



Meeting of the

**Customer Panel**

held

**at The Minto Centre**

on

**31<sup>st</sup> August 2022 at 4.00pm**

**Present:**

- Debbie Fox (WHA)
- Susan Duxbury (WHA)
- Julie Armstrong (WHA)
- Andrea Sharp (WHA)
- John Burrow (Tenant)
- Bill Reville (Tenant)
- Andrew Hardcastle (Tenant)
- Cheryl McGraffin (Tenant)
- Olive Timney (Tenant)
- Marilyn Allison (Resident)

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Colin Tooley

**2. Minutes of Meeting Held 25<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

Debbie Fox opened the meeting and asked for feedback on the information provided. Debbie asked if the group were happy for her to take the lead, and this was agreed by the group.

Minutes of last meeting agreed as true – feedback received as requested.

### 3. Q1 Performance inc Tenant Satisfaction & Customer Offer Outcomes

The performance information provided to the Panel is similar to the layout presented at Board. Additional repairs information has been provided to Panel as this was area of interest identified at the last meeting.

**Void Rent Loss** We have four rural properties currently void which have an F EPC rating. These require substantial investment to increase the EPC rating and bring them up to Decent Home standard. We have applied for a Green Homes Grant towards the cost of the work and have carried out a full option appraisal of these properties. Work has now begun on two of these properties but due to the level of work required these properties have been long term voids and therefore has an impact on our void rent loss.

**Rent arrears** remained fairly consistent over lockdown however have noticed a difference now people are out and about more and starting to do things again. Concerns now due to the cost of living crisis. We discussed how we are looking at how best to support our tenants with funding sources and have published some information regarding advice and support on our Facebook page and website.

Debbie advised that Board have granted permission to dispose of 2 properties in Camerton and 1 in Cockermouth. This was due to the amount of investment required and demand for these areas/properties. We have notified Allerdale of our intention to sell these properties. They have requested we try our utmost to ensure buyers purchase the properties to live in and not as holiday lets etc.

**Repairs and maintenance** KPI discussed. Debbie explained the targets and performance compared to last year.

Stock condition surveys are being carried out by ORS (Opinion Research). These surveys will help inform the planned maintenance programs and energy efficiency plans.

**Anti Social Behaviour** – some of the information was not collected prior to this year. Susan Duxbury explained the figures. Also discussed what a Notice of Seeking Possession is and process to obtain one.

**Tenant Satisfaction** - we collect various tenant satisfaction measures. We have seen a drop in neighbourhood satisfaction for Q1. Information collected is not just the Westfield Estate but for all the stock we own. To put the low satisfaction rate into context, Debbie explained that only 3 tenants gave feedback – 2 were satisfied and 1 was not so this shows as a 33% dissatisfaction rate.

Debbie asked the group if the information was clear in the way it was presented and if there were any gaps in information they would like to see – the panel agreed it was clear and no gaps.

**Customer Offer** this document was developed over lockdown and reviewed at the last meeting with the Panel. The revised version was presented to the Panel with Q1 outcomes recorded. Debbie asked if this was what was expected and also asked if anything was missing. Debbie went through some of the items in the various sections of the offer.

The next estate walkabout is in October. Susan Duxbury asked if any members of the Panel would be interested in attending and if anyone has any specific dates they would be available.

The Panel discussed the grounds maintenance on the estate which had been an issue over recent months and the consensus of the group is that they have seen an improvement. The Panel were asked if anyone would like to be involved in the tender process for next year. Andrew Hardcastle expressed an interest.

Issues with the football pitch were also discussed – information has been passed to the police and asked if the PCSO can monitor the issues.

Debbie Fox asked for feedback.

Olive Timney asked if we ask incoming tenants if they want anything left in the property from the outgoing tenants such as coving – discussed that we are unable to leave coving unless it's the plaster coving as it is a fire hazard. If anything was left and we thought would benefit the incoming tenant then we would ask if they wanted to keep it and it would be left.

John Burrow asked if we would rip a kitchen out when a property is bought back – we advised that lots of things have to be taken into account when a property is assessed when it becomes void.

Andrew Hardcastle asked if a property / garden was left in a mess would we recharge and we advised that yes we would.

#### **4. Consideration of Tenant Feedback/Dissatisfaction and Complaints**

Debbie Fox explained the various routes we received tenant feedback and provided information on dissatisfaction received in quarter 1. Debbie informed that we now also do weekly calls to contractors for updates on jobs completed etc.

Cheryl McGraffin reported poor communication when waiting for parts for jobs to be completed.

Bill Reville reported a very quick response to repairs often same day.

Our Customer Services Officers contact 10-15% tenants who have reported repairs for feedback. Feedback suggests that appointments are not always made for jobs to be completed and often ID is not being shown by contractors. Given recent issues locally with cold caller the importance of showing ID was discussed. This will be raised with contractors in their monthly meeting.

The Panel reported that Surveyors for ORS are turning up without appointments. DF to look into.

ASB satisfaction – we now contact complainants by phone for feedback as previously no feedback was received using the paper satisfaction survey.

Complaints – 4 received and 3 related to grass cutting. We do consider ‘have any lessons been learnt’ and we realise that the grass cutting should have started sooner. Debbie advised that an earlier start and first cut ‘pick up’ will be written into new tender/contract.

## **5. Planned & Cyclical Maintenance Programmes & Decarbonisation**

Debbie Fox read through the proposed planned maintenance programme and allocated budget for the work. Feedback was requested from the Panel who felt the programme was adequate.

Discussed pulling back on the fencing programme to concentrate on energy efficiency work.

Query raised over 65 Windsor Road and are we going to stain the fence. Debbie Fox to check.

Debbie Fox explained the governments commitment to reach net carbon zero by 2050 and what that means for housing associations. We have joined a consortium of other local housing providers to access £400k grant funding to carry out energy efficiency works to our homes. The work would need to be complete by 2024 and we would need to provide 50% to match any funding received. The funding can be used on works which will improve the properties EPC rating to C rating and reduce energy costs for tenants. Some works such as internal wall insulation will be intrusive and disruptive for tenants.

We discussed how best to get information out to tenants regarding the decarbonisation commitment and the level of works required at some properties. It was discussed we should drip feed tenants information at every opportunity. We will publish information on our website and Facebook and also send some information to all tenants with rent statements at the beginning of October.

In order to match any funding, we would need to reduce future planned programmes, meaning fewer kitchen and bathroom replacements. Views were requested on this – Marilyn Allison said that it was more effective to make more energy efficiencies in the current climate.

Panel asked if the heating replacements would affect the solar panels on Ashmore Gardens. DF to check.

Consensus of the panel is that focus should be on the energy efficiency bid.

## **6. Office Opening Hours**

We have requested feedback on office opening hours in our newsletter, Facebook and from tenants on the Blackpool trip. Very little feedback was received. This was discussed and it was agreed that there was no need to change at the moment. We can review at the December meeting. However, the cost of living crisis may mean more foot fall for support and advice.

## **7. Feedback From tenants Conference & Impact of Cost of Living Crisis**

Andrew Hardcastle and Cheryl McGraffin gave feedback on the tenants conference they attended in Warrington. Feedback included:

- Tenants want regular communication.
- Contractors identify vulnerable tenants, 'Customer concern cards'
- Good neighbour schemes.
- Feedback surveys via text message
- Loan Sharks and Credit Unions
- Social supermarkets – into bus stops, chemists, DV info.
- Better links to housing contents insurance for existing tenants.
- Tenants day giving opportunity to meet Board members (AGM)

Debbie Fox advised that for next years rent increase we are expecting a rent cap to be announced to avoid a double figure increase on rents. We recognise the current climate is a difficult time for everyone. We will ensure to publish and sign post tenants to any support or funding available.

## **8. Feedback on Draft Annual Report to Tenants**

Julie Armstrong read through the report and gave an overview of the content. Informed the Panel that the performance and information in the report related to April 2021 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.

It was suggested that we should include a photo of the Customer Panel members in next years report. Cheryl McGraffin commented on the lovely photos from the children in Nursery.

Debbie Fox to draft a post to let tenants know that we are still hardwiring the electric fires.

Cheryl McGraffin commented that the annual report is easy to understand. Andrew Hardcastle commented that there was plenty of figures and information.

Julie Armstrong explained how we measure social value.

## **9. Relationship with Board**

Debbie Fox talked through her paper and provided information on the arrangements other housing providers had with their tenants groups and board. This was discussed.

Andrew Hardcastle to give some thought on becoming a board member. The Panel were happy for Andrew to represent the Panel at Board. Debbie to arrange a meeting with the Chair to discuss further.

Andrew Hardcastle suggested that the customer panel could meet the board members. The AGM would be good opportunity to do this.

## **10. Neighbourhood Investment Fund Application**

Cheerforce Knights application was discussed and declined due to the lack of local children attending the club.

## **11. Any Other Business**

Estate Clean Up day – 15<sup>th</sup> September 2022

AGM – 20<sup>th</sup> September 2022 5.30pm

The Customer Panel were notified of the above and encouraged to attend. Andrew Hardcastle to give an induction to The Customer Panel at the AGM.

Panel members were asked if they felt any training was required at this stage. Members would think about this and feedback to Debbie.

An internal audit on Customer Engagement will take place w/c 12<sup>th</sup> September. Debbie advised members that they may be contacted as part of the audit. Everyone was fine with this.

## **12. Date of Next Meeting**

Debbie to circulate possible dates in December.