



The Gateshead Housing Company

Working with Gateshead Council

CUSTOMERS SERVICES COMMITTEE

15 June 2020

Delivered via Microsoft Teams

PRESENT:

Directors

Leigh Kirton (Chair)
John Adams
Eileen Gill
Helen Hall
Michael Hood
Ian McKenzie
Jim Turnbull

Advisers

Neil Bouch	Interim Managing Director
Ian Price	Director of Property and Assets
Deborah Ewart	Head of Support Services
Hazel Forster	Head of Neighbourhood Services
Kevin Johnson	Head of Customer Services
Phil Hogg	Head of Property and Assets
Scott Straughan	Head of Planned, Investment and Cyclical
Marie John	Head of Business and Development
Martin Poulter	Business, Performance and Customer Services Manager
Stuart Gibson	Governance and Risk Lead

Apologies

Joanne Carr

1 MINUTES

The minutes of the inaugural meeting of this committee held on 2 March 2020 were approved a correct record.

The committee asked for an update on the voids cost benefit analysis. It was noted that the exercise was to assess which elements of work should logically be done prior to a new tenant moving in, and which works could be carried out after the tenant has moved in. Analysis had been carried out of the types of repair typically requested in the first few months of a new tenancy to determine whether that work was done prior to the tenant moving in, and to balance that against the potential delay in having the property ready to let resulting in rent loss. In turn this was balanced against the potential disruption for a new tenant and what could be seen to be poor customer service. The criteria was currently being determined and void properties were being classified on a RAG (Red/Amber/Green) system.

2 GROUNDS MAINTENANCE SERVICE AGREEMENT 2020/21

A revised service agreement between the housing company and the Council for the delivery of grounds maintenance services was submitted.

The updated service agreement incorporated the amendments and contained a review timetable to ensure the agreement was updated annually with customer involvement. A summary of Street Scene activity for 2020/21 was also included within the agreement.

Street scene would continue to deliver similar levels of service as agreed in the 2016/17 service agreement. The key amendments in this years' service agreement was around compliance arrangements for TGHC Fixed play equipment.

The Grounds Maintenance contract was funded by the Council's Housing Revenue Account and Street Scene had confirmed the budget for 2019/20 of £1,486,826. This included a budget of £246,670 to deliver tree maintenance on land managed by the Company as well as an exceptional responsive maintenance identified by the partnership.

The committee asked if estate walkabouts could go ahead in the same way or was the company considering new ways of achieving the same outcomes, given the social distancing requirements. It was noted that the programme would be advertised for customer involvement for the third quarter. Customers could still attend, and the company would risk assess to ensure social distancing was observed. In addition, it would offer the opportunity to be involved in other methods including online opportunities and telephone calls.

In response to another query, the committee noted that the company would cover the cost of providing a new wheelie bin for customers at the beginning of a new tenancy where required.

RESOLVED – That the Grounds Maintenance Service Agreement for 2020/21 be approved.

3 RESULTS OF BIENNIAL CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY 2019

The committee received the results of the biennial customer satisfaction survey that was issued to all tenants and leaseholders in October 2019 and comprised of seven (six for leaseholders) questions which reflected the core questions from the HouseMark STAR framework.

There was a 10% response rate, which was a significant reduction from the 18% response rate the last time in 2017.

Tenant satisfaction has reduced across all six questions reflecting the trend from the 2017 survey.

The survey was conducted 12 months after the TLF customer satisfaction survey which was carried out with a representative sample of the overall customer base and was carried out over the phone rather than by post. The TLF survey showed overall tenant satisfaction at 85.7% which was higher than both the 2019 and 2017 Housemark biennial results. The full results from the TLF survey were

submitted for comparison. The Housemark biennial survey also showed that leaseholder satisfaction had decreased across all six questions. The satisfaction levels between tenants (66%) and leaseholders (42%) in respect of service charges providing value for money highlights the importance leaseholders on this area when judging their overall satisfaction with services payable through the service charge.

During 2019/20, HouseMark carried out a review of the STAR framework on which the biennial survey questions were based and established a new set of five questions and a menu of recommended questions. The first four questions would form the basis of the next biennial survey with the opportunity to include additional questions from the menu of recommended questions. The fifth core questions would be undertaken at the point or close to when the customer received a service. It was proposed to maintain the current 2019/20 targets pending an assessment of the outcome of the STAR review.

In respect of an 18% fall in satisfaction with opportunities to get involved and influence decisions, it was noted that customer satisfaction has reduced across all six questions, since the 2017 survey. Insight provided through analysis of the customer comments made by those expressing dissatisfaction showed there were only two reference's to getting involved and influencing decisions.

From both the 2018 TLF project and the 2019 STAR survey it was known that customers' main priority was the repairs and maintenance service. Service satisfaction levels expressed in this area have a direct impact on overall customer satisfaction. The reinstatement of Service Improvement Group and engagement activity by the repairs and maintenance service would be a key factor in the improving involvement and engagement regarding service delivery. This would be supported by a "You Said, We did" approach. Going forward there would be other factors to address across all engagement activity such as how to involve customers via digital engagement.

Views were sought on the decline in satisfaction levels, as well as a view on the differences between this survey and the TLF results. The Interim Managing Director advised that the three main areas of dissatisfaction from the STAR survey were repairs and maintenance, estate based issues and anti-social behaviour. These were also the three priority areas for customers. Moving forward the priority work for the services would be the Property and Assets 5-year Business Model; Developing the service level agreement with the Council and the work on estate environment; and supporting wider work underway via the Community Safety Partnership to review the anti-social behaviour strategy.

The STAR survey methodology was under review which relied on mailed survey returns from customers. TLF methodology was based on a representative sample of the tenant and leaseholder base and this survey was undertaken via telephone.

The review acknowledged the rise of multi-channel collection methods and further detailed guidance had been provided. This would require an alternative method of collecting repairs satisfaction, which would be adopted during 2020/21.

In both the TLF and Housemark surveys leaseholders expressed greater dissatisfaction than the general tenant base and the annual leaseholder report scheduled in the forward programme for the September committee would cover this in more detail.

The company's membership of the HQN Leasehold Excellence Network provided a benchmarking service for overall satisfaction against other sector members. At the time of producing this report, the collection of this data for 2019/20 had not been completed by all participants and was not yet available. The committee requested a copy of this data as soon as it was available.

In light of the recent Black Lives Matter campaigns, the committee also requested details of any trends when a particular group was less satisfied with the company's services.

RESOLVED – (i) That the results of the biennial customer satisfaction survey 2019 be noted.

(ii) That the current 2019/20 targets be maintained pending an assessment of the outcome of the STAR review.

4 COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS – ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

The committee received annual report on complaints and compliments performance for the year ending 2019/20. In particular, the following was highlighted: -

- Number of complaints recorded
- The Housing Ombudsman
- Responding within timescales
- Customer satisfaction
- Compliments
- Learning from complaints
- Training
- Performance and Feedback Panel
- Vexatious Contacts
- Northgate Complaints System

RESOLVED – That the committee is satisfied with performance for complaints and compliments for 2019/20.

5 CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITY – FINAL QUARTER 2019/20

The committee received an update on customer involvement activity for the final quarter of 2019/20.

During the period, 47 involvement activities took place with customers participating in activities on 202 occasions, though some may have been involved in more than one activity. This figure was lower than previous reports due to the impact of the Covid-19.

The committee also received updates on involvement structure, scheduled meetings, focused groups, e-engagement, community engagement, the moving forward training programme and additional activities.

Due to Covid-19, the launch of the moving forward programme has been delayed until further notice and the courses that had not taken place during lockdown would be rescheduled.

Details of other planned activities were also reported.

RESOLVED – That the committee is satisfied with the customer involvement activity for the final quarter 2019/20.

6 PROPERTY AND ASSETS SERVICE UPDATE – YEAR END 2019/20

The committee received a position statement on the delivery and service improvements of the following services within the Property and Assets Directorate at year end 2019/20 and the current position during the Covid-19 pandemic: -

- Repairs and maintenance (including the Service Improvement Plan)
- Voids
- Compliance
- Housing Capital Programme
- Non-housing Capital Programme

In respect of a query about the availability of external contractors, the committee noted that TGHC was in the process of tendering a specific package of works to effectively deal with voids work. Through the Council's Dynamic Purchasing System it was able to identify a specific list of potential contractors, some of which had been used previously, who were interested in tendering for this specific works package. Two sub-contractors currently supported the void teams, but they could not provide the full scope of mechanical and electrical support. The new tender was for a comprehensive package of works including mechanical and electrical elements. Discussions with sub-contractors suggested that the majority were gearing up to recover from the lockdown. The closing date for tender returns was 17 July followed by a four-week mobilisation period.

In respect of voids, the committee was informed that 124 households had been rehoused from homeless temporary accommodation into permanent Council accommodation since the lockdown began. During lockdown, there had been two cases for hospital discharge that have been temporarily rehoused pending permanent moves.

RESOLVED – That the committee is satisfied with the position statement on the delivery and service delivery of services within the Property and Assets Directorate.

7 RENT ARREARS MONITORING AND PREVENTION 2019/20

The committee received an update on rent arrears monitoring for the year 2019/20, and company's approach to rent arrears prevention. In particular, the following was highlighted: -

- Current Tenant Rent Arrears
- Pandemic Response
- Former Tenant Arrears
- Impact of Universal Credit
- Advice and Support
- Case Studies

The committee was informed that during the pandemic, the Rent and Income Team had made a total around 12,000 contacts and referred almost 3,000 tenants on for additional help and support. The service also did its own food parcel deliveries and continued to complement the work of the Shielding Hubs. The committee felt that it should place on record its appreciation to these employees for going above and beyond their normal daily work.

- RESOLVED – (i) That the committee is satisfied with the information on arrears monitoring and progress on managing and preventing arrears for 2019/20.
- (ii) That the committee place on record its appreciate to employees in the Rent and Income Team for going above and beyond their normal daily work during the pandemic.

8 TENANCY AND ESTATE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY – ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

The committee received an annual update on the following work undertaken to manage tenancies and estates during 2019/20: -

- Sign Ups
- Tenancy changes
- Mutual exchanges
- Suspected abandoned properties
- Home Improvement requests
- Tenancy terminations
- Condensation visits
- Garden Management and Garden Scheme
- Working in partnership with Street Scene
- Sustainable Community Fund
- Estate Walkabout Programme
- Tenancy Visit Programme
- Low Rise Block Inspections
- Care Navigators and Social Prescribing
- Mental Health Matters
- Thrive in Beacon Lough East (TIBLE)
- Reducing Parental Conflict Programme – Relationship Matters
- Implementation of findings from Customer Scrutiny Panel review of customer experience when contacting neighbourhood teams
- Felling Town Centre Masterplan

Details of the response to Covid-19 and the key service developments planned for 2020/21 were also reported.

Concern was expressed about the lack of bins around Redheugh and Eslington Court area, particularly around Eslington Park which was being used for fly tipping, dog fouling and other rubbish. It was noted that the area was inspected on a regular basis and any fly tipping and health and safety concerns were reported and responded to. During the pandemic, Eslington Park had been formally inspected every two weeks. The Head of Neighbourhood Services would liaise with Gateshead Council to review the bin provision in the area.

In respect of a concern raised about potentially abandoned flats in one of the multi-storey blocks, the committee noted that Neighbourhood Housing Officers investigate suspected abandoned properties as part of their role and carried out a range of investigations to determine whether the tenant has surrendered their tenancy. For multi-storeys this included an assessment of their activity entering the building which concierge provided.

A question was asked about the breakdown of pest control treatment type. The figures reported that there had been no treatment for silverfish when tenants in one high rise had reported them being present. It was noted that since June 2016 tenants had been charged to receive a pest control service, however the company would continue to cover the costs for certain types of infestations. The breakdown in the report suggested there were no cases where treatment for silverfish was delivered free of charge. The Head of Neighbourhood Services agreed to review any specific cases and arrange for suitable advice to be provided.

RESOLVED – That the committee is satisfied with annual update on work undertaken to manage tenancies and estates during 2019/20.

9 ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR – ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

The committee received an annual update on work undertaken to tackle anti-social behaviour (ASB) and associated performance during 2019/20. In particular, the following were highlighted: -

- Performance Update
- Service Standards
- Crime & ASB Policing Context
- Domestic Abuse
- Hate Crime
- Customer Satisfaction
- Children and Families
- Prevent
- Multi Agency work
- Applicant Vetting and Exclusion and offer checks
- Incidents involving Employees and Warning Alerts

It was noted that the case the case that was closed due deceased complainant was not linked to the ASB case.

RESOLVED – That the committee it is satisfied with the anti-social behaviour performance and progress update for 2019/20.

10 SAFEGUARDING – ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

The committee received an overview of the work undertaken in relation to safeguarding activity across the organisation during 2019/20. In particular, the following was highlighted: -

- Safeguarding Activity
- Safeguarding Adults
- Safeguarding Children
- Multi Agency Work

- Partnership & Inclusion Officer
- Domestic abuse
- Safeguarding Training
- Safeguarding Week
- Hoarding
- Quality Assessment Framework

RESOLVED – That the committee is satisfied with the safeguarding performance and progress update for 2019/20.

11 MULTI-STOREY TEAM – ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

The committee received an update on activity, performance and customer service of the Multi-Storey Team during 2019/20. In particular, the following was highlighted: -

- Fire Safety
- Caretaker Service (including cleaning, water hygiene, accompanied viewings, new tenancy visits, out of hours service, repairs in communal areas and small tasks)
- Concierge Service
- Customer Satisfaction
- Satisfaction surveys
- Handyperson Service
- Complaints and Compliments
- Customer Involvement
- Sustainable Community Fund
- Improvement Works
- Key developments planned for 2020/21

Satisfaction for both the Caretaker and Concierge service was collated on a yearly basis through postal and online surveys and performance remained consistent. It was proposed to discontinue the traditional survey and focus on developing improvements to service delivery working in partnership with customers through the following methods: -

- Customer Inspections
- Multi Storey service improvement group
- Complaints and Compliments

The proposals would enable focused customer involvement and develop service and specific block improvements. A saving of £2544.56 would also be achieved through the proposed changes.

RESOLVED – (i) That the committee is satisfied with the activity, performance and customer service in the Multi-Storey Team during 2019/20.

(ii) That the proposed change to the collection of customer satisfaction be agreed.

12 OLDER PERSONS HOUSING TEAM – ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

The committee received an update on activity, performance and customer satisfaction for the Older Persons Housing Service 2019/20. In particular, the following was highlighted: -

- Audit of service
- Changes to Bank Holiday working arrangements
- Support Planning
- Tackling Social Isolation
- Drop-in's
- Health and Safety
- Fall Prevention
- Sustainable Communities Fund
- Tenant Led Budget
- Investment Works
- Comfrey Project to support refugees and asylum seekers
- Customer Involvement – Boccia / Hen Power
- Intergenerational work
- National Innovation Centre for Ageing
- Bensham Court Food Co-op
- Dementia Action Alliance
- Age UK
- Coronavirus Support

RESOLVED – That activity, performance and customer satisfaction for the Older Persons Housing Service 2019/20 be noted.

13 HOUSING SUPPORT SERVICES – ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

The committee received an update on performance and service standards and service developments in housing support activity during 2019/20, including young people under 25-year old, over 25-year olds, offenders and ex-offenders, armed forces and learning disabilities.

RESOLVED – That the committee is satisfied with the update on housing support activity during 2019/20.

14 HOUSING OPTIONS SERVICE – ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

The committee received a summary of activity undertaken by the Housing Options Service during 2019/20. In particular, the following was highlighted: -

- Main Presenting Reason for Homelessness Acceptances
- Homeless Prevention Data
- Rough Sleeping
- Developments (including the Homeless Prototype)
- Next Steps

RESOLVED – That the committee it is satisfied with the activity undertaken by the Housing Options Service during 2019/20.

15 REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME – ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

The Committee received an overview of the work undertaken in relation to the Syrian Vulnerable Person Relocation Scheme, and Asylum and Migration functions during 2019/20. In particular, the following was highlighted: -

- Extension of Resettlement Programme until November 2022
- Employment Service
- Accommodation
- Integration Support
- English as a Second Language (ESOL) Provision and Adult Education
- Education
- North East Migration Partnership
- Mears North East asylum contract

Committee were advised that the Migration function was currently managed by the Council as part of the Housing Strategy and Growth Team. The Council's Housing and Economy Portfolio had agreed that the co-ordination of Migration function alongside the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme within the company and to manage this work through one team. The implications of this service development would be subject to a report at the next Resources, Audit and Performance Committee in July 2020.

RESOLVED – That the committee is satisfied with the update on Refugee Resettlement performance and wider migration work.

16 FORWARD PLAN

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

RESOLVED – That the Forward Plan be noted.

17 DATE AND TIME OF MEETINGS 2020

The next meeting of the committee was currently scheduled to take place on Monday, 7 September 2020 at 2pm. If meetings needed to continue to be held virtually, arrangements would be made for the meeting to be held later in the week.