



CUSTOMERS AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

8 September 2016

PRESENT:

Directors

Robert Buckley (Chair)
Elizabeth Bird
Sheila Bouitieh
Joanne Carr
Pauline Dillon
Eileen Gill

Advisers

Neil Bouch	Director of Customers and Communities
Kevin Johnson	Head of Customer Services
Jonathan Graham	Rent and Income Manager
Lisa Philliskirk	Housing Services Manager
Jackie Armstrong	Customer Services Manager
Martin Poulter	Customer Support Manager
Deborah Ewart	Housing Services Manager
Craig Gandy	Neighbourhood Services Manager
Teresa Smare	Neighbourhood Services Manager
Stuart Gibson	Governance and Risk Officer

15 MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting of the committee held on 19 May 2016 were approved as a correct record.

16 MATTERS ARISING – COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS PERFORMANCE UPDATE

A letter had been sent, on behalf of the committee, to the caretaker who received 12 compliments across the year.

17 RENT ARREARS MONITORING AND PREVENTION – 2015/16

The committee received an update on rent arrears monitoring for 2015/16 and the company's approach to rent arrears prevention in relation to the following: -

- Current rent arrears
- Under 25's
- Former tenant arrears
- Welfare Reform
- Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP)
- The Benefit Cap

- Universal Credit
- Advice, support and tenant savings
- Future challenges

The committee expressed concern about the increase in rent arrears for under-25's due to the reduced income they received from benefits. It was agreed that the committee would be provided with details of how many of under-25's were receiving benefits.

It was noted that the company had started doing pre-tenancy checks for all under-25's to identify from the outset how many would struggle to maintain a tenancy. It was further noted that there was an officer in housing options who worked with homeless people to get them back home and find appropriate solutions for them. This post was currently vacant but was looking to be filled.

The committee wanted to highlight to the Board the amount of additional income that the company was generating for tenant households.

The committee wanted to highlight to the Board the significant increase in arrears for the 188 tenants affected by Universal Credit. This had increased from an average of £459.89 per tenant to £790.47 per tenant by year end. The main reason for the increase was due to the six week delay between making a claim and receiving the first payment.

The committee asked if the company was monitoring the impact on 25 to 35 year olds in the build up to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) cap being applied from 1 April 2018. It was noted that the company was currently working with housing benefits to look at the impact of the LHA on these tenants and to prepare for this. The committee would receive an update on the outcome of this at a future meeting.

- RESOLVED –
- (i) That the update on rent arrears monitoring for 2015/16 and the company's approach to rent arrears prevention be noted.
 - (ii) That the committee receive details of the number of under-25's receiving benefits.
 - (iii) That the committee receive an update at a future meeting on the outcome of work with housing benefits to look at the impact of the Local Housing Allowance on under-35's.

18 LETTINGS ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

The committee received the Lettings Annual Report for 2015/16. In particular, the following lettings activity was highlighted: -

- Housing Register
- Properties let
- Mutual exchanges
- Downsizing and Welfare Reform
- Furniture Leasing Scheme

The committee felt that when reporting this to Gateshead Council's Portfolio Holder, it should be impressed upon them that there were 3.5 refusals per let

which highlighted the amount of work having to be done to keep everything steady.

RESOLVED – That the information on lettings activity in 2015/16 be noted.

19 PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO LETTINGS POLICY

Housing, Economic and Welfare Reform resulted in a need to revisit Gateshead Council's Lettings Policy to ensure that it reflected the needs of communities and supported the sustainability of the Housing Revenue Account business plan.

As a result of the Housing and Planning Act 2016, a two stage lettings policy review was agreed by Cabinet to ensure compliance and necessary change were made in a timely manner.

Proposed changes to the Lettings Policy in relation to the following were subject to agreement by Cabinet on 13 September 2016: -

- Proposals to change the eligibility for transfer between Council tenancies
- Increasing sustainability
- Increasing eligibility
- Simplification of policy

Increasing access to properties by changing age criteria had been a fundamental part of the review. Some aspects of these potential changes were challenging and required further consideration and preparation. Specifically the older people's accommodation (sheltered housing and bungalows) had been left to Phase 2 of the policy review and would be presented in a later report. This would enable further consideration of the wider implications of changes to age criteria.

The committee made reference to proposal that offers would only be made to applicants able to demonstrate they could afford to sustain a tenancy and the link to the committee's earlier discussion around support for under-25's who struggled to maintain a tenancy. It was explained that the company would be looking for other housing solutions such as going back home or how they could make the tenancy sustainable. It was often about offering them something that was more manageable.

The committee asked if there were any issues anticipated as a result of allowing children into low rise flats. It was explained that it was simply giving a family that extra option where they had previously been precluded.

The Lettings Service Improvement Group were consulted on the review of the lettings policy and were very supportive of the proposals. The only area of concern raised was in relation to the letting of flats to families with children. Assurances were provided that this would not include multi storey flats and would require the family to bid for and be successful for a low rise flat. It was also explained that the vast majority of families only bid for houses.

RESOLVED – That the proposed changes to the Lettings Policy be noted.

20 RESPONSE TO TALISMAN REVIEW OF LETTINGS (HARD TO LET PROPERTIES)

The committee received a formal response to recommendations made in the TALISMAN review of lettings (Hard to let properties), which were presented to the committee at its meeting on 19 May 2016.

Officers met with representatives of TALISMAN and felt that the report was very positive and made a number of constructive recommendations.

A formal action plan was developed to implement the recommendations and this was presented to TALISMAN. A copy of the formal response was submitted.

TALISMAN said they would like to formally notify the Council that they would like involvement with the Felling regeneration. It was noted that Sir Godfrey Thompson Court was one of a number of estates that fall into the low demand category and the company was working with the Council to discuss their future.

A number of the actions had already been completed.

RESOLVED – That the formal response to the TALISMAN Review of Lettings (Hard to let properties) be noted.

21 PERFORMANCE AND SERVICE STANDARDS – QUARTER 1 2015/16

The committee received details of the Performance Indicators and Service Standards results for the first quarter of 2016/17.

There were currently 14 Key Performance Indicators reported to this committee on a quarterly basis. At quarter 1: -

- Three indicators were traffic lighted green, which showed that the annual targets for these indicators had been achieved. This was an increase from the same period last year when no indicators were traffic lighted as green.
- No indicators were traffic lighted as amber, which showed that the target set had not been met but performance had increased on the previous year. This was comparable with the same period last year.
- Four indicators were traffic lighted red, which showed that the target set had not been met and performance had decreased compared to the previous year. This was an increase from the same period last year when no indicators were traffic lighted as red.
- Seven indicators were new and set with a baseline target for 2015/16.

The performance results therefore indicated that at quarter 1, performance relating to three out of the seven measureable Performance Indicators could be traffic lighted as on target or improving, which related to 43% of the indicators. This was an increase in performance compared to the same period last year when none of the current indicators were being reported. Seven of the indicators were biennial and the other seven indicators related to Housing Services, which transferred to TGHC from the Council in April 2016.

There were currently 12 Service Standards reported to this committee on a quarterly basis. At quarter 1: -

- Five indicators were traffic lighted green, which showed that the annual targets for these indicators had been achieved. This was an increase in

performance with the same period last year when one indicator was achieving target.

- One indicator was traffic lighted amber, which showed that the target set had not been met but performance had increased on the previous year. This was a decrease when compared with performance at the same period last year when two indicators were traffic lighted as amber.
- Two indicators were traffic lighted red, which showed that the target set had not been met and performance had decreased compared to the previous year. This was an increase from one at the same period last year.
- Four indicators were not measurable or were set with a baseline target.

The performance results therefore indicated that at quarter 1, performance relating to six out of the eight measurable Service Standards could be traffic lighted as on target or improving, which related to 75% of the indicators. This was comparable to the same period last year.

RESOLVED – That the committee is satisfied with the quarter 1 2016/17 Performance Indicator and Service Standard results.

22 CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITY – UPDATE

The committee received an update on customer involvement activity for the first quarter of 2016/17.

During the period, 43 different involvement activities took place. Customers were involved on over 1,100 occasions although some may have been involved in more than one activity.

There were a number of outcomes from customer involvement during the period, some of which were highlighted.

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

Details of activities planned for 2016/17 were also reported. One of the planned activities was for customers from the Involvement SIG to be involved in reviewing the style and content of Housing News. The committee made the point that some organisations were no longer issuing paper copies of their newspaper unless it the tenant had 'opted in' to receive a copy, otherwise it was only available online.

RESOLVED – That the committee is satisfied with the involvement activities undertaken in the first quarter of 2016/17.

23 ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR PARTNERSHIP UPDATE – APRIL TO JUNE 2016

The committee received a quarterly update on the following anti-social behaviour partnership working and neighbourhood activity undertaken between April and June 2016: -

- Domestic abuse
- Hate Incident
- ASB Legal Tools and Powers
- ASB Victim Volunteer Support
- Environmental ASB

- Safeguarding Adults and Children
- Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub
- Children and Families
- Families Gateshead
- Missing Sexually Exploited and Trafficked Children Group
- Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements

The committee were particularly impressed with the ASB Victim Volunteer Support and asked to be kept updated with its progress.

RESOLVED – That the committee is satisfied with the ASB partnership update for April to June 2016.

24 SAFEGUARDING – ANNUAL SUMMARY 2015/16

The committee received an annual update on the following work undertaken during 2015/16 in relation to Safeguarding Adults and Safeguarding Children: -

- Prevention
- Safeguarding Performance 2015/16
- Safeguarding training

To ensure that the company continued to develop its responses to addressing safeguarding effectively, an action plan has been produced for 2016/17. The content of this was recognised with the Safeguarding Adults Board annual work plan.

RESOLVED – (i) That the committee is satisfied with the safeguarding summary for 2015/16.

(ii) That the Annual Summary 2015/16 be posted on the Board Members Website.

25 SHELTERED HOUSING SERVICE – YEAR END UPDATE 2015/16

The committee received an update on the following activity, performance and customer satisfaction for the Sheltered Housing Service for 2015/16: -

- Estate Tours
- Drop-in's
- Home Welcome visits
- Sustainable Communities Fund
- Improving the quality and choice of housing
- Investment works
- Laundry equipment
- Customer Involvement – Boccia
- Older Persons Service Improvement Group
- Satisfaction

RESOLVED – That the committee is satisfied with the Sheltered Housing Service – Annual Update 2015/16.

26 ESTATE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY – 2015/16

The committee received an update on the following estate management activity for the period April 2015/16: -

- Estate Tours
- Sustainable Community Fund
- Garden management / Garden Scheme
- Working in partnership with Waste Services and Grounds Maintenance
- Caretaking Service to Multi-Storey Blocks
- Handyperson Service
- Customer Involvement

Details of new ways of working in 2016/17 were also reported.

RESOLVED – That the committee is satisfied with the estate management activities in 2016/17 and new ways of working in 2016/17.

27 TENANCY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY 2015/16

The committee received an update on the following tenancy management activity during 2015/16: -

- HomeViews and new tenancies
- Home Welcome Visits
- Tenancy changes
- Mutual Exchanges
- Suspected abandoned properties
- Home improvement requests
- Tenancy terminations
- Temporary rehousing
- Redevelopment areas
- Energy Angels
- Condensation visits
- Gas capped properties

Details of improvements planned in 2016/17 were also reported.

RESOLVED – That the committee is satisfied with the tenancy management activities in 2015/16 and service improvements in 2016/17.

28 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.

29 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the committee will be held on Thursday, 17 November 2016 at 10am in Room S20, Gateshead Civic Centre, Regent Street, Gateshead.