

TITLE OF REPORT: TALISMAN (Tenant and Leaseholder Independent Scrutiny Management) Panel – Progress Update

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Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide an annual update on the progress of the TALISMAN (Tenant and Leaseholder Independent Scrutiny Management) Panel

Background

1. The Tenant and Leasehold Independent Scrutiny Management (TALISMAN) panel was formed in October 2011. This followed an extensive project that considered the opportunities for the development of an independent tenants' 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 housing services are developed and delivered by The Gateshead Housing Company and Gateshead Council.
3. TALISMAN have a range of tools available to help them to 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
 - Benchmarking or 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 that TALISMAN have carried out: -
 - Anti-social behaviour case management
 - Rent and income
 - Void management
 - Customer Services (local offices)

Review of Lettings – Hard to Let Properties

5. TALISMAN completed their fifth review and presented their findings to the TGHC Customers and Communities Committee in May 2016.
6. The fifth area selected for the Panel to scrutinise was Lettings, focusing specifically on hard to let properties.
7. A range of evidence was used during the course of the review including: -
 - Presentation from TGHC and Council Lettings Manager on overall lettings service and TGHC Head of Customer Services on hard to let properties.
 - Review of Tyne and Wear Homes Website.
 - Satisfaction survey results of Tyne and Wear Homes.
 - Site visits to five hard to let properties (one in each neighbourhood).
 - Focus group with Housing Management Assistants and Lettings Officers.
8. TALISMAN identified a range of positive practice in their review of hard to let properties covering: -
 - Employees often looked at problems from the customers' point of view.
 - Employees in many offices sat with customers to help them complete complicated forms.
 - The modernisation of some communal areas had encouraged pride in the blocks and improved the community spirit in some high-rise blocks.
 - Prospective tenants in the armed forces built up waiting time for time spent working in those services.
9. The review identified 12 recommendations. These included: -
 - Future adverts to include positive quotes from tenants about how their area had changed and was now a great place to live.
 - Future adverts to list local amenities and advantages to living in area.
 - Stop advertising hard to let properties as 'Always Available'.
 - As part of the review lettings review, consider removing of age restrictions or reduce to 40 years in some low demand sheltered housing accommodation.
 - Consider using bedsits as 'respite' tenancies when work was being done on tenant's homes.
10. The findings have been included within improvement plans for the service and progress against the actions has been reported back to both TALISMAN and Customers and Communities Committee. All the actions have been completed.
11. The outcomes of the review have been publicised on the TGHC website.

Review of Repairs Reporting

12. The Panel has recently completed its sixth area of scrutiny of repairs reporting and presented their findings to the TGHC Customers and Communities Committee in February 2017.

13. The Panel has used a range of evidence during the review including the following: -
- Presentation from Customer Services Manager and HomeRepairs Team Leader.
 - Shadowing of Customer Service Advisor/Advice Assistants.
 - Carrying out of Mystery Shopping exercise.
 - Analysis of performance data relating to call waiting time and other methods of contact.
 - Analysis of complaints received since April 2015.
 - Conducting of own customer satisfaction survey and analysis of results.
14. TALISMAN identified a range of positive practice in their review of repairs reporting covering: -
- Two hour appointment slots.
 - Options when contacting by telephone to report new repair or progress existing repair.
 - Call handlers are very knowledgeable and answer calls well. They deal with calls efficiently and in a kind and compassionate manner.
 - The onscreen instructions on the TGHC website are clear and easy to follow.
15. The review identified 23 recommendations. The Repairs Reporting Service has been requested to produce a formal response to these and present them to the next meeting of TGHC Customers and Communities Committee in May 2017.
16. The outcomes of the review will be publicised on the TGHC website.

Recruitment and development of TALISMAN members

17. As of March 2017, there are six members on the Panel. One member has recently resigned due to ill health.
18. The Panel continues to actively look to recruit new members and has had articles published in TGHC News during the last year.
19. The Panel had a stand in the Civic Centre in June 2016 which used as an opportunity to speak to members of the public and employees about work that TALISMAN was doing and the promote the Panel.
20. Members of TALISMAN attended the sixth Northern Housing Consortium Annual Tenant Panel Conference in December 2016 in Leeds.
21. Members of the Panel continue to use a dedicated secure website for TALISMAN to share and discuss information during reviews.

Next steps

22. TALISMAN has agreed that its next area of scrutiny will be a review of customer satisfaction surveys.

23. The Customer Support Manager has been invited to give a presentation at their next meeting on 18 April 2017. The Panel will then agree a timetable for the tools it would like to use to carry out this review.

Review of Terms of Reference

24. A review of the terms of reference has been carried out which, once agreed, will enable future scrutiny reviews to be carried out more effectively.
25. One of the changes being proposed is to change the name of the Panel from TALISMAN to 'Gateshead Housing Customer Scrutiny Panel'. Feedback from customers has shown that the use of an acronym to describe the Panel has caused confusion in terms of its role and purpose. This uncertainty has in turn hindered recruitment. Research has shown that other housing organisations refer their Panel as simply a 'Customer Scrutiny Panel'.
26. It is acknowledged that original decision to establish the Panel and call it TALISMAN was taken by the Council and the views of the OSC are sought on the proposal to rename it 'Gateshead Customer Scrutiny Panel'.

Recommendation

27. It is recommended that the OSC note the progress of the TALISMAN panel with further annual progress reports being brought back to the OSC in order to scrutinise the effectiveness of co-regulation.
28. The views of the OSC are sought on the proposal to rename TALISMAN 'Gateshead Customer Scrutiny Panel'.