

Agenda No:

Report Title: Resident Scrutiny Panel – review of planned repairs & maintenance service

Board: Town & Country Housing Group Board

Action: For discussion & consideration

Date of Meeting: Thursday 7 February 2019

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Presented by: Resident scrutiny panel members – Adam Field, Natalieann Leadbetter & Paul Evans

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Documents in the Board Pad Reading Room: Action plan (appendix one)

Executive Summary

Following their review of the planned repairs & maintenance service, the resident scrutiny panel has developed ten service improvement recommendations. These are detailed in section four of this report and in the action plan (appendix one). The recommendations are varied and focus on the potential amendment of language and/or branding, clearer written communications and the more prominent recording of customer vulnerabilities in the various ICT systems used by staff.

Recommendations

The Board is kindly requested to consider the findings & recommendations detailed in section four of this report and in the action plan (appendix one). The action plan also contains the management response.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Resident Scrutiny Panel was established in October 2013 and is designed to fulfil Town & Country Housing Group's (TCHG'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 six service reviews of customer services, responsive repairs, the void standard, the grounds maintenance service, the money support service and responsive gas services.
- 1.2 In May 2018, the panel commenced a review of the planned repairs & maintenance service, with a focus on external & internal improvements and stock condition surveys. The review was undertaken by resident scrutiny panel members: Fran O'Neill, Emma Lovell, Barbara Twiss, Monica Brown, Mireille Marchant, Yvonne Camille, Natalieann Leadbetter, Paul Evans, Adam Field and Sarah Cheeseman.

2. Rationale & aims

- 2.1 The panel selected the planned repairs & maintenance service after reviewing KPIs and noting that the team had ceased collection of customer satisfaction data in Spring 2018 (N.B. this will be relaunched in 2019). The service also seemed to be a logical area of focus given the previous review of the responsive repairs & maintenance service.

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 listed below, analysed and considered by the panel over several weeks:
- Customer satisfaction results;
 - Asset investment KPIs;
 - Technical specifications;
 - Planned works satisfaction survey letter;
 - Kitchen & bathroom renewals (guidance for colleagues);
 - Heating and insulation programme (guidance for colleagues);
 - Stock condition survey (guidance for colleagues);
 - External and communal repairs and decoration programme (guidance for colleagues);
 - Stock condition survey appointment letter;
 - Preventative maintenance brief;
 - George Jones & Son Ltd (GJ&S) letter before works commence;
 - Initial letter and survey 2018-19 for external works;
 - Other communication types carried out for cyclical works;
 - Survey and installation letters;
 - Appliance disclaimer;
 - Example drawing;
 - Form of agreement for kitchens & bathrooms;
 - Installation process;

- Mears deadline letter & no access survey;
- TCHG website with Mears microsite link;
- Kitchen choices sheet;
- Kitchen & bathroom disclaimer;
- Kitchen & bathroom replacement letter;
- Kitchen & bathroom refurbishment survey & missed appointment/recharge letter;
- Standard email response to enquiry.

3.3 The activities outlined below were undertaken as part of the reality check phase. This enabled the panel to ascertain if the evidence and information gathered to date translated into actual service delivery. In addition, it provided an opportunity to clarify and affirm provisional findings resulting from the desk top review phase.

- Door knocking at a sheltered housing scheme in Tunbridge Wells to speak to residents undergoing a floor replacement and communal decorations programme;
- Door knocking at homes in locations throughout Tunbridge Wells to speak to residents undergoing or due to undergo planned external improvements;
- Door knocking at homes in locations throughout Tunbridge Wells to speak to residents undergoing kitchen and/or bathroom replacements;
- Telephone surveys of residents who had recently had a stock condition survey (via the Resident Scrutiny Manager);
- Research of existing service information on the TCHG website, My Home Online and of equivalent services on other registered provider/local authority websites;
- Interviews with various staff members, including the programme manager and project managers.

4. Findings & Recommendations

4.1 Naturally, there is much commonality between the planned and responsive repairs & maintenance services and as a result, several of the recommendations detailed below are intended to be cross departmental and/or organisational.

4.2 The findings and recommendations are in a combined format as the findings provide the context and rationale. There are ten recommendations in total and for clarity and ease of reference, these are listed in bold font as follows:

- 1) The language used for repairs is confusing for residents, specifically the words 'planned' and 'cyclical'. Even with the benefit of insight gained from this review, panel members remain somewhat baffled. Planned and cyclical repairs involve improvements and component replacements, whereas a responsive repair (e.g. a leaking pipe) is a process undertaken to fix or remedy a fault. **The panel are requesting for the language and/or branding to be reviewed and to be potentially amended on all customer-facing aspects, including written communications, the TCHG website, 'My Home Online' and during interactions with customer services and Countrywise Repairs Ltd.**
- 2) The panel reviewed complaints received about the service from April 2016 to May 2018. They wish to commend the team for the very small number of complaints received relative to the number of improvements undertaken. **However, the panel are seeking assurance that the 'softer' aspects of any future complaints (e.g.**

an operative did not clear up the mess created after completing improvement works) are still addressed and fed back to the relevant contractor, regardless of whether the complaint is upheld or not. Due to difficulties in retrieving TCHG's responses to past complaints in various ICT systems, it has not been possible to conclusively prove that this has been consistently applied.

- 3) On behalf of the panel, the Resident Scrutiny Manager completed numerous telephone surveys with residents who had recently had a stock condition survey. The purpose was to test understanding about the process. The exercise revealed a mixed picture, although feedback about the surveyor was positive. **The panel would wish to see the letter sent to residents to advise about a forthcoming survey further simplified and amended. Specifically, they would like it to be even clearer that the purpose of the process is to inform the future works programme and is not about picking up responsive repairs. The panel appreciate this has already been revised on several occasions but have developed a draft for consideration.**
- 4) The letter sent to residents to advise of imminent external improvement works invites the recipient to report any repairs by return or via completion of an online survey. Although the intention is to enable residents to highlight any repair issues which may need attention, there is no guarantee these will be picked up in the forthcoming programme. This is misleading and confusing, meaning residents may not then report repairs in the normal way. Furthermore, it assumes an understanding about the difference between a responsive and planned repair (as described above in 1). **The panel would like to see the letter/survey wording revised and made clearer, so to better manage expectations. With this in mind, they have developed some amended wording for deliberation. In addition, the panel would like further consideration to be given about how best to record and capture any such feedback on 'My Home Online', to confirm receipt and ensure a written record for all parties.**
- 5) The panel were made aware of a handwritten communication from a sub contractor sent to a small group of residents asking for personal contact information. One of the residents then contacted TCHG who confirmed it was a scam and an alert to this effect also appeared on community social media. However, it subsequently transpired that the letter was genuine. **Going forward, the panel request that all future written communications between contractors/sub contractors and residents be professionally presented and feature the TCHG printed logo to avoid any similar misunderstanding.**
- 6) The documents developed as 'guidance for staff' regarding various aspects of the service (e.g. kitchen & bathroom renewals) are excellent and provide clear and useful information. **The panel would like to see these amended for residents and made available on the TCHG website as the current information is quite sparse and could be improved.**
- 7) The panel undertook door knocking at a sheltered housing scheme to speak to residents undergoing a floor replacement and communal decorations programme by GJ&S. Feedback was excellent and although most likely aided by the self-contained nature of sheltered housing and the presence of the tenancy sustainment officer (scheme manager), it provided an exemplary example of how to communicate with residents (including several that are vulnerable) using written methods, communal noticeboards and through face-to-face contact.

The panel also undertook door knocking to speak to residents undergoing kitchen and bathroom replacements by Mears. Feedback was very good aside from a few minor snagging issues. Feedback was particularly good regarding the difference the resident liaison officer role (employed by Mears) makes to satisfaction and communications with residents. **Although the panel understand GJ&S have an equivalent role and the nature of the works undertaken is different (i.e. GJ&S undertake external and internal improvements and do not normally enter residents' homes), the panel would like to see this quality replicated with GJ&S if possible.** With the exception of the sheltered housing scheme, feedback from residents elsewhere about GJ&S was more mixed and their understanding about the purpose of ongoing or recently completed works vaguer and at times confused.

- 8) When the panel undertook further door knocking, they came across an elderly, blind resident who had recently had her roof repaired to remedy a leak. The leak had been repaired several weeks earlier but had not been tested, due to taking place during the summer period, with no rain for some time. Coincidentally, there was heavy rain a few hours before the panel arrived. The resident showed the panel the leak which was now dripping through the ceiling in her living room onto her TV. Due to her frailty and visual impairment, she was not able to move the TV and was covering it in towels to absorb the water. After the panel's visit, the issue was immediately reported and the roof replaced promptly. TCHG staff subsequently investigated the case and all processes had been correctly followed. For transparency, these findings were also shared with the panel.

Regardless, the panel request that vulnerabilities (where known) are more prominently flagged in the various ICT systems used by staff, preferably on the first page which appears after doing a search and not hidden elsewhere. The panel appreciate this will not be a quick fix but consider this to be extremely important. They would also like to request that all contractors be reminded about safeguarding responsibilities and that all repairs involving leaks are thoroughly tested following completion.

- 9) The panel interviewed various staff members and were impressed by their specialist knowledge and expertise. They were also struck by the range and volume of tasks undertaken by the project managers. During the interviews, there was some discussion about residents' changing expectations and the stigma surrounding social housing tenants. **With this in mind, the panel are pleased to note TCHG's participation in the 'See the Person' campaign and request that it be reiterated to all staff at a future staff briefing session and featured more prominently on the staff intranet.**
- 10) The panel understand that satisfaction surveys are under review corporately and wish to add their support for this. **Where planned repairs have been undertaken, they wish to ascertain if the new satisfaction survey format (when implemented) can also incorporate the opportunity for residents to report any minor snagging issues to enable Mears to provide a quick resolution.** As stated previously, feedback for Mears was very good but could be outstanding if snagging issues were dealt with promptly.

5. Next steps

- 5.1 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).

- 5.2 The panel requests that the Board consider the recommendations & proposed timescales and provide 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'*.
- 5.3 The approved recommendations will also be summarised and published on the TCHG website to enable tenants to understand the impact of the resident scrutiny panel on service improvement.
- 5.4 The panel wish to extend their sincere gratitude to the planned repairs & maintenance team for their flexibility, openness and positive approach to the scrutiny process.