



Report to Customers and Communities Committee

26 February 2015

Title: TALISMAN – Progress Report

Report of: Involvement and Diversity Manager

Purpose of Report

1. To provide the committee with an update on progress against actions identified in TALISMAN reviews completed to date and provide a general update on the Panel.

Background

2. TALISMAN (Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Management Panel) was established in October 2011.
3. The purpose of the Panel is to ensure that the needs and views of Gateshead residents are at the heart of how housing services are developed and delivered by The Gateshead Housing Company and Gateshead Council.
4. The first review of anti-social behaviour took place between January and June 2012. The Panel's recommendations were presented to this committee in July 2012 and the action plan to address the recommendations was presented to this committee in November 2012. The committee also received a progress report in May 2013 where it was noted that the majority of actions were complete.
5. The second review of rent and income took place between March and September 2013. The Panel's recommendations were presented to this committee in September 2013 and the action plan to address the recommendations was presented to this committee in November 2013.
6. The third review of void management took place between October 2013 and June 2014. The Panel's recommendations were presented to this committee in September 2014 and the action plan to address the recommendations were presented to this committee in November 2014.
7. The committee was informed in its last progress report in September 2014 that the Panel had agreed that its next area of scrutiny would focus on customer service. It had received an initial presentation giving an overview of customer service but was still to decide specific areas it would like to focus this review around.

Scrutiny Reviews - Progress completing actions

8. At its meeting in September 2014, the committee was informed that most of the actions following the review of anti-social behaviour had already been completed and update was provided of three actions that were still outstanding. The following progress has been made since the last update. Updates are highlighted in red.
 - Surveys/sample sizes – A review of our current approach to surveys was provided in a previous report to committee. This included looking at best practice from other organisations around sample sizes and methods of satisfaction collection. In 2013/14, it has been noted that response rates to a number of surveys has fallen. As a result, we will be revisiting this issue in the next financial year to determine if the approach of themed and service specific surveys continues to be the most appropriate way of collecting customer satisfaction information.
 - Collect and report data to SIG for monitoring on length of time taken to resolve ASB cases – This action requires ICT development within our ASB case management system. This is an outstanding action from 2013/14 service plan which will transfer to the 2014/15 service plan. This item is also on the SIG workplan for 2014/15. *Information and findings related to length of time taken to resolve ASB cases was shared with the SIG group at their January meeting and has been added to their March agenda to allow further time for discussion.*
 - Share Housemark data and work with SIG to benchmark – This was discussed with SIG initially as part of 2013/14 workplan, and included performance, satisfaction and costs. *A further update on benchmarking and performance was provided at the November and January ASB SIG. This can now be signed off as complete.*
9. The committee received, at its meeting in September 2014, an updated action plan following the review of rent and income which showed that all the actions had been completed with the exception of the review of the Tenancy Agreement needing to reflect Welfare Reform and its impact on tenants. The Company is looking at mitigating the impacts of Welfare Reform but not specifically through the Tenancy Agreement as it is merely a legal document outlining tenant/landlord rights and responsibilities. The Board has previously received reports around measures the Company is taking to mitigate Welfare Reform and will bring further reports to the Board around its wider approach. This action plan can now be signed off as complete.
10. The committee received, at its meeting in November 2014, an action plan following the review of voids. An updated action plan that shows those that have now been completed and progress with those that are still outstanding is attached at Appendix 1 to this report.

Other Updates

Membership

11. The Committee was informed in September 2014 that there were currently six members on the Panel.

12. In September 2014, Elizabeth Bird was appointed onto the Board as a Tenant Director and as a consequence had to resign from the Panel.
13. In October 2014, another member also left the Panel reducing the membership to four.
14. In December 2014, Hazel Hitchen, who resigned from the Panel in January 2014, expressed an interest to re-join the Panel. There is nothing in the terms of reference that excludes a former member of TALISMAN from re-joining the Panel if they haven't completed their full term of office. The current members of the Panel approved the decision for Hazel to re-join and she was reappointed to the Panel in January.
15. An expression of interest was received in January from Chris Sleight, a tenant who lives in Chopwell to join the Panel. Following an interview with three members of the Panel, including the Chair on 13 February 2014, Chris was appointed onto the Panel, increasing the current membership back to six.
16. Although there are now six members on the Panel, four of these are from the West of the Borough. The Company recognises this imbalance in representation from across the Borough and will be carrying out a targeted recruitment campaign during the next couple of months at those areas where it is under-represented. This will include promoting the work of the Panel specifically to the Multi-Storey and Leaseholder Service Improvement Groups and the BME Forum.
17. As part of this process, the Company is also looking to produce a more user-friendly leaflet and to generally look at better ways of raising the profile of TALISMAN.

Review of Customer Service

18. The Panel is currently undertaking its fifth review, which is of customer service. Following an initial presentation giving an overview of customer service in the Company, the Panel agreed to specifically focus its review on the local housing office network.
19. As part of this review, the Panel has been looking at various information including the following: -
 - Position statement for Neighbourhood Services
 - Organisation chart for local offices
 - Job Profiles
 - Board reports from previous housing office reviews
 - Complaints
 - Website
20. The Panel produced a satisfaction survey which was sent to all members of the Service Improvement Groups, BME and Disabled Forums. The results of these are being collated.
21. The Panel has completed a visit to each of the local offices to observe customer service. As well as observing customer service between tenants and staff on the reception, they also had an opportunity to inspect the office, sit in the back office

and observe a sign up with a new tenant. During one of the visits, the Panel member was also able to observe an interview with a tenant.

22. Focus groups with housing management assistants and housing managers are currently being organised as the next stage of this review.
23. The Panel is aiming to complete this review and present its findings to the meeting of this committee in May 2015.

Terms of Reference

24. The Panel has reviewed and made some suggested changes to its terms of reference. These include reducing the number of scrutiny reviews they will aim to complete each year from four to one or two and increasing the maximum term of office from six years to 10 years. This reflects the learning of the panel and organisation since it was originally established.
25. The amended terms of reference are attached at Appendix 2 to this report. The amendments are highlighted in blue.

External Events

26. Members of the Panel attended the fourth Northern Housing Consortium Annual Tenant Panel Conference in November 2014 at York Racecourse. The Panel facilitated one of the workshops at the Conference with David Hewitson, Chair of TALISMAN and the Company's Governance and Risk Officer presenting its review of voids.
27. Some members of the Panel are attending Scrutiny: A Deeper Involvement on 23-25 February 2015 at Trafford Hall. At the same time, another member of the Panel, the Mentor and the Governance and Risk Officer are attending a networking event in Darlington on 24 February 2015.

Link to values

28. This report relates to the following company values: -
 - Being customer focused, innovative and professional
 - Being a listening and learning organisation
 - Being honest, accountable and transparent
 - Embracing equality

Impact on tenants

29. The overall aim of the TALISMAN is to ensure that the needs and views of Gateshead residents are at the heart at how housing services are delivered.
30. The outcomes of the TALISMAN reviews to date have identified areas for improvement which will benefit tenants and leaseholders as a whole.

Risk Management Implications

31. Failure to engage with tenants has been identified as an overall strategic risk for the company. The TALISMAN builds on the existing structures in place for tenants and leaseholders to shape services and influence our delivery.
32. Feedback and monitoring of responses to recommendations following a review by the TALISMAN is fundamental to ensuring that tenants feel they are being listened to, encouraging their ongoing engagement.
33. The TALISMAN supports the company's overall approach to co-regulation as set out in the Homes and Community Agency's regulatory framework.

Financial Implications

34. There is a budget in place to support the operation of TALISMAN. Where recommendations are made which have budgetary implications they would be considered on a case by case basis.

Equality and Diversity Implications

35. TALISMAN's code of conduct includes specific expectations relating to equality and diversity. All new members of the panel will either attend a full day training session or undertake the company's e-learning course to give them a level of understanding.
36. In addition, the framework for each review includes consideration as to whether the service is inclusive.

Value for Money Implications

37. The TALISMAN's framework for reviews includes a remit to consider value for money within the services they inspect.

Health Implications

38. The reviews undertaken by the TALISMAN will ultimately result in positive health implications for tenants and leaseholders accessing the service. The TALISMAN have recognised that where it is difficult to use a service, or the information provided is unclear, this can lead to undue stress and concern for a customer.

Environmental Implications

39. There are no direct environmental implications associated with this report.

Consultation carried out

40. Each review will involve significant consultation with the service manager, service users, employees and possibly partners to determine how well the service is performing.
41. In addition, the TALISMAN is consulted on the proposed responses to recommendations by the service area to allow negotiations where necessary.

Recommendation

42. The committee is recommended to

- approve the updated TALISMAN terms of reference;
- comment on the progress made since the last six monthly update in September 2014.



Service Feedback to committee on TALISMAN recommendations



Service Area	Void Service				
Date of response to committee	6 th November 2014				
Recommendation	How is this to be implemented? (or if it can't be explain the reasons for this including any further discussions with TALISMAN)	Lead service	Target date for completion	Where will progress be reported? (e.g. committee, relevant SIG etc)	Progress Update
Recommendation already implemented					
Position statements should be written for every service area as soon as possible at the start of the financial year.	The "Void" service area is part of the overall Repair Management Service and a position statement for this is produced at the start of each year as part of the preparation for the annual report. For this review, a statement focusing just on voids was also requested and was provided (For any service, if TALISMAN requires a bespoke statement then this will be produced by the Service Manager at the commencement of any future review.)	Phil Hogg / Russell Urwin	Complete	Used to formulate the Annual Report. Annual report sent to all tenants.	
The term voids be replaced, suggest 'Empty or vacated property'. This may clarify the term for tenants.	Communications team have used the term empty property or vacant property on Housing Company website and will consider for future publications.	Mark Charlton / Ian Clarkin	Complete	Visible on the website and available to all tenants	

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First visit to all vacated properties by both TGHC and Mears representatives and a relet category agreed.	<p>Joint inspections have been in place since 19 May 2014. We will continue to monitor the number of category variations after initial inspection to see if this change has been successful.</p> <p>Findings to date show an improvement in the accuracy of the first variation.</p>	Mark Charlton	Complete	Performance monitored by Company/Council Core Group and reported to Committee	
Aim to visit all outgoing tenants' homes before the end of their tenancy to encourage them to leave the property in a reasonable condition in accordance with the tenancy agreement, to leave it in a good decorative order, clean and safe conditions.	<p>We currently aim to complete visits to all tenants before tenancies end.</p> <p>Visits are completed on 100% of transfers, however, abandoned properties, evictions and deaths are not visited prior to tenancy end.</p>	Jackie Armstrong	Complete	Ending your tenancy leaflet and termination procedure	
Collect and collate failure information over areas of dispute e.g washing machine plumbing holes. Look at reasons for failing lettable standard as this leads to delay and loss of income –identify if there could be a case for more flexibility such as doing	<p>Lettable Standard “fails” have been added to the set weekly agenda for the operational meeting between TGHC and Mears. Fails will therefore be discussed on a weekly basis with trend information collated on a monthly basis.</p> <p>Mears have implemented a new procedure in which all fails are to be discussed between area Supervisor and Mears Responsive Maintenance and Void Manager.</p>	Mark Charlton	Complete	<p>Operational / Partnership meetings</p> <p>Performance monitored by Company/Council Core Group and reported to Committee</p>	

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some remedial work after tenant has moved in.	<p>A review of tenant satisfaction is completed on a quarterly basis. Satisfaction remains above 95%, we continue to monitor dissatisfaction.</p> <p>Joint handovers have been introduced during October. We will continue to further monitor fails and ensure learning.</p> <p>A review of the current performance indicators will be reviewed by March 2015 in line with any future contract extensions or tender exercises.</p>				
TGHC and Mears void officers to have regular joint meetings. A list of priority jobs to be shared weekly between TGHC and Mears.	<p>Systems are in place to monitor properties undergoing work with Mears. A report is shared between the partnership on a weekly basis.</p> <p>Properties are discussed on a weekly basis with attendance required according to discussions.</p>	Mark Charlton	Complete	Company/Council Core Group in contract review	
The Panel had noted that as a result of Welfare Reform, some property types were not being advertised due to their current difficulty to let, for example 2-bed flats.	<p>All available properties are being actively advertised, but we limit the number of adverts of the same type in each block in any week</p> <p>Where there are high levels of empty properties in one location, we may defer the relet process until other similar properties have</p>	Jackie Armstrong	Initial actions Completed	Company/Council and reported to Customers and Communities Committee	When action plan was previously presented vacant properties stood at 507 with 39 held. Vacant properties are

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<p>Produce regular updates around properties which are taking longer to let and what the company is doing to tackle this issue.</p>	<p>been let.</p> <p>A warning marker is built into Northgate showing properties defined as difficult to let. This is monitored and reported to Gateshead Council.</p> <p>Internally we are piloting new techniques to encourage lettings to inform future approaches to marketing. For example, open house viewings, additional décor or carpets and improvements in social media.</p> <p>In September 2014 flats with 2 bedrooms at Redheugh and Eslington Court were redesignated.</p>				<p>now down to 435 with 27 held due to low demand. The redesignation of properties in Redheugh and Eslington Courts was implemented in September 2014 and has had a positive impact on the number of lets.</p> <p>The assessment of demand undertaken in February/March 2015 will be updated and reported to Board.</p>
<p>Collection of keys to be centralised and limited to two collections per day. Suggest that this should be linked to delivery of internal post.</p>	<p>Upon ending of a tenancy a customer has the right to hand keys in at all offices across the Borough. Using the internal post would cause delays in the void process.</p>	<p>Mark Charlton</p>	<p>Complete</p>	<p>Operational / Partnership meetings</p>	

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	Discussions have led to process changes which have been implemented. Mears aim to collect keys in a structured way to ensure efficient use of resources. We continue to monitor any delays and will amend processes accordingly in the future.				
For future implementation					
Redecoration voucher scheme to be reviewed and alternatives considered to see if it could offer better value for money for the company and tenants. Currently relies of the tenants' DIY skills being adequate.	<p>Agree we should review the décor voucher scheme.</p> <p>We have a number of procurement exercises that will be commenced in this financial year including Décor vouchers, security and Energy Performance Certificates.</p>	Simon Chrisp	April 2015	Home SIG, Resources and Customers and Communities Committee on policy changes	To be commenced upon completion of decoration cost analysis work.
<p>Suggest that would be more cost effective if Mears could apply one coat of emulsion in one colour to all walls and one coat of undercoat and gloss to all woodwork. This would ensure a good visual effect.</p> <p>Consider that Mears</p>	<p>Cost analysis exercise to be completed to assess the value of the vouchers per empty property (given out to customers) against the cost of actual redecoration in properties.</p> <p>Costing information and analysis will be required before any changes could be made to the current process.</p> <p>An evaluation of the results will be required in line with current available budgets.</p>	Mark Charlton / Shaun Rowell	Jan 2015	Home SIG	We have started decorating void properties in some localities. We are evaluating the impact of this work and will implement in 2015/16 a targeted

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<p>should decorate all sheltered, elderly and vulnerable tenants properties and consider redecorating all relet, not least to set the standard showing how properties should be left by tenants.</p>					<p>approach to decoration to increase lettability This work will be linked to the updated assessment of demand.</p>
<p>To review the Lettable Standard leaflet every two years.</p>	<p>Agreed that the leaflet should be reviewed on a more regular basis. Lettable Standard review to be added to the Home SIG agendas.</p>	<p>Mark Charlton</p>	<p>April 2015</p>	<p>Home SIG, Customers and Communities Committee on policy changes</p>	<p>Review of the Lettable Standard booklet is scheduled for the 7th April with the Home SIG.</p>
<p>A request for further information regarding one of the empty properties visited identified that the local housing offices do not keep copies of references given to other housing providers when a former tenant moves out of the borough.</p> <p>The former tenant had been recharged for poor quality DIY work carried</p>	<p>A copy of all future references will be stored electronically in Northgate against the individual.</p>	<p>Craig Gandy</p>	<p>COMPLETE</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>All offices now store references electronically between the main server and the Northgate Document Management System (DMS). By June 2015 all offices will operate with DMS.</p>

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<p>out to the property, however it was not possible to check whether the housing provider had requested this information as part of the reference.</p> <p>All requests for references from other housing providers be recorded by a Senior Lettings Officer and details be held on file.</p>					
<p>It needed to be made clear to tenants the standard of property expected when tenant leaves the property. Produce a property standard leaflet for new and transferring residents. To be drawn up, monitored and reviewed with residents. To be issued to a tenant when they put in their four weeks notice.</p>	<p>Review the “ending your tenancy” booklet in line with the rechargeable repairs review with consultation from customers. Clarity to be given with regards to the expectation on customers in terms of final property condition.</p>	<p>Jonathan Graham</p>	<p>April 2015</p>	<p>Home SIG consultation and feedback</p>	<p>Due to the close relationship between the condition of a property at the end of the tenancy and the Lettable Standard we have linked the two reviews. Both will be presented to the Home SIG 7th April 2015</p>

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Future Consideration					
The Company currently doesn't always post inspect work where a tenant has had permission for improvements or alterations. Ensure that inspections are carried out to make sure work has been done correctly to avoid remedial works when the property becomes empty.	We currently inspect all high risk permission requests. Items such as gas, electric or structural changes would be inspected. Lower level permissions are inspected on a risk based approach, for example permission for fences or built in wardrobes.	Andrew Mason / Ian Burton	TBC	Home SIG, Customers and Communities Committee on policy changes	We continue to inspect high risk permission requests and any amendments to policies and procedures will be considered in the future.
All residents to receive an annual visit to check on the state and upkeep of the property. This is a fundamental requirement of asset management, both TGHC and Mears officers agreed with this approach. Identify and prioritise visits to at risk tenants, e.g young and first time tenants, single parents and residents	<p>A range of tenancy visits are currently carried out in properties to enable us to identify any property or tenancy issues.</p> <p>External learning is underway to inform how others manage such aspects. Findings will form the basis of a review to develop a risk based tenancy visit programme. Potential to explore opportunities around working with external partners.</p>	Julie McCartney	TBC	SIG consultation and Committee	We are collating information that will inform our future approach to carrying out an annual programme of risk based customer contact visits.

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from out of the area without references.					
Rechargeable work agreed and invoiced before tenant vacates the property and photographic evidence to be taken.	<p>Rechargeable repairs are currently applied via repairs in line with the repair policy. We will undertake discussions with Home SIG and present options to Gateshead Council for review.</p> <p>We are introducing mobile technology to Void Officers which will allow a potentially simplified process to be adopted. For example, photographic evidence collection and sharing.</p>	Jonathan Graham	TBC	<p>Home SIG for consultation</p> <p>Report to Committee</p>	Mobile technology has been implemented in the void service. We are in the process of developing procedures appropriate for mobile working.
Not to be implemented					
Review the definition for Void relet times and consider some exclusions from this calculation e.g renewal of kitchens where parts take 10 days or more to come into stock, or properties with damp issues requiring remedial works. There is a case for looking at problems caused by dampness and old heating systems on a larger scale as this comes	<p>Exclusion from the Repair Partner working period is not viable as it would fail to show the true reflection of performance. The Key Performance Indicator showing time taken from void to let includes properties where exclusion (exclusion based on benchmarking guideline definition) has been made.</p> <p>Performance is calculated on the average time taken to complete all raised jobs. Fails against target information is used to ensure learning.</p> <p>Clarity around procedures and categories has explained the increase in timescales for</p>	Mark Charlton		Performance monitored by Company/Council Core Group and reported to Committee	

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<p>up frequently as the cause of most work required bringing property up to lettable standard.</p>	<p>dampness during winter months to allow sufficient drying out time.</p> <p>Trend information around stock availability and delays is tabled at the Partnership Value Engineering Group with efficiencies and VFM savings being identified.</p> <p>Stock condition surveys are to be commissioned by TGHC to provide accurate information on stock. Issues identified may inform future investment.</p>				
<p>Local performance targets for time taken to make property ready to let and to let property once it is handed over.</p>	<p>(Partially already implemented)</p> <p>We have a suite of Key Performance Indicators (PIs) with targets that are agreed with Gateshead Council and that can be benchmarked with other organisations.</p> <p>The key PI for letting properties is “Average number of calendar days taken to let a property” (i.e. from when one tenancy ends, until the next one begins)</p> <p>We break this down into smaller elements and measure performance against each element (so we are always aware of the average time to make ready to let, and then to let).</p>			<p>Performance monitored by Company/Council Core Group and reported to Committee</p>	

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	<p>There are targets for the time to prepare the property to the lettable standard for each category of work, but we do not have local targets for the time taken to then let, as this is subject to patterns of demand for properties.</p> <p>We do however set targets for each small step in the process in order to avoid delays (e.g. time to inspect property once keys available; time taken to shortlist bidders after advert closes).</p>				

TALISMAN

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Introduction

The purpose of **TALISMAN** is to ensure the needs and views of Gateshead residents are at the heart of how services are developed and delivered by The Gateshead Housing Company and Gateshead Council.

The three primary aims of the group are to:

- Act as an independent driver for continuous improvement in performance and value for money.
- Ensure that customer views and aspirations are central to improving performance and service delivery.
- To contribute to local and national consultations on policy and strategy issues affecting Gateshead

These three aims should be achieved by working together with The Gateshead Housing Company and Gateshead Council in a constructive and positive partnership.

Remit

The remit of **TALISMAN** is to scrutinise services and approaches to ensure that The Gateshead Housing Company and Gateshead Council housing services are providing the best possible products and services to customers and to ensure that decisions have been made with customer needs at heart.

The scope of this scrutiny activity will be limited to the delivery of services provided by The Gateshead Housing Company and housing services at Gateshead Council in relation to the regulatory framework for social housing, covering:

- **Tenant Involvement and Empowerment** (customer service, tenant involvement, accessing services and responding to people's individual needs)
- **Home** (maintaining properties, repairs and maintenance and the health and safety of tenants and leaseholders)
- **Tenancy** (how properties are allocated and tenancy agreements, but not how rents are set)
- **Neighbourhood and Community** (keeping neighbourhoods clean and safe and addressing antisocial behaviour)
- **Value for Money** (how resources are managed and services being delivered in a cost effective but high quality way)

The remit is galvanised around a number core standards:

- To engage and communicate with the wider customer body
- To act with transparency
- To reflect the needs and aspirations of the customer body

- To respect the primacy of The Gateshead Housing Company Board and the Gateshead Council Cabinet
- To make recommendations based on robust evidence, in a constructive and non-confrontational manner
- To highlight good practice

Safeguards

Given the status, strategic importance and profile of **TALISMAN** it requires a high degree of probity. Safeguards to ensure this is maintained include:

- The development of a team and person specifications and sets of standard competencies.
- Adoption of an enforceable Code of Conduct.
- Use of a suitably qualified mentor to assist operations and assess collective and individual competence.
- A requirement for members to commit to undergoing training and ongoing personal development.
- Regular personal development reviews for members carried out by the Chair and or mentor, with time bound personal development action plans as required.
- A requirement that individual members declare any conflicts of interest in particular scrutiny reviews and agree to be excluded when any conflict of interest occurs.
- A requirement that the group publishes details of its scrutiny activities along with an explanation for the choice of topics, the priority allocated to them, the findings and resulting outcomes.
- A [periodic](#) review of the group's effectiveness carried out by another customer group or staff [and for this to be reported to Customers and Communities Committee](#).
- Ability for The Gateshead Housing Company Board to initiate a full external scrutiny of the **TALISMAN** and instigate appropriate sanctions such as issue of a 'Notice to Improve'.

Scope

TALISMAN will be furnished with a range of powers and responsibilities, on the following basis:

- Full and unfettered access to internal performance data, comparative benchmarking data and customer feedback by submission of a 'Request for Information'.
- Commercially sensitive and personal data will not be shared with the group but the group can expect a full explanation of the reasons for confidentiality.
- Ability to commission independent evidence gathering activities through utilisation of the Service Improvement Groups, Mystery Shoppers and other sources.
- Ability to hear evidence from officers and customers on request.
- Ability to shadow officers in their duties on request (where there are no health and safety implications preventing this).
- Requirement to report on activities and account for prioritising, methods and recommendations.

- The power to report findings and recommendations directly to Boards without staff intervention.
- A formal duty on the Customer and Communities Committee and Executive Team to respond appropriately and in a timely manner to the group's requests and recommendations.
- A requirement that the Customer and Communities Committee and Executive Team develop and implement an Improvement Plan agreed jointly with **TALISMAN**.
- A formal 'Notice to Act' served on The Gateshead Housing Company Board where the Board or a subsidiary Committee has not responded within agreed timescales.
- Request for intervention by Gateshead Council where internal negotiations have broken down and The Gateshead Housing Company Board has not responded to the 'Notice to Act'.
- Request for intervention by the housing regulator where internal negotiations have broken down and The Gateshead Housing Company Board and Gateshead Council has not responded to the 'Notice to Act'.

Communication and Engagement

A key objective of **TALISMAN** is to ensure it achieves a high degree of communication to the wider customer body. This is facilitated by adoption of the following measures:

- A requirement that **TALISMAN** publishes an annual report of activity and findings (as described earlier), including resulting outcomes.
- A requirement that **TALISMAN** publishes interim updates on its activity.
- ~~■ A requirement that the results of **TALISMAN**'s annual health check is published to demonstrate that it is operating effectively.~~

This may be done through existing communication tools from The Gateshead Housing Company and Gateshead Council, or local community publications and websites.

Scheduling Activities

- The Gateshead Housing Company will provide regular updates to the group to assist them in picking scrutiny topics. This will include performance indicators, customer feedback trends, and schedules of [internal service reviews key activities within the Company](#).
- The group will aim to complete between 1 and 2 scrutiny reviews per year and may do these as a full team or in smaller working parties, taking into account any potential conflicts of interest.

Membership

- The group will [aim to be](#) made up of a team of up to 11 volunteers who are selected based on an agreed competency framework and using a transparent recruitment structure.
- ~~■ Up to 5 of those posts will come from the 5 neighbourhood management areas in the Borough, 1 from each area.~~
- ~~■ The remaining posts will come from members of the Service Improvement Groups.~~

- To qualify for selection an applicant would need to be either a tenant, living with a tenant, or a leaseholder, and must be motivated in improving housing and neighbourhood services for the good of all and not for personal gain.
- Members will be recruited using a 3 stage recruitment process including a self-selection questionnaire, assessment activities, and an interview by existing members of the Panel and one member of staff in an advisory capacity. ~~a panel which includes at least one person who isn't a member of staff from The Gateshead Housing Company or Gateshead Council.~~
- The group will have the power to co-opt an additional 3 members as and when required for short periods to assist with particular scrutiny reviews or under-representation.
- The group will elect a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson on an annual basis. ~~with a Chairperson able to stand for a maximum of 2 years.~~
- Members will be able to remain as a member of the group for an initial period of up to 5 years. A rolling cycle of retirement and recruitment will be carried out to enable continuity. This may include a voluntary or random selection to step down from the role. To facilitate this, members will be able to stand for a period of an additional 5 years if required to maintain this continuity.
- A member who has served for a full 10 year period must step down for at least 12 months before re-applying.
- Individuals who are currently serving as, or have been a Councillor or Board or Committee Member in the last 2 years, will not be eligible for TALISMAN.
- Individuals who are currently, or have in the last 2 years, been an employee of The Gateshead Housing Company, will not be eligible.
- Individuals who are currently, or have in the last 2 years, been an employee of Gateshead Council within a service covered under the remit of TALISMAN, will not be eligible.

Resignations from TALISMAN

- Resignations from the Panel must be made in writing to the Chair (by letter or email) who will then inform the rest of the Panel. The Panel will then consider the resignation at the next ordinary meeting of the Panel.

Support from The Gateshead Housing Company and Gateshead Council

The Gateshead Housing Company and Gateshead Council will provide TALISMAN with range of resources and support to enable them to carry out their role. This will include:

- Access to training and networking events to support personal development action plans
- Space to meet together individually and as a team
- ICT resources to carry out scrutiny work independently, including access to laptops and the internet
- Reasonable personal expenses to cover travel and consumables required as part of conducting scrutiny activities
- Access to customer involvement mechanisms to conduct research and gather supporting evidence
- Full access to information to carry out thorough scrutiny reviews within the timescales outlined in the request for information procedure.

- A budget to ~~cover the operational costs~~ support the work and development of the scrutiny group which will be administered by staff but ~~shared transparently with the group~~ reviewed and managed by the group.