcomes including:
 - A variety of projects in over 15 different areas that teach skills, bring people together and create more opportunities to stay involved
 - Creating over 12 social groups based around the local community centre
 - Running activities that focus on tenant priorities, such as mindful meditation, to help with mental health.

You can find a more detailed list of these outcomes in Appendix 2.

These examples show that there are benefits and positive changes that have been happening for tenants and the wider community through our community involvement activities.

But is that enough?

What does the future of community involvement look like?

There is good work going on but what else could we be doing?

- **Are there gaps? Or are there things that we could be doing differently?**

During our consultations with tenants and staff, we asked these questions and collected their ideas. With over 50 opinions from tenants and more than 100 from staff, we had to look at a practical way to make sense of all these ideas. By grouping all the ideas into six similar headings, it allowed us to see the overall gaps and also recognise changes that we need to make in the way we work. We can describe these six areas better as our **principles** which will focus our way of working and make sure that tenant's time and effort is worthwhile and valued, while meeting the vision of Cartrefi Conwy and the expectation of Welsh Government.

The six principles that will focus our future work are:

1. Communication
2. Planning and focus on solutions
3. Respect
4. Inclusivity
5. Partnerships
6. High Standards

By looking at these six principles, it is possible to see how each one relates to a gap or the need to change the way we work.

1. **Communication** – Communication is a key element of successfully working together. This was a common issue raised by tenants and staff. It is vital to have effective communication if we are going to build trust, get the most out of everyone, and reach the results that tenants want. We will be committed to open and honest communication. Tenant input is valued all the way to Board level and they will receive feedback on their involvement. By improving the way we communicate, we will encourage and develop more involvement from both tenants and staff.
2. **Planning and focus on solutions**– One stumbling block we have often encountered is a lack of clarity and direction about how a community involvement activity or project will work. By committing to a clear goal straight away, planning how to work towards it, and being clear about what the desired outcome will look like, everyone can feel secure in the process and their role in it. We can do this by starting at the community/personal level and finding out what they want- not what we think they want. This will also allow us to communicate in the best way and use methods, such as co-production, that will give the best value for everyone. At the end of an activity/project, we will review the results to see if they have met the original goals and see if we need to do something different in the future.

3. **Respect** – Trust and respect between tenants and Cartrefi Conwy is essential to building relationships and is a vital first step for any initiative to be successful. By being open, objective and respectful throughout any work that we do with tenants, we are committing to a mutually beneficial relationship that we all want to see succeed. We can move towards this through being clear about what can be done, making sure that everyone feels empowered, creating a wide acceptance of community involvement, and celebrating and promoting our shared success.

4. **Inclusivity** – Working together means everyone involved should have the opportunity to share their views and be listened to in a meaningful way. Cartrefi Conwy is committed to providing opportunities for all. By embracing diversity, being willing to listen and be open with each other, and finally by removing barriers, we can make sure that the involvement is available to everyone. Not all involvement methods suit everyone so it's important that involvement is structured to reach people at the level they choose. The pyramid of engagement shows what we have in place now.



At some of these levels, we ask tenants to take the role of experts in helping us to improve our services. We need to make sure any participants have the correct skills to do the job that we ask them without barriers at any level.

5. **Partnerships** – With the changes to the housing sector through welfare reform and cuts in local services, we are being asked to do more things that were generally left to the local authority or government. There is a real risk of duplication, people falling through the gaps, and finances not being used effectively. In most cases, residents will know best who and what is happening around them. Through proactively working together, we can make sure that the right partners are involved, and tenant's skills and knowledge is being appropriately shared.

6. **High standards**– When working together, everyone needs to take responsibility. Committing to high standards which we can be proud of, doing our best and being committed to each other will make partnerships successful. At the same time, we should always be ambitious in what we can achieve together and continually seek to push the boundaries and look for new creative ideas and ways of working.

How can we make sure involvement works for all?

We are very aware that in order for community involvement to work, there needs to be practical support for tenants to make involvement easier. There also needs to be a budget set aside to help community involvement to thrive.

We will reduce the barriers to involvement by:

- Providing transport or paying expenses for people to get to activities that we have organised
- Making sure that all venues are accessible
- Offering childcare to enable people to attend activities
- Arranging activities at flexible times to suit more people
- Providing a wide range of ways for people to contact us
- Supporting people to feel more 'in the know' through training, networks or conferences
- Supporting people personally to feel comfortable in getting involved
- Providing information in a way that works so that people know what is going on
- Providing internet connections through Wifi in our community centres/ lounges
- Providing comfortable meeting spaces in our community centres/ houses

How will Cartrefi Conwy financially support Community Involvement?

We will commit to having a budget that will meet the needs of this strategy and its action plan. We will review the budget each year to make sure that we are able to successfully deliver community involvement activities and the action plan including:

- Management, staff and necessary resources
- Tenant Overview & Scrutiny Panel expenses
- Conference/seminars/ workshops/ and network events places
- Training opportunities
- Surveys and questionnaires
- Start up and annual grants
- Event support for community groups
- External experts to provide focused activities
- Other costs for events and activities, such as:
 - Transport and out of pocket expenses
 - Venue and catering costs
 - Advertising/promotional costs
 - Translation costs

Hand in hand with our own funding, we will look for opportunities to apply for grants which will help to achieve our objectives and enable communities to do even more in their areas.

How will we make sure we are meeting our objectives?

Key to this strategy is making sure that it benefits everyone. It is only by keeping track of what happens and what has been achieved that it is possible for everyone to see the real benefits of community involvement.

To make sure this is the case, we will create an action plan that is linked to the four objectives. We will use this action plan to record what has been achieved.

We don't solely measure community involvement by numbers and actions, but in many cases, there are personal stories that we need to take into account. To do this we will use different tools to show the benefits that have come about from our activities. The tools that we will use include:

- HACT social value toolkit
- Case studies
- Project/ session evaluation for individuals
- Resident Involvement Module (a Cartrefi Conwy computer system)
- Value for Money

As part of this, a strategy project team, including tenants, will monitor the action plan every year. We will include this information in a report, which will go to the Tenant Services Board of Cartrefi Conwy. We will use the website, Facebook and newsletters as a tool to communicate and broaden awareness of what has been achieved.

Appendix 1- Tenant Consultation results from Big Day Out and community activities and groups 2018

Q1 I think community involvement is...	Total	Q2 What makes me feel happy and healthy?	Total	Q3 I feel the best way to have my voice heard is through...	Total
Making friends	94	Helping others	104	Face to face with staff	120
Being neighbourly	82	Being part of a social group	88	Community events	73
Socialising with others	70	Walking	59	Social media	69
Being listened to	67	Bingo	59	Community groups	52
having my opinion heard	62	Exercise	57	Online surveys	40
A chance to change things	49	Gardening	56	Tenant and resident group	37
Being part of an event	48	Arts and crafts	54	Formal meetings	33
Doing hobbies with others	48	Reading	37	MyCartrefi website	32
Getting important information	40	Singing / choirs	28	Postal surveys	30
Learning new skills	34	Knitting / sewing	23	Phoning the call centre	25
Getting advice and direction	33	Men's shed	23	Telephone surveys	21
getting help to get into work	29	Luncheon clubs	21	My councillor	18
		Other - Cake / ICT / laughing / friends / She Shed	9	Other - ICT	1
				Other - smart phone ap	1
Q4 Thinking about yourself, your friends and your neighbours - what do you think is most important -	Total	Q5 I feel that the most important things for my community are...	Total	Q6 Which area of Cartrefi Conwy do you feel the Scrutiny Panel should be looking at in more detail?	Total
Mental health support sessions	113	Clean and tidy neighbourhood	112	Repairs	76
Dealing with stress	97	Pride in where I live	109	Communication with tenants	68
Cooking and nutrition	60	Play areas	72	Complaints process	49
Confidence building sessions	54	Events	65	Communal cleaning / caretaking	48
Budgeting	49	Activities for young people	64	Estate Management	45
Help with managing my tenancy	40	Neighbourliness	58	Community Involvement activities	30
Debt advice	37	Police presence	50	Customer contact	27
Employment support	33	Active community group	46	Rent arrears	26
Getting support to use the internet	25	A place to meet	44	Website	20
Support activities for men	24	Access to help and advice	43	Adaptations	18
Help with English and maths	18	Cartrefi Conwy contact	29	Voids	5
Driving theory test support	9	My councillor	19	Sign up process	5
Other - woodwork	1			Other - Health and safety	1

What difference has Community Involvement made?

Tenants Voice –All the work we do may affect communities in some way, so we think it is essential to have as many ways as possible to make sure their voice can be heard. Some of this has been through:

- Involvement in the governance of Cartrefi Conwy by appointment to its Board and management committees. Their contribution has helped to form the strategic direction and business priorities and provided them with the chance to challenge or support decisions that will directly affect tenants, staff and communities.
- Formal groups regularly meet to dig deep into the work that Cartrefi Conwy does to see if there are better ways to do things. They make a final recommendation to the Board which may change the way we work. The Tenant Scrutiny and Overview Panel has investigated five areas of the business- and made 42 recommendations to the Board- all of which have been accepted and changes made.
- We have broadened and improved the ways in which we listen to tenants. We can now do this informally through a one to one chat or a telephone survey or more formally through an organised focus group. Over the last three years we have consulted on 15 different topics using a variety of methods
- We realised the importance getting the views of as many tenants as possible, so we have created and promoted a Tenant Involvement Questionnaire, which then forms a list (261 tenants in 2018-19) of people that would like to be involved. We use this list to invite tenants to consultations which makes sure there different faces attending and giving their views.

Community Action- The strength and determination displayed in our communities is always impressive, and sometimes it just needs a bit of encouragement to find a focus and help it flourish. By working closely with communities we have achieved the following:

- There are over 20 community or social groups actively working to improve their areas with support from us. They focus on all sorts of work: gardening, arranging trips and estate wide activities, holding decision making or information meetings, encouraging social activities for all, and so much more. They make a huge difference in the areas they work in.
- Community centres are the hub in eight areas, and through our support, they stay open for a full range of activities that improve the community.
- Money makes the world go 'round- and it is no different for community work, so we continue with a community chest fund and help to find other funding. Over the last three years we have granted £53,000 to 41 different community groups and projects.

Personal Development- The impact of one person changing their life for the better not only affects them, but also the people around them. For this reason, we feel that we need to place a lot of emphasis on helping individuals to improve their life chances. When we asked tenants what they felt was the most important concern facing them and their friends, the highest response by far was mental health. Some of the benefits that have been achieved include:

- We use a wide range of innovative and interesting activities to encourage tenants to get involved. Sometimes this first step is the hardest. Sessions such as cooking on a budget or mindfulness have brought people forward who are now developing relationships in their

community or with a worker. Over the last year alone, nearly 100 community members have been involved in sessions like this.

- Over 40 tenants have shown that they have grown in confidence through a host of ways such as: joining and taking on roles in community groups, taking part in training or activities, volunteering, or learning skills to help them apply for jobs.
- By tapping into Partnership projects and funding, we are able to work with more people, run more sessions and deliver more benefits. The Give Where You Live “Timebanking” project has been delivered mainly through nearly £40,000 of external funds. Also, by working with different teams within the Council there has been funding of nearly £5,000 to run projects.

Health and Wellbeing- We recognise the negative impact from poor mental and physical health more these days, and the benefits of improving people’s health can transform lives. Just one small fact demonstrates this, as people with a high degree of loneliness are twice as likely to develop Alzheimer’s as people with a low degree of loneliness. Targeting health and wellbeing has led to innumerable benefits to tenants including:

- Creating social groups in nearly every community centre has given an entertaining respite for tenants, which gets them socialising, learning new skills, and meeting new friends.
- Project based work such as the Passion for Life scheme or the Reading project have successfully attracted tenants that don’t usually get involved, and in the process they have learned new skills or mixed with other people, young and old. This has often led to ongoing involvement in other activities.
- Mindfulness sessions have proved exceptionally popular and have benefited participants in the short term, but have also led to more involvement in other ways that has improved their confidence and well-being.