



CUSTOMERS AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

10 September 2015

PRESENT:

Directors

Robert Buckley (Chair)
 Elizabeth Bird
 Sheila Bouitieh
 Pauline Dillon
 Kathryn Ferdinand
 Eileen Gill
 John Hamilton

Advisers

Neil Bouch	Director of Customers and Communities
Kevin Johnson	Head of Customer Services
Julie McCartney	Head of Neighbourhood Services
Deborah Ewart	Housing Services Manager
Jackie Armstrong	Customer Services Manager
Jonathan Graham	Rent and Income Manager
Helen Watson	Involvement Officer
Stuart Gibson	Governance and Risk Officer

12 MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting of the committee held on 6 May 2015 were approved as a correct record.

13 RESPONSE TO TALISMAN REVIEW OF CUSTOMER SERVICES

The committee received a formal response to the recommendations made in the TALISMAN (Tenant and Leaseholder Independent Scrutiny Management Panel) review of Customer Services.

The review highlighted nine areas of positive practice and made 18 recommendations which TALISMAN felt would improve the services received by customers.

A formal action plan has been developed to implement the recommendations and this was presented to TALISMAN at their meeting on 18 August. TALISMAN said they were satisfied with the response and our approach to the recommendations. The Company has been able to action some of the recommendations immediately.

Feedback from the review including recommendations and the Company's response has been shared with employees through a team briefing. A copy of the team briefing has been provided to TALISMAN.

Updates on progress with the action plan will be reported to the Involvement Service Improvement Group at their bi monthly meetings.

The committee asked how the Company ensured a consistent approach when applying a discretionary 'rent free week' at the start of a tenancy. It was noted that there was specific guidance that staff had to follow during the sign up process before identifying cases where this would be applied.

RESOLVED – That the committee is satisfied with the response to the TALISMAN review of Customer Services (Housing Offices).

14 ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR PARTNERSHIP UPDATE – APRIL TO JUNE 2015

The committee received a quarterly update on the following anti-social behaviour partnership work and neighbourhood activity between April and June 2015: -

- Domestic Abuse cases
- Hate Incident cases
- Hate Crime Policy
- School Based Anti-Discriminatory Project
- ASB Legal Tools and Powers
- ASB Training
- School Non Attendance Panel
- Mental Health Workers
- Safeguarding Adults
- Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)
- Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)
- Safeguarding Children
- Children and Families
- Families Gateshead
- Missing Sexually Exploited and Trafficked Children Group (MST)

The committee was informed that there were no specific reasons why the Inner West Neighbourhood Management Area (NMA) experienced the biggest increase in the number Hate Crime incidents reported in all of the NMAs in 2014/15.

RESOLVED – That the committee is satisfied with the anti-social behaviour partnership update for the period April to June 2015.

15 ESTATE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY – 2014/15

The committee received an update on the following estate management activity for the period April 2014 to March 2015: -

- Estate Tours
- Estate Tour Peer Reviews
- Neighbourhood Pride and Design out ASB/Crime
- Garden Management
- Garden Scheme
- Working in Partnership with WS and GM
- Estate Based Services
- Caretaking Service to Multi-Storey Blocks
- Handyperson Service

One of the key actions for 2015/16 is to review the approach to estate management. There is a need to continually review services to ensure the Company can maintain the best visual appearance on estates.

Estate Management services are subject to a report to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14 September 2015 and the outcome of this will be reported to a future committee. A copy of the report will be posted on the Board Members Website.

Going forward this year, the Company is looking at new ways of working, which is one of the key objectives in the five year strategic plan. The approach to tackling local issues, sustaining estates and neighbourhoods and improving customer satisfaction would be developed further. Details of the improvements to the service in 2015/16 were reported.

The committee thought that the estate tour peer reviews were a very good idea and asked to be kept informed of their benefits.

- RESOLVED –
- (i) That the committee is satisfied with the estate management activities and the new ways of working planned for 2015/16.
 - (ii) That the committee receive annual activity reports on estate management.
 - (iii) That the committee received an update following the review by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

16 TENANCY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY – 2014/15

The committee received an update on the following tenancy management activity in 2014/15: -

- HomeViews and New Tenancies
- Home Welcome Visits
- Tenancy changes
- Mutual exchanges
- Abandoned properties
- Home improvement requests
- Tenancy terminations
- Temporary rehousing
- Redevelopment areas

- Energy Angels

The Company will continuously improve the services it delivers to tenants which link directly with the four strategic objectives within the five year strategic plan. Details of key service improvements planned for 2015/16 were reported.

- RESOLVED – (i) That the committee is satisfied with the tenancy management activities for 2014/15.
- (ii) That the committee receive annual activity reports on tenancy management.

17 SHELTERED HOUSING SERVICE – ANNUAL UPDATE 2014/15

The committee received an update on the following activity, performance and customer satisfaction for sheltered housing service in 2014/15: -

- Estate tours
- Drop-ins
- Home Welcome Visits
- Neighbourhood Pride
- Designing Out Crime
- Improving the quality and choice of housing
- Investment works
- Laundry equipment
- Digital Inclusion
- Rookie Golf Programme
- Dementia Friends Training
- Older Persons Service Improvement Group
- Here & Now Sessions

The committee advised that the Sheltered Housing Service was really valued by residents and it was agreed to relay this comment back to staff.

The committee was particularly impressed with 95% of customers satisfied with living in a sheltered scheme and 95% of customers satisfied with opportunities to get involved in their scheme and asked if the Company was doing anything differently given such a big increase on previous years. It was noted that the Company had changed its approach to quarterly with closer contact and a themed approach.

- RESOLVED – That the committee is satisfied with the annual update on sheltered housing service in 2014/15.

18 LETTINGS REPORT 2014/15

The committee was advised of the following lettings activity in 2014/15: -

- Housing Register
- Bidding
- Properties let
- Refusals

- Tenancy terminations
- Mutual exchanges
- Downsizing and Welfare Reform
- Furniture Leasing Scheme

The Company was concerned about the amount of administration involved in the Housing Register of over 12,000 given the relatively small amount of activity of those bidding and might need to come back to the committee at a later date.

Reference was made to earlier discussions with the Board about Tyne and Wear Homes. It was noted that there was no additional cost or work being involved in Tyne and Wear Homes and satisfaction levels were very high. It was also noted though that the Company was exploring whether choice based lettings was still the best option.

- RESOLVED – (i) That the committee is satisfied with the information on lettings activity in 2014/15.
- (ii) That the committee receive a report on marketing strategy at its first meeting in 2016.

19 RENT ARREARS MONITORING AND PREVENTION – 2014/15

The committee received an update on the following rent arrears monitoring for 2014/15 and the Company's approach to rent arrears prevention: -

- Current rent arrears
- Under 25's
- Former Tenant Arrears
- Welfare Reform
- Under Occupation
- Discretionary Housing Payment
- The Benefit Cap
- Universal Credit
- Advice and Support Officers
- Energy Angels

The committee asked if there was an indication whether the Company would continue to receive funding from the Government and HRA for Discretionary Housing Payments. It was noted that the funding from Government reduced slightly last year. Gateshead Council agreed £500,000 each of the next two years and at the moment the Company has factored this into each year of the five year strategic plan.

- RESOLVED – That the committee is satisfied with the information on arrears monitoring and progress on managing and preventing arrears.

20 CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITY – UPDATE

The committee received an update on customer involvement activity for the first quarter of 2015/16.

During the period 1 April to 30 June 2015, over 75 involvement activities took place with customers being involved in various activities. Customers have been involved in involvement activities on over 2,000 occasions although some may have been involved in more than one activity.

There have been a number of outcomes from customer involvement during the period and details of some of these were reported.

The committee also received an update on the involvement database, performance against service standards, external recognition and future activity.

The committee asked if there was any connection between the increase in the number of BME tenants getting involved and BME tenant arrears coming down. It was noted that it was difficult to know this but it must help with more being involved. It was further noted that the Rent and Income Team did a lot of targeted work around BME tenants.

The committee asked how the Company measured value for money of those getting involved. It was agreed that this was something the Company would need to consider going forward.

RESOLVED – That the committee is satisfied with the involvement activities undertaken in the first quarter 2015/16.

21 FORWARD PLAN

A forward plan of reports that will be presented to meetings of this committee during the next year was submitted.

RESOLVED – That the forward plan be noted.

22 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the committee will be held on Thursday, 5 November 2015 at 10am in Room S21 at Gateshead Civic Centre, Regent Street, Gateshead.