

Member Spotlight

May 2021

Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust





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We asked **Caroline Drew, Community Engagement Business Partner** to share what VAHT are up to. If you'd like to contact Caroline about any of the below click [here](#)

Give us a little known fact about your organisation

We began in 2006 with a stock transfer from the local district council, 15 years later we own and manage around 8,500 homes across Buckinghamshire and the surrounding areas. We're part of a company group with our two subsidiaries, Fairfax Housing and Fairfax Design & Build.

Tell us about a time that engagement has made a difference to your services or communities?

Engagement is always making a difference to our services; in particular our approach to scrutiny through Task and Finish groups is making a real change. Residents are proactively challenging us, forming robust reports and recommendations for improvements. Residents are empowered to identify the area for scrutiny and request the support and information needed.

For our communities, it's important that residents have a say in how geographical areas are improved. In 2015 we set up our Nurture your Neighbourhood scheme where residents can apply for environmental or community safety improvements where they live. Not only are the applications made by residents but they're assessed and managed by a resident panel. We've been able to create spaces for residents to come together (outside of covid-19 regulations), building their community and helping to improve their health and well-being.

What are you currently working on when it comes to engagement?

Lots! Despite the challenges of covid-19 we have taken the opportunity to make sure our engagement foundations are robust and fit for purpose for the business and for our residents. With this in mind and to underpin the requirements in the Social Housing White Paper, we're reviewing our Community Engagement and Scrutiny Framework, working collaboratively with residents to set our customer commitments for the next 12 months and building relationships between our resident volunteers and Board.

Equality, diversity and inclusion of our engagement opportunities is key to making sure all residents have their voice heard. We're planning how to safely bring back face to face engagement and not lose the digital offering we now have in place.

And lots of resident training!

Why did you decide to join Tpas?

We joined to gain access to the great networking and training opportunities that are on offer. They help us and our resident volunteers to keep up to date with sector changes; good practice as well as learning from what other organisations are doing and sharing our own successes.

What is your top engagement tip?

Be open to change and continuously strive to improve what you and your organisation do. Make sure to listen to your residents and communicate openly and honestly, never assume!



What's the one thing you are really proud of when it comes to engagement?

I'm proud to be part of an organisation that sees itself as more than just a landlord and strives to provide homes for living and communities for life.

A great example is our training programme. Over 50 of our residents have gained a level 2 nationally recognised qualification over a variety of courses, enhancing their skills, confidence, CV and knowledge.

Outside of covid-19 we've run an annual Summer Fun programme since 2015, providing activities over a 2 week period in August to our young residents and their families. Activities have ranged from horse-riding to days out at the seaside to activity parks. The activities we provide aren't just enjoyable for our residents, but they enable us to engage with a particular group and have lead to further positive engagement across all of our opportunities.

