



Meeting of the

Customer Panel

held

at The Minto Centre

on

5th December 2022 at 3.00pm

Present:

- Debbie Fox (WHA)
- Susan Duxbury (WHA)
- Andrea Sharp (WHA)
- John Burrow (Tenant)
- Bill Reville (Tenant)
- Andrew Hardcastle (Tenant)
- Cheryl McGraffin (Tenant)
- Olive Timney (Tenant)
- Colin Tooley (Tenant)

1. Apologies for Absence

Marilyn Allison (Resident)

2. Nomination of Chair

One nomination had been received from Andrew Hardcastle. Discussion that John Burrow may be interested but he decided not to progress with this.

Andrew Hardcastle was elected as chair of the group for a 12 month period and John as deputy chair.

3. Minutes of Meeting Held 31st August 2022

Minutes of previous meeting agreed as a true record.

Matters arising – office opening hours – the office is now open 2 full days (Tuesday and Wednesday) but staff are always on hand to open should anyone attend the office outside of those 2 days. Footfall is being monitored to assess whether we need to open any additional days.

4. Q2 Performance inc Tenant Satisfaction

Performance information provided for Q2 (April to September).

Void Rent Loss has started to reduce as work has started on the major voids except for the 2 properties at Beech Mews. Although there has been delay receiving the funding for the air source heat pumps. Hopefully these will be fitted in the coming weeks.

Rent arrears – are stable and below target at week 35 – 3.24% Concerned that this may start to increase due to the time of year and cost of living crisis however we are trying to provide information to help tenants as well as reminding people that it is important to keep on top of rent payments and bills. We have sent 38 referrals to County Council for the Taste of Christmas food parcel.

Tenant satisfaction remains to be high.

STAR survey is to be done (awaiting questions to be approved).

Keeping a close eye on late repair completions. Stock Condition surveys are just about finished and then we will have the information from those to feed into the stock investment plan.

John Burrow felt that the surveyor was very abrupt and didn't show any ID. This will be fed back to ORS.

5. Consideration of Tenant Feedback/Dissatisfaction and Complaints

There is a big emphasis in the Social Housing Whitepaper on tenant feedback, taking this on board and using that to shape services.

The report provided at the meeting was also presented to Board last week.

Debbie went through the report.

Tenancy Follow Up visits – 22 carried out in Quarter 2.

1 tenant dissatisfied as had to chase up an outstanding repair.

Repairs Satisfaction Calls.

1 Person dissatisfied with out of hours service.

1 person dissatisfied with fence condition.

Gas servicing – 100% satisfied.

ASB – 2 cases closed and both satisfied.

Complaints

1 complaint as they didn't feel that they should be recharged following an electrical issue due to DIY fault. Following investigation, it was agreed to waive the recharge as a gesture of goodwill. Tenant satisfied with this outcome.

Colin Tooley flagged up that he had been unable to get through to Out of Hours service when he tried a few weeks ago.

We discussed the importance of collecting information regarding complaints along with the outcomes and any learning.

6. Service Standards

Debbie Fox went through the report.

Section 2.2 on the report is what we have as a service standard currently. We would like the group to consider what services are important and what standards we should have along with any relevant timescales.

During this discussion dog fouling was brought up by Colin Tooley. Advice given to not pick up and report to Allerdale. If its left, then this will also be reported to us by Works 4 You or the Environmental wardens.

Action – to review this at the next meeting to see if any improvement.

Examples of other organisations service standards were discussed i.e.) answer the phone in 5 rings, answer emails in a set time, see visitors promptly.

People's priorities are generally repairs, asb and complaints. We also need to look at different communication methods to ensure that everyone gets the information we provide.

Action – Debbie to circulate copies of the examples.

Action – Feedback from Panel required by 23/12/22.

Leaflet will then be drafted and circulated.

7. Update on Customer Engagement Internal Audit

Debbie gave a brief background information on the audits and advised that we are currently considering what audits will be carried out next year.

Report received from Beevers and Struthers for the Customer Engagement Audit which gave 10 medium recommendations.

The organisation will need to complete a lot of work to implement the recommendations.

Timescales have been set to complete the work.

There is regular progress reports provided to audit and risk committee.

Some of the recommendations are:-

- Gap Analysis to be carried out against the Government White Paper by 31/3/23
- Review the strategy (customer engagement)
- Update the action plan
- Diversity review of the panel membership by end January 2023
- Training to be offered to people who are involved by end of February 2023
- Satisfaction Surveys
- Customer Panel Rolling responsibilities (Terms of reference)
- Updating risk register to include Customer Engagement.

Debbie advised that there are lots of things for the panel to be involved with and asked if the panel were happy to work with us.

All agreed that they are happy to work with us to meet the recommendations.

Action – Debbie to circulate the report from Beevers and Struthers so members can read fully.

8. Update on Social Housing Decarbonisation Application

Board have been updated with the progress of the application.

Westfield have joined a consortium with South Lakes Housing, Eden, Progress Housing, Lune Valley and it is being led by Eden District Council.

We have joined the consortium as the government prefer bigger applications to be submitted.

The government have imposed a target for all social housing properties to have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) of at least a C rating by 2030.

The application has now been submitted but we will not hear until February the outcome of the application with a plan to start the work in April 2023.

We have identified 46 properties that have the lowest EPC rating and will need the biggest investment.

This includes work Windows, Doors, Loft Insulation, Cavity Wall, Solar Panels, Internal Wall Insulation.

We have to match fund 50% of the cost.

It's a 2 year project with 19 properties being completed next year and 26 the year after.

The total project is £900,000. Due to the level of funding we have to invest then the planned maintenance work has had to be scaled back to release that funding to this work.

We have approached all local contractors to see if they are interested in carrying out any work and can provide assistant to them to get onto the framework in order to tender for appropriate work

A project team has been set up which is made up of Debbie Fox, Helen Timney, Laura Nixon, Tom Clare and Susan Duxbury.

The biggest thing with this type of work is tenant engagement so that they are fully aware of the scale of the work to be carried out and what an upheaval it could be for tenants.

Compensation will be provided for some elements of the work.

We need to develop a customer engagement plan. Possibly looking at a show house for people to look round. We will be contacting those customers identified and arranging open events / home visits to discuss the project.

We are going to appoint a Technical Officer which will be advertised as a permanent full time role.

Once the programme is complete then there will still be approximately 150 properties to bring up to standard.

9. Relationship with Board

Andrew Hardcastle met with Henry Barker and it was decided that Andrew will not become a board member because as such he would then not be able to represent the panel. He would be able to attend as a panel member either in person or provide a report to inform Board as to what is discussed at Panel.

John Burrow asked for clarification as he was not aware that it had been discussed about Andrew applying to join Board. Members confirmed that this was discussed at the last meeting.

Debbie advised the panel that anyone can apply to join the board if they would be interested.

10. NIF & Tenant Enablement Fund Expenditure to Date

Debbie provided a report with an update on the budget.

NIF budget is £35,000 with £15,000 for the tenant enablement fund which is used for new tenants or existing tenants who are struggling.

Spend so far:-

NIF £14,114.70

TEF £ 4,686.91

Total £18,801.61

11. Annual Rent Review

The Housing Regulator have been looking at the rent review. The rent increase would normally be set at CPI plus 1% which would have seen an increase of 11%.

However, the regulator has set a cap of 7%.

This increase has been discussed at Board and a final decision will be made early January on what percentage will be applied from April 23.

Due to inflation and minimum wage increases, we have to consider the increased maintenance costs for labour and materials. As a business we have to manage costs to ensure we can continue to deliver a quality service to tenants.

Discussion took place around the rent increase with concerns raised by panel members about how people would manage, and which group of tenants would be most impacted. Some members understood the difficulty of the decision when trying to maintain services and pressure of an increase on tenants, especially those in low income employment.

12. Any Other Business

Grounds Maintenance Contract. It was the intention that we would go out to retender for this next year however we were worried that we would get an inflated cost from a new contractor due to the current climate.

We have therefore met with Works 4 You to discuss a 'roll over' for next year with additional work.

They have agreed to do the following additional work:

Starting the contract sooner

Collection on first 2 cuts

Will be cutting the bank at the bottom of Westfield Drive (that should be council responsibility)

Taking on extra areas

Spraying and removal of weeds in areas that are county councils' responsibility but looks unsightly when not maintained.

They have also employed 2 people off the estate.

Board have agreed to stay with Works 4 You.

New Development

We have to put suggestions forward for street naming of the new developments. So if properties are tagged onto an existing street they will be named that ie) the bungalows at Fell View will be Fell View and a continuation of numbers.

Action - Debbie asked panel members for name suggestions by the end of the week and we can pass these to the council who will have the final decision.

Suggestions received at the meeting

Andrew – Queen Elizabeth Court

Andrew – Welfare Mews

Bill – Balmoral Way / Road

Minutes

These will be posted rather than emailed.

13. Date of Next Meeting

To be confirmed

Cheryl asked if we could look at the day / times of meetings. She is ok for a 3pm meeting on Mondays or Thursdays but not the rest of the week.