

TITLE OF REPORT: **Gateshead Housing Customer Scrutiny Panel
(GHCSF) – Progress Update**

REPORT OF: **Neil Bouch, Interim Managing Director, The
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Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide an annual update on the progress of The Gateshead Housing Customer Scrutiny Panel (GHCSF)

Background

1. The Gateshead Housing Customer Scrutiny Panel (GHCSF) was originally established in October 2011. This followed an extensive project that considered the opportunities for the development of an independent tenant organisation in Gateshead.
2. The purpose of the panel is to ensure that the needs and views of Gateshead residents are at the heart of how social housing services are developed and delivered by The Gateshead Housing Company (TGHC) and Gateshead Council.
3. The Panel have a range of tools available to help them effectively scrutinise a service area, which could include but are not limited to: -
 - Self assessment from Service Manager (written or in person)
 - Question and answer sessions with managers
 - Focus groups of employees or customers
 - Performance information including service standards and benchmarking information where appropriate
 - Feedback from surveys
 - Outcomes from mystery shopping
 - Co-opting of experts or TGHC Service Improvement Groups (SIGs)
 - External learning to compare TGHC performance to other similar providers.
4. The committee has, as part of previous update reports, received details of the findings from the following reviews conducted by the Panel: -
 - Anti-social behaviour case management
 - Rent and income
 - Void/empty homes management
 - Customer Services (local offices)
 - Lettings
 - Repairs Reporting
 - Customer Satisfaction Surveys.

Review of Customer Service in Neighbourhood Housing Offices

5. The panel has recently completed its eighth review which scrutinised customer service delivered from neighbourhood housing offices. Their findings were presented by the Panel Chair to TGHC's Customers and Communities Committee in February 2019.
6. The Panel used the following tools to collect evidence and to produce this report:
 - Desktop research
 - Focus groups with officers (Customer Service Officers and Neighbourhood Service Advisors)
 - Focus groups with specialist teams (Leasehold Services, Rent and Income, Sheltered Housing, Multi-Storey, HomeRepairs and Lettings)
 - Mystery shopping on telephony and email responses
 - Presentation of the service area by Head of Neighbourhood Services.
7. There were 25 recommendations made which have been grouped into five main areas. The Panel feels that when implemented, will result in improved customer service and more effective relationships between different Neighbourhood Housing Teams.
 - Customer Service
 - Training for employees
 - Updating procedural guides
 - Internal communications and working relationships
 - External communication with customers.
8. The Panel requested that the Head of Neighbourhood Services produce an action plan in response to the proposed recommendations. A planning meeting was held 16 April 2019 with the Panel Chair and members, Panel mentor and TGHCs Involvement and Diversity Officer to shape the proposed action plan and discuss the proposed recommendations with the Head of Neighbourhood Services. The final plan including details of the agreed recommendations made will be presented to the Customers and Communities Committee in May 2019.
9. The recommendations and progress against featured in the April 2019 TGHC newsletter that is sent to all tenants and leaseholders. It is also sent via email to those registered for the TGHC electronic mailing service.

Recruitment and development of GHCS members

10. Two members resigned from the Panel during 2018/19 due to ill health and personal commitments. This resulted in a new Panel Chair, David Chambers, being elected by members in November 2018.
11. A recruitment exercise was undertaken in March 2019 which resulted in three new members being appointed. The new members will shadow the meeting taking place in April to help give them an understanding of what is expected during the process of a review.

12. Currently there are seven members on the Panel, including one leaseholder. Members continue to look at ways to promote the Panel and recruit new members to ensure membership remains high.
13. In January 2019 the Chair of TGHC Customers and Communities Committee met with the Panel Chair and another member, to share their expertise on preparing and presenting at committee meetings and help with the Panel members' development. Panel members found this a very positive experience.
14. In September 2018 Panel members received 121 digital training from local organisation Digital Voice for Communities, following the identification of digital needs of individual members to help with their scrutiny reviews.
15. Other training and conferences that Panel members have attended during 2018/19 include:
 - Stockport Homes - Making Scrutiny Matter - February 2019
 - NHC 8th National Tenant Panel Conference, York – November 2018
 - NHC – Tenant Advisor - Tenant Unconference - Networking event for involved tenants and employees – April 2018
16. Members of the Panel continue to use a dedicated secure website to help them conduct effective scrutiny reviews.

Next steps

17. The Panel are currently using their recent learning to help select the next area of scrutiny, which is yet to be identified.
18. In May 2019, a Panel 'away-day' will take place with members which will focus on identifying their strengths and developing skills to help with future reviews. The away-day will also involve planning future reviews and progress updates on action plans during 2019/20.
19. The Chair of Customers and Communities Committee has offered to attend this to offer continued support to the Panel. TGHC Organisational Development Advisor will be working closely with the Involvement and Diversity Officer to deliver this session.

Recommendation

20. It is recommended that the OSC note the progress of the GHCSPP with further annual progress reports being brought back to the OSC to consider the effectiveness of co-regulation.