



CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF HOUSING

Best practice in housing 2017



INTRODUCTION TO BEST PRACTICE IN HOUSING 2017

As the independent voice for housing and the home of professional standards, the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) has a very important role to play in supporting the housing sector to learn, upskill, improve, and of course, influence.

All the activities we carry out are designed to provide both individual housing professionals and housing organisations alike, with the opportunities to build their knowledge and expertise, to make housing better for all.

However, our role is not only to help deliver the key training and learning supports that you, the housing professional, need to develop your career: it's also to positively influence key policy and industry decision-makers, to ensure everybody's interests are met equally.

This best practice document focuses on the housing industry on the island of Ireland as a whole. It demonstrates best practice in action, by showcasing the 2017 CIH housing award winners (as well as listing all highly commended recipients), as chosen by our awards judging panel.

We hope this document will reinforce the importance of innovation in housing because, in order to keep on meeting the ever-changing needs of our society, we must move forward together, and continually strive to find new and better ways of doing things.

With this in mind, if there is any way that we can help you / your organisation, please get in touch and we will be delighted to help you meet your training needs and staff supports in any way we can.

Nicola McCrudden CIHCM
Director CIH NI & ROI

BEST HOUSING STORY

APEX HOUSING ASSOCIATION - "THE HOUSE IN THE WELLS"

Background

The House in the Wells, a hostel for men over 18 years who are homeless and suffer from addiction, recently joined forces with a local cancer charity called The Pink Panthers.

Project inspiration

The collaboration between the House in the Wells and The Pink Panthers came about following the death of two residents – both from cancer – within a very short period of time. With a history of poor engagement with Primary Health Care Services, conditions associated with excessive alcohol intake were going largely undetected. However, as a result of the death of these two long-standing residents in The House, residents and staff alike agreed that a positive intervention was needed.



Aim

The aim of this project was to forge a partnership relationship, promote awareness of cancer, and highlight the need for screening and engagement with primary care services.

Project concept

The House in the Wells provides accommodation and support for 24 homeless men with addiction issues, particularly alcohol. In 2009, the 'Rough Sleepers and Street Drinkers Strategy for Derry/Londonderry' was developed by the Housing Executive, Supporting People and The Western Health and Social Care Trust.



This 'strategy' identified an as yet unmet need in relation to the population of people who were drinking / sleeping-rough, in and around the city centre area.

Project delivery

'Supporting People' believed that The House in the Wells, given its experience in this area, was very well-positioned to remodel its service, to help address this gap in service provision and in the process, develop

a service in which controlled drinking was permitted. As a result, Apex was asked to consider remodelling the existing service provision within The House, to one of harm reduction.

In conjunction with the introduction of outcome based support plans, controlled drinking was permitted within The House from October 2013. The result is that a number of new controls, which are now in place, have resulted in a reduced daily alcohol intake for residents - with many now drinking beer/cider instead of spirits - improved compliance with medication regimes, and improved nutritional intake. The result is that most of the residents now stay within the confines of the scheme instead of venturing into town to drink on the streets.

EXCELLENCE IN CUSTOMER SERVICE

CLÚID HOUSING – CLÚID WORKS

Background

As one of the leading housing associations in Northern Ireland, Clúid is always looking to develop new customer service initiatives that will help provide their customers with a better service that meets their precise housing needs, and make their lives easier on a day to day basis.

Project inspiration

Clúid Works is an in-house repairs service established in 2016. It serves the south-east of the country, comprising over 1600 homes across eight counties. Emanating from Clúid Housing's ethos to deliver "the right repair, first time, on time", the project was inspired by a need to keep on innovating in the area of customer service, in order to keep delivering a better service to all their customers.

Aim

To create and deliver an innovative in-house repair service that would meet the needs of customers, and provide a fast, efficient, exceptional quality repair service that would be best in class and designed around modern living.



Project delivery

This project was all about being different: Clúid wanted to add real value to its customers by challenging the traditional thinking around home repairs and how they were carried out. Being different, by giving customers what they really wanted and needed, was the starting point. But finding the perfect solution to meet this objective was the ultimate challenge.

In the end, the solution came in the form of a clever app which seamlessly integrates Clúid's appointments system, GIS tracking, operative handhelds and van stocks, to deliver a simple reliable service.

But how does it work? Actually very simply: the customer inputs details of the repair fault / problem, the app then allows them to choose a specific time (as opposed to just the usual am or pm option), for a tradesman call out, and that's it: great customer service at the touch of a button.

Key successes

This customer service initiative was all about challenging the traditional thinking behind delivering repairs services, to ensure the customer gets exactly the service they need, when they need it.

To date, this project has been an enormous success both for the organisation and its clients:

- Over 1600 repairs completed
- "End to end" time of 5.9 days
- 99% customer satisfaction
- Access to homes on arrival 99%
- Ratio of value calls to waste calls 98: 2 (compared to 70:30)
- Job ticket costs comparable with private contractors
- The only repairs service in the South of Ireland where the customer chooses an appointment at first point of contact



EXCELLENCE IN DEVELOPING SKILLS AND CAPACITY

NORTHERN IRELAND HOUSING EXECUTIVE – ASSET MANAGEMENT GRADUATE TRAINEE PROGRAMME

Background

As the public housing authority for Northern Ireland, NIHE is a landlord with responsibility for approx. 86,000 dwellings, and a staff of over 3,000 people. As one of the largest employers in Northern Ireland, and the single biggest housing organisation in the country, the business recognised the need for the development of a dedicated training programme, designed specifically to meet the needs of graduates.

Aim

The Asset Management Graduate Trainee Programme is a structured two-year training programme, created to help ensure that trainees meet work placement competencies across all NIHE departments. The goal of the programme was to support trainees through in-house mentoring and training, underpinned by a Post-Graduate Diploma in Construction Business and Project Management, delivered through Ulster University.

Project delivery

The Asset Management Graduate Trainee programme focused on developing the skills and abilities of each trainee within the area of social housing.

The programme was designed to ensure there would be a continuous drive towards service improvement, right across the entire organisation; this goal was achieved through on-the-job learning supported by a mentoring programme delivered by a dedicated programme coordinator. The structure of this programme was complimented by Ulster University, for its innovation and delivery, while it was also identified as a model for adoption by other Housing Executive divisions.

The core benefits of the programme are as follows:

- Better succession planning/on-the-job training
- Less dependency on agency staff
- Structured two-year training programme (Rotational Placements/In-House Training/ PG Diploma)
- Opportunity to work on special projects

Key successes

(i) NIHE and the housing sector

The key success of this training programme was that it provided a flexible workforce with excellent knowledge of divisional departments (interdependencies of each and other Housing Executive divisions/external bodies), capable of being placed wherever the business needs lay.

In addition, throughout the recruitment process, NIHE proactively encouraged women to apply for places, with 20% of trainees being female. This helped to make this male-dominated industry

much more inclusive, and much more appealing to females who might otherwise not have seen the housing profession as a realistic career option.

(ii) Tenants

The project has had a major impact on the way in which the Housing Executive has delivered its services to its tenants. The key achievements in this regard are:

- Business-critical work completed in less than 12 months:
 - Maintenance and Improvement Services Contract
 - Tower Block Strategy – informing investment planning
 - Compliance policies/processes/procedures
- The organisation was able to develop Tower Block economic appraisals documents which could be applied to other stock, with staff skillset development
- The programme enabled a seamless transition from contract development to delivery: trainees fully supported the implementation of this
- NIHE was able to deliver one large maintenance contract for a longer period of time as a result of efficiencies resulting from streamlined project delivery processes
- Trainees learned to recognise blockages and helped to streamline delivery, resulting in consistency of process, as well as improved governance

(iii) Trainees

The programme also benefitted the trainees themselves, in the following ways:

- Increased self-confidence and team work experience across the entire asset management division
- Opportunities to work on knowledge or skillset areas that are specific to each trainee
- Better understanding of the impact of housing management and policy issues on asset management, within a social housing context
- The linkage with university study with on-the-job training greatly enhanced the career opportunities of the trainees

MORE THAN BRICKS AND MORTAR

RESPOND! – RESPOND! COLLEGE

Background

Research recognises that social housing tenants tend to have low levels of educational attainment. This is something which affects employability, is disempowering, and negatively impacts the quality of life of individuals and families living in estates.

Respond! College delivers health service skills and healthcare support programmes nationally, in partnership with Education and Training Boards and the Department of Social Protection. These programmes are a prerequisite for professional carers.

Project aim

Through this particular training initiative, Respond! targeted both residents and the wider community: such a participatory educational design meant empowerment was a central goal at the outset.

Project concept

The Certificates in 'Health Service Skills' and 'Healthcare Support' set out to enhance the participants' capacities, in occupying a caring role.

The Health Service Executive document 'Framework for Improving Quality in our Health Service', has a clear aim to ensure that all workers foster a culture of quality that continuously seeks to provide safe, effective, person-centred care across all services. As such, courses are designed to enable students to develop these critical core competences.

While good content is always very important, so too is teaching philosophy. With this in mind, as community educators, Respond! College recognises that many students who did not achieve academic success via traditional routes, are often quite damaged by negative learning experiences. As a result, the aim is not just to teach facts to students, it's to enable them to think creatively, to develop analytical skills, self confidence, and the core skills they need to become empowered actors.

Project delivery/results

The majority of students were long-term unemployed at the outset. However, as a direct result of undertaking this course, most have since progressed to careers in social care, one of the only growing sectors in the contemporary economy.

In addition, as a result of the success of this inaugural course, further courses are now being rolled out in Kilkenny, Waterford, Cork, and Portlaoise.

Finally, and on a much broader level, as a result of this training course, Respond! removed some of the traditional barriers which prevented disadvantaged people from gaining a good education. In doing this, they opened up educational opportunities to those who otherwise could not have accessed them. Not only did this benefit the students in terms of self-confidence, it also resulted in completely transforming the entire way of thinking amongst the community.

PROMOTING INTEGRATION

HOSFORD HOUSE, EAST BELFAST MISSION

Background

Hosford House is the homeless service of East Belfast Mission, and provides accommodation and support to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

As a result of experiencing high demand for its service from Muslim and Arabic speaking refugees, the organisation focused on developing its existing service to ensure full integration of these communities into its services.



Project delivery

Once the problem had been identified, the group developed a plan to ensure the service would be developed around the needs of these new client groups. To achieve this, the organisation worked in partnership with the Northern Ireland Community for Refugees and Asylum Seekers, and also with the Housing Executive Community Cohesion Unit. Finally, they also consulted with the clients themselves to gain their input into service development.

The key elements of the Hosford House response included:

- (1) Accessing training and information in respect of best practice when it comes to dealing with the client group. This enabled staff to become sensitive to the particular needs and issues faced by their client group: specialist counselling, benefits issues, social support, reunification with families, dealing with hate crime etc.
- (2) Tackling language barriers by offering interpreting services: this ensured that staff could communicate effectively with all their clients, and that clients clearly understood the service so that they could fully benefit from it.
- (3) Developing a knowledge base of all the services which were available to the client group.
- (4) Accessing housing that was appropriate to the needs of the client group: EBM developed access to new private rental accommodation and also supported people to access social housing.
- (5) Accessing funding for training for the client group: in partnership with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, clients were offered a number of places on interpreting courses that had a focus on diversity.
- (6) Made resources available to support clients: this included providing funds for religious celebrations (Ramadan).
- (7) Providing information to other clients in respect of the new client group: this helped to increase understanding, creating a more harmonious environment for everyone.

Key successes and results

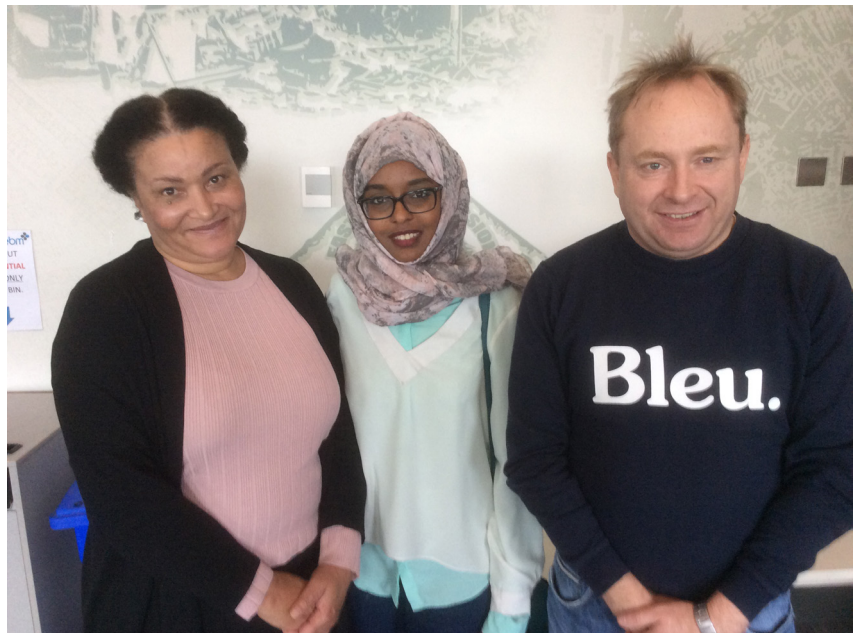
The project resulted in very positive interaction between the group's traditional client group and this new one; this included socialising together, eating together, participating in cultural events and joint projects: all of which resulted in the development of some lasting friendships between people.

Since developing the project, Hosford House saw increasing numbers of referrals from the client group, and received positive feedback from clients who felt safe, supported, and welcome.

Feedback from stakeholders was enormously positive: Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS) identified this service as excellent and duly committed to recommending it to their clients.

Feedback from the client group was extremely positive: 100% of the people they worked with found the service, and the community as a whole, to be welcoming and completely accessible. The following real life example of Muna Omar, clearly shows this to be the case:

Muna, a refugee from Somalia, stayed at Hosford's hostel and was supported to gain a qualification in interpreting. The result was that she acquired full time employment and is now a volunteer interpreter with the service.



Muna was also supported to reunite with her husband who now also lives at the hostel and they plan to move into their own accommodation in 2017.

Muna said that: 'I was lucky enough to have the support of EBM. Today I'm working and I am closer to my ultimate goal, through the support they have provided me with. I felt very welcome at EBM and as a person from another country I never felt alone or strange at EBM. I must say, they have the most understanding and kind support staff I have ever seen'.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN HOUSING

COMPLEX NEEDS UNITS AT DUNGIVEN AND BROOKEBOROUGH

Background

Developed by Apex Housing, this project was all about delivering bespoke 'complex needs' family homes, for two large families whose lives were adversely affected by living in accommodation that was wholly unsuitable to their family needs. One home was built to meet the needs of a family of nine people, the other for a family of seven.

Project Delivery

Complex needs families want to be able to live ordinary lives in extraordinary circumstances. Both families in question recently moved into their new homes, and each gave a resounding endorsement of their new homes, during post-completion visits.

In Dungiven, the mother of the family in question said, "even though our home is specially designed for complex needs, it is still incredibly family orientated and therefore feels very much like home for all of us."

In the case of the Brookeborough home, the mother of the family commented that: "I really felt that Apex listened to my individual needs and the needs of my family. Our new home is perfect for us, I love it. And even though my daughter can't say it, I know she does too".



While in each case occupational therapists (OTs) assessed the physical needs of the two families, it was very much up to Apex - as the housing provider - to translate these physical needs into buildings that were capable of being transformative, both physically and emotionally.

Design briefs were written for each of the two houses, based on OT Reports, and architects were commissioned to design the buildings, in consultation with the families and their OTs. At the end of this process, Apex presented each family - and their OT - with a final draft design for discussion and agreement.

Ultimately though, when it came to delivering on this brief, Apex recognised that, above all else, each family simply had a desire to live ordinary, dignified lives within their own communities, a goal that was not only met but exceeded.

Sustainability

Sustainable communities are only created when the design and build of a project takes into account every aspect of people's lives, to ensure that each individual need is catered for. In other words, if a family feels that their lives are compromised by the home in which they live, then this personal aspect of sustainability is compromised and needs to be repaired. In the case of these two case studies, both families loved the communities and localities in which they lived, but they were very

dissatisfied with their living circumstances.

Advanced standards

To become better at complex needs delivery, Apex engaged with the Health and Social Care Trusts, NIHE and DSD (as the Department was called at the time) to point out weaknesses in their systems.

For example, HAG guidance was out of date and no coherent NI-wide system of reporting was used by OTs. To rectify this, they offered advice which was received and accepted in formal settings, and which now forms part a number of groups, set up by public bodies, to review and update systems.

The proof is very much in the pudding: the family in Dungiven, whose son is a double amputee, is now back in his own community, has appeared on television talking about his circumstances, and is raising awareness of his condition and declaring his intention to become a Paralympian athlete. Apex has now provided him (and his family) with a home that allows him to positively and actively contribute to his community, simply by focusing on his strengths and very precise requirements.

The results

Through the building of these two bespoke and custom family homes, Apex completely transformed the lives of nine people in Dungiven, and seven people in Brookeborough.

In Dungiven, two siblings - each with severe health issues - now enjoy their own ground floor bedrooms, with full access to en-suite facilities. The older sibling is an adult and his mother has described how her son can now come and go as he pleases, get his own breakfast and shower in privacy: "It's as if he's got his independence back", she says.

In Brookeborough, the family's life has been dominated by the severe condition of the young girl; simply by sorting out the nuances of how the family dynamics worked, this family is now able to function in a much more dignified manner. The little girl's mother has endorsed her new home; "my daughter now has a sense of independence but with an added sense of security, which gives both of us the peace of mind to know that I can be in her room in seconds if she ever needs me."

Future initiatives

Apex is currently working with other equally complex needs families and sees these seemingly small interventions as being a vital part of sustaining vibrant communities.

Each home that is completed in conjunction with the help of OTs, contributes to a bank of knowledge that is being fed back into the Trusts / NIHE / Department for Communities networks. Thus, the work that Apex currently do can also help other housing providers to understand the importance of building houses with an absolute focus on the needs of the individual, rather than adopting the one-size-fits-all approach to building. This will, in the process, help to improve delivery of complex needs units all over Northern Ireland.

WORKING TOGETHER

APEX HOUSING - FOYLE FOOD PROJECT

When Apex Housing became aware of increasing food poverty issues among its tenants, it encouraged three foodbanks to join with them in forming one collective food poverty project, based at its Apex Living Centre in Derry-Londonderry.

Armed with this idea, representatives from local businesses and charities all joined together to form a new charity which not only provides 'food handouts', but which has also developed a highly successful 'More Than Food' project, working to tackle poverty issues.



Working with private businesses and voluntary groups within Derry-Londonderry, this project has managed to marry business and social knowledge, an approach which has led to a decrease in the duplication of services, whilst at the same time helping people in poverty to address difficult financial issues, of which food poverty is a symptom.

As a result of this project, rather than having three separate foodbanks within Derry-Londonderry, there is now one organisation serving the needs of the community in this area. The result of this collaborative approach is that limited resources can now go further.

The process

As the group wanted to go beyond just providing a foodbank, Apex spent over £220,000 renovating an under-used building, to bring to life their vision of the 'Apex Living Centre'. This has become a 'hub' for developing 'more than food' initiatives in an effort to tackle poverty issues, within local neighbourhoods.



This centre now houses the new Foyle Foodbank, as well as a number of different organisations which, together, deliver support services to foodbank users.

As a result, users can now take part in a number of initiatives, including the following:

- interactive 'cooking on a budget' demonstrations within the purpose-built demonstration kitchens
- digital inclusion initiatives, all delivered on a voluntary basis by local businesses
- financial inclusion, debt, and benefit advice from partner organisations working from the hub
- floating support services provided by a partner organisation

The centre has also enlisted a team of 19 volunteers to work with people experiencing food poverty and who are accessing, or at risk of accessing, the Foyle Foodbank.

Results and project impact

From March to November 2016, 1755 adults and 1396 children who would otherwise have gone hungry, have been fed by the project.

In addition, the project has benefitted the community in a wide range of different ways:

- 36 people have accessed 'cooking on a budget' interactive demonstrations delivered by volunteers from local businesses
- 3 local IT companies deliver digital inclusion initiatives within the centre
- 13 people who were in 'extreme debt' were supported with accessing Citizens Advice Bureaux or Step Change's debt advice service
- An extra £134,957 has been generated in unclaimed benefits
- 160 people were supported with switching to a cheaper electricity provider
- 50 people were awarded a £25 electricity voucher, courtesy of a local network provider
- 2 people have been supported with accessing employment within local businesses
- 15 people were supported with registering and completing courses on basic literacy and IT
- 23 people are using the intensive floating support service

In addition to all of the above, churches, schools and local businesses regularly support the project through donations of money and food; this has increased the social awareness amongst these groups, particularly among school children who are often unaware of food and poverty issues within their local area.

Finally, users of the Apex Living Centre have commented on the safe and confidential nature of the Centre and 70% of foodbank volunteers are previous foodbank users, a testament to their appreciation of the service.



CONCLUSION

The list of winners and highly commended recipients highlighted in this best practice compendium, are clear evidence of the innovation and quality that can be seen across the housing sector in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It showcases real life examples that demonstrate all that is positive about housing.

All winners and highly commended recipients (see full list overleaf) were selected by our panel of independent housing experts, and honoured at our housing awards 2017 event at Titanic, Belfast. However, the overwhelming response we received to our awards application call, shows that our housing sector is now bigger, better, and more innovative than ever before.

We hope that this best practice compendium will help you to see the scale of innovation that we're now seeing within our sector. But more than that, we hope it will inspire you to keep on thinking big, whether through physical building structures or community supports, so that together we can make our communities better for everyone.

Nicola McCrudden CIHCM
Director, CIH NI & ROI

FULL LIST OF CIH AWARD WINNERS AND HIGHLY COMMENDED FINALISTS

1. BEST HOUSING STORY

Highly commended

Apex Housing	The House in the Wells
NIHE	Omagh men's shed

Winner

NIHE	Anthony McGrath
------	-----------------

2. EXCELLENCE IN CUSTOMER SERVICE

Highly commended

Housing Rights	www.housingadviceni.org
----------------	--

Winner

Clúid Housing	Clúid Works
---------------	-------------

3. EXCELLENCE IN DEVELOPING SKILLS AND CAPACITY

Winner

NIHE	Asset management graduate trainee programme
------	---

4. MORE THAN BRICKS AND MORTAR

Highly commended

Clanmil	Supporting people: empowering communities
---------	---

Winner

Respond!	Respond! College
----------	------------------

5. PROMOTING INTEGRATION

Highly commended

Clanmil	Felden
NIHE	Changing lives, building communities

Winner

EBM	Hosford House
-----	---------------

6. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Highly commended

Fold Housing	Residential development at Rathgill Parade, Bangor
--------------	--

Winner

Apex	Complex needs units at Dungiven and Brookeborough
------	---

7. WORKING TOGETHER

Highly commended

Housing Rights	Housing advice service in prisons
----------------	-----------------------------------

Winner

Apex	Foyle food project
------	--------------------

8. HOUSING HERO

Highly commended

Helm	Karen Montgomery
Welcome Organisation	Colleen Hamilton

Winner

Divis Residents Association	John Leathem
-----------------------------	--------------

9. RAISING STANDARDS IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Winner

TDS

TDS

10. YOUNG PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR

Highly commended

Clanmil

Michaela McCusker

Alpha Housing

Sarah Young

Winner

Helm

Ciaran McLaughlin

11. CIH PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR

Winner

Clanmil

Clare McCarty

