1. Introduction

1.1   The resident scrutiny panel was established in October 2013 and is designed to fulfil Town & Country Housing's (TCH's) commitment to enable residents to directly influence service provision, as well as exceed the Regulator of Social Housing's regulatory requirements. Since April 2014, the panel has undertaken eleven service reviews of customer services, responsive repairs & maintenance, the void standard, the grounds maintenance service, the money support service, responsive gas services, planned repairs & maintenance, leaseholder & shared owner services, service charges, the 'resident voice' phase one (digital services and service standards) & phase two (staff recruitment, induction & training and resident involvement in procurement) and the tenancy sustainment service.

1.2   In September 2022, the panel commenced a review of the community safety service. This was undertaken by resident scrutiny panel members: Natalieann Leadbetter, Paul Evans, Teresa Godden O'Callaghan, Valerie George, Kevin Dodds, Adam Field, Alex Tuckwell, Andrew Palmer, Steven Hill, Kirsty East, Rebecca Horler and Sue Masters.

1.3   The panel wishes to commend and record their admiration of the community safety team. The diversity of issues that the team responds to daily is not widely known amongst residents. But it should be because in effect, the team are potentially filling the void created by other public sector reductions in funding such as to social care and mental health services. The team consists of talented, dedicated specialists and TCH is lucky to have them. Partly due to increased demand during the pandemic, the panel are aware that the size of the team has increased in recent years, with 'lower level' cases currently dealt with by neighbourhood housing managers. In an ideal world, every community safety issue would be dealt with by the team due to their considerable knowledge and experience, although the panel recognises that resources are limited.

2. Rationale & aims

2.1   Prior to this review, the panel completed a review of the tenancy sustainment service. They were also aware of the increased prevalence of domestic abuse and anti-social behaviour during the pandemic, meaning a review of the community safety service felt timely and like a logical progression following the last review.

3. Methodology

3.1   The service review was undertaken using a structured process developed during previous reviews. This included a desk top review of evidence and information, followed by a reality check phase culminating in several recommendations for service improvement.

3.2   The desk top review phase involved the gathering of relevant evidence and information. This was analysed and considered by the panel over several weeks and included the following:

- A presentation and discussion with the Community Safety Manager
- An extensive exercise to compare the documents and processes in place at TCH with those of 17 other registered providers and community groups to identify good practice examples.

3.3 The activities outlined below were undertaken as part of the reality check phase. This provided an opportunity to clarify and affirm provisional findings resulting from the desk top review phase.

- Shadowing of TCH's community safety team
- Mystery shopping of TCH's customer service team and analysis of telephone recordings
- Presentation by Solihull Community Housing about their community safety service
- Research about satisfaction survey responses and further discussions with residents who had used the community safety service in the preceding six months.

3.4 Community safety work is complex. It should be noted that resident satisfaction with the service often depends on whether in the resident's opinion, a favourable outcome has been delivered. In turn, this often depends on what technically constitutes anti-social behaviour. Clearer website information may help to improve satisfaction, so expectations are better managed from the outset (e.g., the difference between day-to-day and excessive noise).

Residents were approached to give their feedback on the understanding that there was no requirement to divulge the specifics of any case, with questions focused on delivery of the service rather than whether the specific issue had been resolved or not.

4. Findings

4.1 Although the team are clearly very effective at supporting residents and resolving disputes, as evidenced in some of the feedback responses, the panel would like to see more preventative measures and self-solve options. As stated previously, this could be in the form of better website information to support resident independence which could potentially reduce service demand.

4.2 Customer services telephone call recordings and survey responses highlighted the prevalence of mental health issues among victims and perpetrators, and the limitations of available interventions. While the panel recognises it is not TCH's primary responsibility to support those with complex needs, they felt that mental health first aid and other specialist training may assist staff when triaging cases. Some registered providers even have a dedicated mental health resource.

4.3 The panel would not wish to see any resident lose their tenancy, although they fully appreciate how difficult it can be for a victim of anti-social behaviour to have to live alongside a perpetrator indefinitely. Equally, the panel are also mindful of those who cite innocuous day-to-day activities as a nuisance.

4.4 In some instances, there appears to be a lack of understanding about TCH's role and responsibilities in tackling anti-social behaviour and confusion about how/where to report. The anti-social behaviour strategy states one of its key aims is communication, however poor communication was a recurring theme in resident feedback. Residents reported cases were closed without their knowledge and a lack of follow up contact, giving an uncaring impression. Some residents also felt they were not being heard and/or listened to. The recommendations below reflect these findings and may also contain some information for contextual purposes.

5. **Recommendations**

General

1. For consistency, ensure the React system is used to record all community safety cases and identify a lead person to report outcomes to the complainant. Ensure information about a case is transitioned in full when passed to another member of staff so a resident does not have to keep explaining the issue, this will help to reduce the time that residents feel they wait for a resolution.

2. Consider if more robust consequences for perpetrators could be developed. Some registered providers use a strike type system with an outlined process so all cases are treated the same at the same stage, which may act as a more effective deterrent. To aid anyone who may find a log sheet difficult to complete, consider installing additional CCTV and offering recording equipment such as ring doorbells and alarms through providers such as Margate Task Force, Kent Fire and Rescue or Neighbourhood Watch.

3. The panel were impressed with customer services and how they remained calm when dealing with difficult telephone calls. However, as stated above, they felt that mental health first aid training may be beneficial and could help with more empathic language (e.g., "I can hear how upsetting that is for you" rather than "I understand"). Also, better training for customer services to ensure documented protocols are consistently followed.

   The panel were surprised by the intensity of some situations, again noting the lack of external support for residents with mental health difficulties. The panel would like to see other issues dealt with by customer services to avoid residents needing to redial (e.g., reporting a repair caused by previously unreported anti-social behaviour). Equally residents wishing to report a community safety issue should be given the option of disclosing this discreetly to a member of the community safety team, rather than divulging the details to customer services.

4. Other registered providers have been successful with anti-social behaviour campaigns across neighbourhoods. Could this be replicated if a need is identified? Could the team partner with community services, such as 'Kitchen Table' run by Crossways Community or use the Amelia Scott building as 'Mind' do to offer drop-in services?

   Also consider implementing safe spaces in community locations such as chemists and banks as Peabody do. Promote the 'Ask for Angela' campaign, 'Ask for ANI' or develop a code word such as UNA (Urgently Need Assistance). Work with perpetrators around positive behaviours as they may not realise how their actions are affecting others (e.g., starting a mechanics course instead of using the street for car repairs), or they may be vulnerable or a victim themselves.

Documents

5. In the anti-social behaviour strategy, consider describing targets and goals as commitments and make these measurable (SMART model). Give more detail about supporting victims. Make the term 'community trigger' better understood and give more detail about the accreditation mentioned, particularly timescales.

6. In the anti-social behaviour policy, consider including a list of the ways to make contact, give examples of what might be classed as urgent or severe. Explain where an

'appointment' might take place and change the wording in point 7.5 about not moving a resident so perpetrators will not feel that their actions do not have consequences. Add a sentence about fast tracking cases for residents with defined vulnerabilities.

7.   Ensure information about the community safety service features in leasehold documents and on the 'Love Living Home' website.

Preventative measures including tenancy agreement

8.   Include more detail in the tenancy agreement about being a good neighbour e.g., neighbours charter and/or ongoing training where appropriate about responsibilities. These should be clear from the outset e.g., your home – your responsibility. Consider possible use of 'demoted tenancies' as a sanction.

        More clear, simple, jargon free messages to all residents stating that anti-social behaviour is unacceptable. Promote in new resident starter pack as a video (as well as by leaflet) that 11pm-7am is still viewed as night-time (under the Noise Act 1996) when it comes to hoovering, washing machines, beeping car horns and fireworks. Some registered providers use a points style system to reinforce good neighbour expectations.

9.   Include community safety service information in the starter/joining pack for new residents to provide clarity about what the team can and cannot do, highlighting key messages and reiterating resident responsibilities. Emphasise the link with the tenancy support service.

        Ensure the community safety service is a regular feature in the resident and leasehold service newsletter, promoting what they do and where residents can get help and advice. Utilise social media to 'advertise' the service, perhaps in the form of a simple and visual poster. This could also be used on communal notice boards.

Website

10.   Consider using anonymised real-life stories on the TCH website to provide a variety of ways to access community safety information for residents where English is a second language. The panel are aware the website remains under development but would still like to see more information to provide advice, help and guidance.

11.   Provide clear community safety information for residents about what TCH can do versus the local authority given the powers differ. This may better manage expectations and could also be useful for non-residents who may wish to complain about a TCH resident. Include access to the anti-social behaviour policy.

        Consider the use of diagrams/signposting, including a list of external resources such as Neighbourhood Watch (they include an example log sheet on their website). Also consider a flow chart with scenarios and yes/no questions pointing to different agencies. Include support for domestic abuse for men as well as women and a 'leave now' button/'hide browsing history' function.

12.   Improve the complaints page - it appears to direct users to information which is not there and includes the feedback (compliments) form which is illogical. The form does not allow for anonymous feedback to be given. Consider implementing a simple button tap system for compliments e.g., a happy or sad face.

6. Next steps

6.1 Before this report was submitted to Board, it was submitted to the appropriate managers and executive management team for comment. The management response to each of the recommendations is included in the 'management response' column in the accompanying action plan (appendix one).

6.2 The panel requests that the Board considers the recommendations & proposed timescales and provides a formal response, detailing the process by which the approved recommendations will be implemented. The resident scrutiny panel constitution states that *'where recommendations are agreed by the Board, an action plan will be developed and implemented by the head of service. He/she will provide the panel with a progress update every six months. Where the Board does not agree with any of the panel's recommendations, the reasons will be explained in their formal response to the panel'.*

6.3 The approved recommendations will also be summarised and published on the TCH website to enable residents to understand the impact of the resident scrutiny panel on service improvement.

6.4 The panel wish to extend their sincere gratitude to the community safety team, for their transparency, openness, and positive approach to the scrutiny process.