

Customer Involvement Impact Report

2022/23

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welsh



The services we deliver must benefit the changing needs of our customers and communities.

By involving United Welsh residents in how we improve our services and make decisions, we are better placed to remove barriers for people to achieve their ambitions, and bring sustainable change to the places where they live.



2022/23 was a busy period for our Community Investment team. Following a consultation with customers, colleagues, and stakeholders, the team developed a **new approach to customer and community engagement**.

The team restructured to become the Customer Involvement team, who will focus on:

- Continuous service improvement across the United Welsh Group
- Sustainable community development
- Employment, training and skills building, and reducing in-work poverty
- Income generation for customer and community activities.

This report outlines work undertaken by the team during the 2022/23 year.

We would like to thank our customers for their support, feedback and involvement during the year. Your input is hugely appreciated and helps us to make changes that matter.

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Creating communities

Dinas Powys Community Consultation

Dinas Powys is one of the largest housing areas that we manage.

In 2022, we did a consultation to help us better understand **what life is like for residents in Dinas Powys**, and what community issues they would like us to prioritise.

Over **50%** of residents responded to our survey, helping us to create a partnership approach to resolving issues alongside residents, and other community groups and organisations such as the Dinas Powys Community Activists.

Customers told us:

How they felt about living in the Caerleon Road area; what was great about living there and where we could improve.

This included:

- Improvements to the services delivered by United Welsh and our repairs and asset management service, Celtic Horizons
- Having more things to do, especially for young people
- Help to make the community safer.

We also received a petition from over 600 residents, asking us to make the area from Eastbrook Station safer with additional lighting.



Dinas Powys Community Consultation

What we did:

We formed a **working group** of staff and community stakeholders to start a community action plan that addresses the issues raised. We also hold a monthly catch up with Community Councillors.

- We have worked with Community Councillors to address the lighting issue, and **new lighting will be installed** later this year
- We invested in the installation of a Play Pod, which **over 60** local children are enjoying regularly
- We partnered up with **Play Wales** to deliver activities for children and young people

- We are bringing an **allotment space back to life**. As well as our staff donating their time, staff from Pricewaterhouse Cooper also kindly helped for a PwC Corporate Volunteering Day
- Celtic Horizons has improved the **look and cleanliness of the area** with additional support provided for grounds clearance and waste management
- We are planning a **youth consultation** to create a safe and enjoyable space for more young people to play, be adventurous and creative.



Treharne Road wellbeing space

Treharne Road is within the Court area of Barry.

Customers told us:

They wanted improvements to their communal garden area.

The garden was previously used by Treharne Road residents to catch up, relax and enjoy the sun, but due to there being no entry gate, it was becoming a hot spot for fly-tipping and littering.

What we are doing:

We are working with Barratt Homes and Vale of Glamorgan Council to bring **36 new affordable homes** to Barry Waterfront, just two miles from Treharne Road.

As part of the contract, a percentage of the development cost has been donated for **community benefit**.

We consulted with residents about how the garden area could be improved, resulting in a **new side gate, pergola roof with guttering, rotary washing lines and a water butt** being supplied and fitted by Barratt Homes, transforming the garden space for residents to enjoy again.

Through the fund, our team also **secured a job for a resident** at the Barry Waterfront site through our Targeted Recruitment and Training scheme.

What next?

Part two of the garden revamp is underway. We're working with residents to create a **new wellbeing space** within the garden, including a new bench, raised beds and hanging baskets. These will be watered using rainwater from the water butt.



Spotlight on...

User Centred Design of Services and Research

User-centred design (UCD) is an approach to design that places the needs of users front and centre.

By following an iterative service design process that focuses on the user's needs every step of the way, the process is guided by the person's behaviours, values, and expectations from beginning to end.

Our aspiration is that for the services we create or improve, development will be founded on the views, feedback and stories of people which the services are intended for.

This year:

- **12 staff members** completed an Introduction to Service Design Course to learn and start sharing knowledge among teams
- **Seven staff members** completed an accredited User Centred Research and Service Design Course to understand how to engage customers in service design, research completion, gaining customer insight, challenging assumptions and understanding customer experience

Next, we will:

- Develop **customer performance indicators** based on what's most important to our customers
- Ensure the **customer experience is improved** by the Renting Homes Act legislation
- Embed a **data driven** – not assumption driven – approach to improving the customer experience
- Train groups of customers to carry out user research.

“The course was insightful. I learned enhanced engagement skills, which will enable me to provide services which are truly led by the needs, wants and desires of our customers.”

Sian Evans
Living Well Manager

Windsor Quay residents' group

Windsor Quay is a community in Butetown, Cardiff.

Customers told us:

They were concerned about the nearby development of private housing.

What we are doing:

We worked with customers to create a **residents' association** and helped them to become a formally constituted group, with support for accessing finance for overheads.

We worked with the group Chair to foster a good relationship with First Port, the property manager for the new private housing development.

This has reduced concerns as there is now **open, meaningful communication** between the contractors and local residents.

We were also pleased to support the group with community funding to **bring people together** for the Queen's Jubilee street party and a Christmas lights gathering.

Overall, the residents' association aims to:

- Enable people to collectively voice any concerns
- Bring the community together for events and celebrations
- Keep people informed of local ongoing issues
- Improve communication between residents and United Welsh's housing management teams.



Working Families project

Working Families was a four-year project funded through the National Lottery Community Fund to deliver a series of interventions and activities across South Wales.

The aim was to alleviate the pressures associated with in-work poverty, collaborating with families to design solutions to **improve their way of life** and opportunities in the wider community.

The project operates across Gwent, led by United Welsh and **delivered in partnership** with five other housing associations: Pobl, Linc Cymru, Tai Calon, Monmouthshire Housing Association and Newport City Homes.

2022 was the fourth year of Working Families, with the project due to end in February 2023. However, additional funding of **£225,000** was allocated by National Lottery to extend for another two years.

Project work

This year, we have led or supported **14 groups and community initiatives** to improve life for families in Gwent and ease financial strain. Some of the projects include:

Working Wardrobe

This project **donates interview clothing** to people looking for work across South Wales, giving people the confidence and self-belief to take that all-important first step towards a new, meaningful career.

Led by recruitment company Moxie People, United Welsh is a delivery partner alongside Platform, Newydd Housing, CCHA and Toward.

We support five volunteers at the Caerphilly hub, which has helped **147 families** and donated **725 items** of clothing since inception. We are looking to expand provision at the hub to offer school uniform and prom / formal clothing, as these items can also be a financial burden for families on a low income.



Working Families project

Caerphilly sustainable cooking sessions

We have run sessions in collaboration with families at **Greenhill Primary School** in Hengoed, Caerphilly, to teach affordable meal planning and cooking.

Each week, a different family prepared a healthy meal in school and ate together, then everyone took home ingredients to make a meal at home themselves. A **recipe book and price plan** were also created and distributed throughout the school.

In the course feedback, all participants confirmed that they now **sit down together as a family to eat**, and 95% stated that they now **cook together and try new foods**.

This has had a positive impact financially, with more families having the tools to buy ingredients and cook, rather than relying on convenience food or takeaways. The sessions also **positively impacted household dynamics**, with shared mealtimes creating more conversations and a greater sense of wellbeing and contentment.

“The course showed my son the process of the effort that goes into making a meal daily, and showed him the cleaning up afterwards. It also showed him it can be a fun bonding experience for families, his confidence grew massively when he enjoyed the meal he had cooked.”

Netteiria, Greenhill Primary School parent



Working Families project

The Laptop Lending Library

This was created to provide families experiencing digital exclusion with the tools and knowledge they need to be online.

12 families are loaning laptops from us. We have focused on helping them to be visible online, and access online resources and groups that can **positively impact their lives** day to day.

We are also loaning tablets to community groups to help them to deliver training.

The Working Families project team has noted that, across the groups and initiatives they have supported during the project period, group members now:

- Have more confidence to communicate with utility companies to manage their responsibilities
- Have greater awareness of benefit entitlements and support available
- Share household items in an informal freecycle, providing items such as travel cots and highchairs as they become needed
- Have more confidence to take responsibility for planning activities, doing facilitation and finding funding
- Have more confidence to take on new challenges such as studying for qualifications, learning to drive or applying for work
- Have closer relationships with other community groups, particularly parental groups, with more friendships and support networks flourishing.



Spotlight on...

Rents and Cost of Living Consultation

Each year, United Welsh reviews the rent and services we charge for, as typically the costs of buildings and services increases annually.

The review includes a consultation with our customers. They help us to consider how affordable our rent is, how well understood the rent calculation process is, and whether rent provides value for money.

This year, we expanded our consultation to help us understand our customers' experiences of the high cost of living, high inflation and increasing energy and fuel costs.

We also wanted to know how the cost-of-living crisis was affecting them day to day, as well as their overall mental and physical health.

**Over 400
customers
responded**

We gained key insights into how customers are affected, and who is in most need.

The insights:

- **Informed our community development offer**
- **Helped us to support those most disadvantaged**
- **Fed into our rent setting discussions and new business strategy development.**

Transforming lives

Live Life to the Full courses

Live Life to the Full is a course designed for people that are experiencing isolation, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, anxiety, low moods or low motivation.

This year, we saw an increase in customers who were experiencing poor health and struggling with their wellbeing, and the negative impact this was having on their daily lives. This could manifest itself in people feeling unable to:

- Tackle household tasks such as cleaning, decluttering and gardening
- Deal with their bills
- Manage neighbour issues, or family issues without support
- Take responsibility for themselves.

We introduced the six-week Live Life to the Full course for customers to embrace their strengths.

40 customers have taken part, and all have reported **significant improvements** in their health and wellbeing, self-esteem and confidence.

Many attendees have also since enrolled in training and volunteering opportunities, with all reporting that the course had a **positive impact on their mental health and wellbeing**.

What did our customers say?

“The course has given me a greater understanding of how my mental health affects me and the people around me. It’s also given me more ways to manage my mental health, allowing me to understand what I can control and what I can’t.”

John



Blaenau Cwm Residents Group

We provide a number of one-bedroom flats in Blaenau Cwm. Several residents living there attended the Live Life to the Full course, although they didn't know each other before.

After the course, three Blaenau Cwm residents were keen to **start volunteering or find work**, with two of them securing work within a month of finishing the programme.

They also setup a **monthly coffee morning** to meet with our teams, including Celtic Horizons, to prevent neighbourhood issues and miscommunication.

Next, the group are planning to create a **wellbeing space** at Blaenau Cwm's garden area, and want to develop more **supportive activities for men**.



Get into Housing project

Get Into Housing is a partnership project that works with people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds to start a career in housing or gain work experience.

The project offers bespoke mentoring, on-the-job experience, and pays people at least the Real Living Wage.

At United Welsh, we offered a total of **five**, six-month work placements as part of the project. After the placements, three individuals - Mack, Marion and Sylvia - went on to gain **permanent employment** with us.



What did our customers say?

Marion successfully gained a permanent position as a Day Project Worker. She said:

"I was so excited when I got accepted onto the programme, and the experience I had whilst working for the homelessness team was priceless. I was also assigned a mentor, who was always available to offer advice and support. Whilst on my placement, a job became available within the team, so I decided to apply for it and was delighted when I was offered the role. I'm now a full-time project worker at Oak House.

"Following the Get into Housing programme, I am so much more confident, I believe I can do something bigger and stand up for vulnerable people."



Mack was employed as a Liaison Officer for our Living Well team following his placement. He said:

"I moved from Hong Kong to the UK in June 2021. After a year of job hunting, I saw a post in a Hongkonger Facebook group about the Get into Housing project and applied.

"My placement involved identifying potential problems in the communal areas of our schemes and reporting them to our contractor to arrange repairs and maintenance.

"I really enjoyed my placement and I'm so happy my experience was recognised. My manager Sian placed me in the right place to fully utilise my skills and the best thing is I've now been employed by United Welsh."



Spotlight on...

The Together Fund

Our Together Fund was setup several years ago to support United Welsh residents and local people to make positive changes where they live. It is a Community Benefits fund managed by Coalfields Trust.

In 2022/23:

- We provided **£13,979.74** to community projects
- Funding awards were spread across the communities we serve – **Caerphilly: 40%; Cardiff: 33.3%; Blaenau Gwent: 20%; Monmouth: 6.7%**
- The total number of beneficiaries profiled to benefit from funding provided is **10,056** people. 1,129 are anticipated to be residents of United Welsh.

In the next financial year, we will review the fund and our Community Benefit offer overall. We intend to better plan how we maximise income from our procurement activities, and we want to use the fund to **support our customers most in need.**



Intensive Housing Support

This year, we adopted a person-centred approach to reduce anti-social behaviour and safety compliance issues with customers who have previously struggled to engage with us.

Through **one-to-one support sessions**, we were better able to identify the cause of the lack of engagement, and understand why people were struggling with fulfilling aspects of their housing contracts (such as not letting us access their homes for gas and electrical checks or being the subject of ASB complaints).

These customers were potentially at risk of losing their home, but through the one-to-one support, we were able to address and plan how to **overcome the barriers together**.

“Mr X would not allow the standard gas and electrical safety checks to be done at his property. In the past, Mr X has been aggressive when presented with issues that need attention.

“I worked with Mr X to understand the deep-rooted issues that present as barriers, using principles of restorative practice and a ‘no stone unturned’ approach.

“Our relationship has gone from strength to strength, leading to Mr X securing permanent employment and rent rescue support, which overall minimised the chance of him losing his contract and home. We have established a good relationship to help him comfortably engage with us going forward.”



Spotlight on...

Employment and training opportunities

Helping customers to gain sustainable employment and training has continued to be a priority for us this year.



38

customers helped into work, including two people joining the United Welsh Group



3

customers accessed volunteering or work placements



31

customers accessed training opportunities including health and safety, customer service and construction qualifications



26

customers received one-to-one support to remove significant barriers to accessing work, such as transport issues, childcare or family issues, and health concerns

“A customer rang to tell me that following an interview set up by Peter, he now has a new job, 40+ hours per week with a proper contract. He is so excited and grateful to Liam and Peter.

“He gave a lot of praise, stating Peter has gone above and beyond to help him.”

Looking ahead to 2023/24

We will continue to work across our housing areas to identify community-led projects that create a valuable difference to our customers, their families, and the places where they live.

We also want to **involve our customers** in the development of more equitable services, considering where inequalities lie and what we can do to offer more opportunities for engagement, training, volunteering and personal growth.

Adopting **user-centred design** is a key part of United Welsh's 2023-27 Strategy, and we look forward to developing this approach to service improvements throughout the organisation.





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Proud to be part of the United Welsh Group
We **build** homes, **create** communities and **transform** lives