



Report to Customers and Communities Committee

26 February 2015

Title: Customer Inspections: Multi – Storey blocks

Report of: Director of Customers and Communities

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of the report is to provide committee with an update on the introduction of customer inspections in multi storey blocks and approve a revised estate tour programme in multi storey blocks from April 2015.

Background

2. There are currently a number of different types of inspections of the communal areas within the 25 multi storey blocks across Gateshead. These include the Estate Tours programme, inspections of the Caretaker cleaning standards and Health and Safety inspections.
3. All multi storey blocks have a residential Caretaker and part of their role is to provide a cleaning service to the communal areas. They work to very specific and defined service standards that have been developed with customers who attend the Multi Storey Service Improvement Group.
4. The monitoring of performance against the cleaning service standards has previously been carried out via monthly inspections by the Caretaker Supervisors. The dates of the inspections were not published and the Caretaker not warned in advance. The results of the inspections were published on the noticeboard as a pass or fail, detailing any remedial action required.
5. Estate Tours are carried out on a quarterly basis by the Estate Officer with a customer. The dates of Estate Tours are published on the website and on the notice board in the block. They involve a similar process to the inspection of cleaning standards but rather than a pass or fail the block is awarded a score against a matrix and the block is awarded a grade, Gold, Silver or Bronze. After the Estate Tour is completed the results are published on the web site and block notice board.
6. Results of the estate tour programme are reported annually to committee. The results of the 13/14 estate tour programme were reported to this committee on 11 September 2014.

7. Health and Safety inspections are carried out on a monthly basis by Caretakers and any issues identified are reported and actioned to ensure that we maintain in a safe and secure environment for our customers.

Customer Inspection Pilot

8. Customers who attend the Multi Storey Service Improvement group requested the opportunity to become more actively involved in the monitoring and “testing” of the specific cleaning standards, outside of the Estate Tour programme.
9. During 2013/14 a customer inspection pilot was developed with customers from the SIG. They were provided with training by the Caretaker Supervisors and following a period of shadowing started carrying out the inspections on their own.
10. Feedback from the customer’s involved in the pilot was very positive and included: -
 - That the inspections were an important tool in achieving and maintaining high cleaning standards.
 - That they enjoyed carrying out the inspections and feeding results back including positives.
 - They can see a clear link between raising issues following an inspection and improvements in performance
 - Provides an opportunity to compare different blocks and feedback on issues such as the condition of the communal areas etc. to the SIG group.
 - Whilst the inspections are a check on cleaning standards they also provide an opportunity to focus on the customer’s perspective and their experience of living in the block.
 - Liked the flexibility in terms of choosing to inspect their own block or not and carrying out inspections either solo or jointly with other customers. They can also choose the dates of the inspections to fit with their own commitments.
11. The customer inspections effectively replaced the inspections previously carried out by the Caretaker Supervisors. Their feedback was also very positive and they reported that after initial pilot the inspections were working very well.
12. This also provided the Supervisors with the opportunity to focus more on the blocks where issues have been highlighted, working more intensively with the Caretaker.
13. Following completion of the pilot it was reviewed by the SIG and agreed to adopt in all 25 blocks. This has now been fully rolled out and involves a team of seven Customer Inspectors.
14. The results of the inspections are displayed in each block including any remedial work required to maintain the service standard.

Proposals

15. The customer inspections have been operating in parallel with Estate Tours but there is an opportunity to align both programmes to provide a streamlined inspection regime. Customers from the SIG value and wish to maintain the link with the Estate Officer that the Estate Tour provides.

16. The group have suggested that customer inspections and Estate Tours are aligned so that each multi storey block receives an inspection every three months, alternating between an Estate Tour and a customer inspection i.e. one of each every six months.
17. This approach will help inform a wider review of Estate Tours to be delivered in 2015/16.

Link to values

18. The report relates to the following values of the company:
 - Being customer focused, innovative and professional
 - Being motivated, trained and committed across the company
 - Being a listening and learning organisation

Impact on tenants

19. The Customer inspectors have fed back that they have seen improvements to the quality of the service as a direct result of issues they have raised.

Risk Management Implications

20. The approach to inspections and Estate Tours will inform and support a review of the Estate Tour programme in 2015/16. Alongside the frequency of inspections and information recorded the wider review of the estate tour programme will consider the opportunities to build on the approach adopted in multi storeys that aims to minimise the health and safety risks.

Financial Implications

21. The Head of Corporate Services has confirmed that there are no financial implications arising directly from the recommendations of this report.

Equality and Diversity Implications

22. We encourage a range of customers to take part and make every attempt to tailor the customer inspections to take individual needs into account.

Value for Money Implications

23. The inspections support our drive for value for money by providing a more efficient use of the Caretaker Supervisors time. By reducing the need for Supervisors to carry out routine inspections of all blocks every month they can focus more time on the blocks where issues have been identified, working more intensively with the caretakers to tackle any underlying issues.
24. The proposed alignment of inspections will enable Estate Officers to focus time on the marketing and letting of void properties in multi storeys as well as supporting vulnerable tenants.
25. Value for Money is also a standard agenda item at the Multi storey SIG.

Health Implications

26. There are no direct health implications arising from the report.

Environmental Implications

27. The Caretaker's duties help to maintain the environment both inside and around the external areas of multi-story blocks.

Consultation carried out

28. Customer inspections have been developed in consultation with the Multi Storey SIG, and we will continue to use this approach to review and improve the services we provide.

Recommendations

29. The committee are asked to:
- comment on the development of customer inspections and the pilot work undertaken
 - approve the proposed frequency of Estate Tours and Customer Inspections in multi storey blocks from April 2015;
 - note the proposed review of the wider Estate Tour programme in 2015/16.