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**Title:** Response to Customer Scrutiny Panel – Review of Customer Service when contacting Neighbourhood Teams

**Report of:** Head of Neighbourhood Services

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### **Purpose of Report**

1. The purpose of the report is to provide committee with a response to the recommendations made in the Customer Scrutiny Panel's review to evaluate the customer experience when contacting Neighbourhood teams.

### **Background**

2. The committee received a report from the Customer Scrutiny Panel on 21 February 2019 to update them on their review of customer service delivered by Neighbourhood Housing Offices.
3. The review identified examples of positive areas and made recommendations which were grouped into five main areas:
  - Consistent Customer Service
  - Training for employees
  - Updating procedural guides
  - Internal communications and working relationships
  - External communication with customers

### **Response to recommendations**

4. Employees within Neighbourhood Teams were presented with the panel's findings and recommendations through a number of briefing sessions during March 2019 which gave employees an opportunity to discuss the findings and suggest how the panel's recommendations could be implemented
5. Officers met with members of the panel on 16 April 2019 to discuss the findings. It was felt that the review was positive, and the recommendations would drive further improvements to the service delivered to customers. Each finding was discussed in detail to support the development of a formal action plan which was presented and agreed with the panel on 26 April 2019. **See appendix 1.**

6. Employees within Neighbourhood Teams were presented with the panel's findings and recommendations through a number of briefing sessions during March 2019 which gave employees an opportunity to discuss the findings and suggest how the panel's recommendations could be implemented.
7. The findings and recommendations from the panel review are also reflected in the findings of the customer satisfaction project lead by The Leading Factor (TLF).
8. The outcomes from the panel review and TLF project will inform service planning across the organisation in 2019/20.

### **Link to values**

9. This report relates to the following company values: -
  - Fair
  - Customer Focused
  - Open and Honest
  - Accountable
  - Inclusive and Valuing diversity
  - Innovative
  - Passionate about what we do

### **Impact on tenants**

10. The response to each of the panel's recommendation should improve the experience for customers when they require a service from the Neighbourhood Teams.

### **Risk Management Implications**

11. There are no risk management implications arising from this report.

### **Financial Implications**

12. There are no financial implications arising from this report. The recommendations can be delivered through current resources.

### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

13. We aim to improve customer service and ensure extended, inclusive access to services, advice and information for all customers.

### **Value for Money Implications**

14. The involvement of tenants and the wider community can result in value for money savings as saving as service managers can gain an insight into what tenants want and need. This can result in resolving the issues first time and delivering something that works for all parties.

### **Health Implications**

15. There are no direct health implications arising from this report.

### **Environmental Implications**

16. There are no direct health implications arising from this report.

### **Consultation carried out**

17. The actions that will deliver the recommendations have been developed in conjunction with members of the panel and employees.

### **Recommendation**

18. The views of the committee are sought on whether it is satisfied with the response to the Customer Service Panel review.



**Review of Customer Experience when contacting local neighbourhood teams – Action Plan**

Findings from Panel	How is this to be implemented? (if it can't be explaining the reasons for this including any further discussions with scrutiny panel)	Lead Officer	Target date for completion	Progress Update
<p><b>Review the help offered to potential customers with Tyne &amp; Wear Homes application process. The panel feel this is a crucial area to be addressed and should be a priority. Letting properties is a priority for the company and we should make sure that the process does not put applicants off by offering help at each stage in the application process.</b></p>	<p>In partnership with lettings team develop and implement an employee training brief for Tyne &amp; Wear Homes applications, including medical assessments</p> <p>Refresh training brief on an annual basis.</p> <p>Training brief to be included in induction for all new employees.</p>	<p>Craig Gandy and Jackie Armstrong</p>	<p>30 September 2019</p>	

Findings from Panel	How is this to be implemented? (if it can't be explaining the reasons for this including any further discussions with scrutiny panel)	Lead Officer	Target date for completion	Progress Update
<b>Ensure that help is offered and available to complete any form as a matter of routine and without the customer having to demonstrate that they need help</b>	Develop and implement an employee training brief for front line customer service.	Craig Gandy	31 October 2019	
<b>Address the issue that Neighbourhood Housing Teams (NHT's) have raised in relation to ease of contact with specialist teams. This is impacting them on their ability to deal efficiently with customer enquiries at first point of contact.</b>	Review service contact arrangements with specialist teams, where appropriate identify point of contact for each.  Managers and supervisors to ensure employee contact details are up to date on internal directory	Hazel Forster	31 October 2019	
<b>Customer contact – review the current telephony arrangements to improve the customer experience including:</b>	Review current arrangements of telephony in neighbourhood teams to identify stress points and reasons for failed calls.	Hazel Forster/Craig Gandy	31 August 2019	

Findings from Panel	How is this to be implemented? (if it can't be explaining the reasons for this including any further discussions with scrutiny panel)	Lead Officer	Target date for completion	Progress Update
<p><b>Introduce changes to the way telephony is managed to reduce the frequency of failed calls.</b></p> <p><b>Work towards a “contact centre” approach to telephony whereby customers ring one number and calls can be answered by any Neighbourhood Housing Office. The same should be applied to contact via email.</b></p>	<p>Work with ICT to develop and a new approach to telephony that addresses the issues identified. Update CS Panel</p> <p>Roll out new approach</p> <p>Monitor and review impact of changes with customer involvement</p>	<p>Hazel Forster/Craig Gandy/Lisa Jones</p> <p>Hazel Forster</p> <p>Hazel Forster/Craig Gandy</p>	<p>31 March 2020</p> <p>31 March 2020</p> <p>31 March 2020</p>	
<p><b>Recording customer contacts – introduce a process of logging contacts on Northgate like the repairs service. Training to be provided to ensure that this being done and in a consistent way. The panel feel this is a crucial to delivering excellent customer service and should be adopted as a priority.</b></p>	<p>Review options available in Northgate to log customer contacts quickly and easily and adopt an agreed approach across all Neighbourhood Housing teams.</p>	<p>H Forster/A Curtis</p>	<p>30 June 2019</p>	

Findings from Panel	How is this to be implemented? (if it can't be explaining the reasons for this including any further discussions with scrutiny panel)	Lead Officer	Target date for completion	Progress Update
	<p>Identify common reasons for customer contact to inform the development of Northgate to provide meaningful data about customer contacts and establish a centralised view of customer activity.</p> <p>Provide training to all Neighbourhood Housing Teams</p>	<p>H Forster/A Curtis</p> <p>H Forster/D Tindale</p>	<p>30 March 2020</p> <p>30 March 2020</p>	
<p><b>Review the Induction programme delivered to new NHAs both permanent and temporary to ensure that they receive a consistent level of training that provides an adequate level of knowledge and understanding of customer service.</b></p>	<p>In partnership with Employee Services review and amend existing induction plan for NSA's</p>	<p>C Gandy/D Worrall</p>	<p>31 December 2019</p>	
<p><b>Develop a programme of periodic refresher training of the most commonly used customer service related procedures.</b></p>	<p>Develop a programme to review each managing tenancies procedure on a periodic basis</p>	<p>H Forster/D Tindale</p>	<p>31 March 2020</p>	

Findings from Panel	How is this to be implemented? (if it can't be explaining the reasons for this including any further discussions with scrutiny panel)	Lead Officer	Target date for completion	Progress Update
<b>Specialist teams to diary in a programme of refresher training to NHTs. Content to be agreed with CSOs.</b>	Develop a programme for specialist teams to update neighbourhood teams about services they deliver.	H Forster	31 July 2019	
<b>A programme of Northgate training tailored to specific job roles to be delivered to NHTs.</b>	With CSO's carry out an assessment of Northgate training needs for NSA role  Include identified training requirements into NSA induction plan	C Gandy/A Curtis  C Gandy	31 August 2019  31 December 2019	
<b>Wednesday training – to ensure customers can access NHOs change the approach to closing all NHOs on a Wed afternoon for training. Stagger training days across the NHOs and ensure sessions are fully utilised.</b>	In partnership with the the panel the following actions have been agreed:-  Review monitoring performance management arrangements for weekly training sessions	C Gandy	30 June 2019	



Findings from Panel	How is this to be implemented? (if it can't be explaining the reasons for this including any further discussions with scrutiny panel)	Lead Officer	Target date for completion	Progress Update
	Brief neighbourhood teams on telephone arrangements for office closure	C Gandy	30 May 2019	
<b>Reduce the time procedures takes by simplifying them. This should start with the alteration's procedure.</b>	Develop a programme to review each managing tenancies procedure. Frequently used procedure to be prioritised	H Forster/D Tindale	31 March 2020	
	Develop best practice guidance for reviewing managing tenancies	H Forster/D Tindale	31 Dec 2019	
<b>Where possible reduce the need to fill in forms to request a service.</b>	Develop and include best practice guidance for reviewing tenancies	H Forster/D Tindale	31 Dec 2019	
<b>Where form filling is required ensure that they can be completed and returned via email or website without the need for printing out and posting back.</b>	Develop and include best practice guidance for reviewing tenancies	H Forster/D Tindale	31 Dec 2019	

Findings from Panel	How is this to be implemented? (if it can't be explaining the reasons for this including any further discussions with scrutiny panel)	Lead Officer	Target date for completion	Progress Update
<b>When reviewing a procedure ensure that it utilises Northgate wherever appropriate.</b>	Develop and include best practice guidance for reviewing tenancies	H Forster/D Tindale	31 Dec 2019	
<b>Develop the company's approach to self-serve to provide the opportunity for customers to request services without the need to make contact by phone or email.</b>	Develop and include best practice guidance for reviewing tenancies	H Forster/D Tindale	31 Dec 2019	
<b>Stop the use of jargon and adopt a plain English approach to writing procedures.</b>	Develop and include best practice guidance for reviewing tenancies	H Forster/D Tindale	31 Dec 2019	
<b>Ensure that procedures are applied consistently across all NHTs.</b>	<p>Training and development to be included in the development of a programme to review each managing tenancies procedure</p> <p>Performance management development to be included in best practice guidance for reviewing managing tenancy procedure</p>	<p>H Forster/D Tindale</p> <p>H Forster/D Tindale</p>	<p>31 Dec 2019</p> <p>31 Dec 2020</p>	

Findings from Panel	How is this to be implemented? (if it can't be explaining the reasons for this including any further discussions with scrutiny panel)	Lead Officer	Target date for completion	Progress Update
<b>All procedures to be allocated a review date no longer than 3 years.</b>	Develop a three-year rolling programme to review frequently used managing tenancies procedures	H Forster/D Tindale	31 March 2020	
<b>Internal communications to engage and reflect more activities undertaken by NHTs</b>	<p>Communications Lead to co locate from each Neighbourhood Team on a weekly basis</p> <p>Housing Managers/CSO's to lead on updating Communication Team with newsworthy stories</p>	<p>K Slavin</p> <p>C Gandy</p>	<p>30 April 2019</p> <p>30 April 2019</p>	<p><b>Update - May 2019</b></p> <p>The Communication lead has developed a programme and is co-locating on a weekly basis. <b>This action is now complete.</b></p>
<b>Housing Managers/ CSOs to encourage NHTs to engage with internal communications during the working day.</b>	Manager's to utilise Wednesday training sessions to highlight and discuss weekly communication information.	C Gandy	30 May 2019	
<b>Take steps to tackle employee's negative perceptions of how customers view the organisation (TLF mirror survey). Update NHTs as to the results of the TLF survey and the positive feedback in relation to their teams.</b>	Publicise the Customer Satisfaction Project 2018 for all employees	Mark Pollard	6 June 2018	<p><b>Update – May 2019</b></p> <p>The customer satisfaction project has been publicised for all employees and is included in the project bookshelf for further reference. <b>This action is now complete.</b></p>

Findings from Panel	How is this to be implemented? (if it can't be explaining the reasons for this including any further discussions with scrutiny panel)	Lead Officer	Target date for completion	Progress Update
<b>CSOs to continue to be allowed the time to meet collectively and share experiences and learning</b>	CSO's to continue to meet monthly.  Review CSO meeting agenda to incorporate shared learning	C Gandy  C Gandy	25 April 2019  1 June 2019	<b>Update – May 2019</b>  The Customer Service Officer's meet monthly and this will remain unchanged. <b>This action is now complete.</b>
<b>Where possible encourage co-location with specialist teams including “hot desking” in NHOs.</b>	Designated officers within customers and communities to co-locate on a regular basis to carry out their day to day role.	H Forster/D Ewart/K Johnson	31 July 2019	
<b>Members of Senior Management Team to seek opportunities to proactively engage with NHTs</b>	Members of SMT to attend Neighbourhood Team briefing sessions during service specific training delivery.	H Forster	31 July 2019	
<b>Promote via website, TGHC News and social media the roles and responsibilities of the different specialist teams and NHTs. The aim is to ensure that customers understand the range of services we offer and how they can contact them.</b>	Develop and implement a communication plan for 2019.20 that promotes to customers the roles and responsibilities of different teams	K Slavin	31 May 2019	