



**WATFORD
BOROUGH
COUNCIL**

**WATFORD COMMUNITY HOUSING TASK
GROUP**

Wednesday, 17 October 2018

6.30 pm

Town Hall

Publication date: 9 October 2018

Agenda

Councillor A Khan (Chair)

Councillors S Cavinder, A Dychton, A Grimston and K Hastrick

1. Apologies for absence

2. Disclosure of interests

3. Actions from previous meeting

The notes and actions of the meeting held on [24 September 2018](#) to be submitted and signed.

4. Report from Watford Community Housing (Pages 3 - 7)

A report of Watford Community Housing (WCH) is attached addressing the questions raised by the task group.

Representatives from WCH will also make a presentation to the task group.

5. Next steps

The task group to:

- Consider any next steps for their work programme
- Agree a date for a meeting in January 2019 following the residents' drop in sessions



Watford Community Housing Task Group

17th October 2018

Question	Response
<p>What is the process for checking properties before residents move in?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lettable Standard - used as the benchmark for the condition of how the property will be let. • The Voids Team Leader inspects the property and specifies the required works. • Electrical and gas safety checks are undertaken. • In-house voids team undertakes the works. • Property is cleaned by the Voids Team. • Works are post-inspected by Voids Team Leader against the Lettable Standard. • Keys are returned to the Lettings Team, ready for tenant sign up and nomination process.
<p>How are the service charges determined?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WCH operates variable service charge which means the tenant pays the actual cost incurred to deliver the services to the block. • Charges based on services received by the tenant and what as landlord we are required to provide, which in some cases is determined by the lease. • Set based on estimates of the coming year, which includes: a review of the previous year's actual costs, planned works, removal of any one off costs and any contractual uplifts. • Currently our service charges are capped at £18 per week (at the Group Board's discretion). This means in some circumstances, WCH does not fully recover all of the costs incurred for delivering the service.
<p>How is value for money for the service charges established?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Financial Standing Orders require us to competitively tender our service contracts to ensure VFM for WCH and its tenants. This typically requires at least 3 quotes from suppliers. • Under the Leaseholder Reform Act 2002 we are required to consult with Leaseholder where works are over £250 (per leaseholder) and £100 for services, with an opportunity for leaseholders to nominate contractors. • High value contracts (great than £4.5m for works and £181k for services)) go through EU procurement process, which can take up to 6-9 months to procure. • Contracts are monitored both financially and from a quality perspective by our staff.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular contract meetings are held to discuss the contract and the associated performance KPIs. 												
<p>What is the range of cost of service charges and what are some typical examples e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a resident in a high rise building a resident in sheltered accommodation A resident in a low-rise building? 	<p>Below is our average service charges for a range of property types requested:-</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="584 398 1398 976"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>General Needs</th> <th>Leaseholder</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>High Rise</td> <td>£19.89 per week (50 weeks) £994.50 per annum including personal charges *</td> <td>£1,339 per annum</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Low Rise</td> <td>£6.95 per week £347.50 per annum including personal charges *</td> <td>£448 per annum</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sheltered Accom</td> <td>£27.90 per week including personal charges*</td> <td>n/a</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p><i>*Personal charge is for statutory services such as gas where there is communal heating.</i></p>		General Needs	Leaseholder	High Rise	£19.89 per week (50 weeks) £994.50 per annum including personal charges *	£1,339 per annum	Low Rise	£6.95 per week £347.50 per annum including personal charges *	£448 per annum	Sheltered Accom	£27.90 per week including personal charges*	n/a
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<p>Can the task group be provided with any benchmarking information for service charges?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our service charges were recently benchmarked as part of an independent sector scorecard and out of 236 social housing providers we came 33. This is an upper quartile performance and amongst the lowest service charges for tenants in the sector. Compared to local Housing Associations (Eastern Region) out of the 27 bench marked we had the 2nd lowest charges compared to our neighbouring Associations. 												
<p>Could WCH describe the processes from a problem being reported through to feedback being received from the resident?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WCH has a dedicated customer aftercare team who deals with feedback (Customer Relations Team). We also operate a 24 hour contact centre for tenants to raise issues. Feedback can come via many different routes including: telephone call, customer surveys, face to face conversations and via digital channels such as email, Facebook and our new Digital Tenancy Platform. All tenants that register dis-satisfaction with our services receive a call so we can understand in detail the service failure. All complaints and complements are logged on our feedback system. We operate a three stage process; Frontline staff are encouraged to resolve the issue at an early stage, if this is not possible the complaint is 												

	<p>referred to a manager to review and is replied to within 10 working days.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the tenant still remains unhappy the tenant has the option to proceed to either a Director review or a Tenant Panel to make a final decision. • The tenant's final recourse is to either go to the Housing Ombudsman or the Designated Person.
How is feedback on the performance of contractors sought?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All of our surveys are conducted and collected by WCH. • In the case of our largest contractor Engie who undertake our improvement programme, a survey is filled out by the tenant on completion of the works via a tablet. • All completed responsive repairs generate a paper survey, which is sent out with a freepost envelope. We get on average 200 returns per month. • Our grounds and cleaning contracts are sent out via text, with a link to an online survey. This is rotated on a monthly basis to cover all community areas. Each area gets surveyed twice a year. • Our Gateway Membership Team has run in partnership with the organisation, a number of Tenants Question Time events, which is another channel for tenants to feedback on our contractors.
What is the procedure for logging complaints about contractors?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We introduced this year a new complaints handling software. • Our complaint handling process is outlined above.
How does WCH follow up on the feedback?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All tenants who express negative feedback are phoned by our Customer Relations Team (CRT) to understand the issue in greater detail and where possible to resolve the complaint. • The key issues are feedback to the team and an ongoing dialogue is opened with the tenant via CRT team member. • The feedback is logged and fed back to the relevant team(s) to make service improvements and is discussed at our monthly performance meeting. • Complaints are also discussed at contract meetings to ensure lessons are learnt. • We publish any improvements in our quarterly "Tenant Voice" publication and on our website.
What is the process for quality assuring the repairs/maintenance undertaken?	<p>There are a number of ways that we ensure the quality of the repairs / maintenance which we provide, these include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10% of repairs are visited to check value for money and quality by our Responsive Repairs Team Leaders • 100% of completed improvement works such as kitchens, bathrooms and windows are post inspected against the contractor specification for quality and VFM. • Trained technical staff, post inspects cyclical maintenance contracts.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3rd party quality assurance consultants are used for gas and electrical maintenance. • We are members of Gas Safe and ECA which requires us to meet the required technical standards for gas and electrics. • Robust contract meetings are held to discuss quality of works with contractors. • Contractors have their own quality assurance processes, which include checks by their own staff. • All complaints registered around workmanship will receive a visit to review the quality of the works
<p>How does WCH ensure that service standards are being maintained, especially in communal areas?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WCH has service standards and schedules which are published on our website. • Grounds and cleaning maintenance inspections are undertaken by Neighbourhood Officers and Mobile Estates Officer against a visual standard document. • We have recently introduced tenant inspectors for grounds and cleaning contracts, which work with us to maintain the expected standards • Estate “walkabouts” are undertaken by the Senior Estate Officer alongside residents, stakeholders and the Neighbourhood Officers. • We have a team of Mobile Estate Officers who undertakes visual checks and report any communal maintenance issues. • 10% of communal repairs are post inspected by our Responsive Repairs Team Leaders
<p>How are details of repairs/maintenance communicated to residents before and after they take place?</p>	<p>Repairs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have a detailed repairs policy and tenants guide which outlines what we are responsible for and what the tenant is, available on our website. • Residents can track their repairs via our new Digital Tenancy Service, which automatically updates the status of the repair. • If contacting us via telephone an appointment date is verbally provided to the tenant. • A text is also sent confirming the appointment shortly after the call. • A reminder text is sent to the tenant 24 hours before the visit. • Each completed repair generates a customer satisfaction survey. • We also call 20% of completed repair on the next day to check that everything was completed to their satisfaction. <p>Planned Maintenance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An introductory letter is sent advising of the inclusion in the programme. This for example could be for a new kitchen.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our contractor will make contact with the tenant to arrange a convenient time to survey. • A VFM assessment is made to ensure the specification of works meets the financial valuation. • If a communal planned programme, such as roofing, letters are send in advance to notify of timescales and advising of any anticipated disruption. • We have also held tenant events to engage the community in the works process. • Post inspections are arranged by the contractors to deal within any defects.
<p>How are external contractors trained in customer services?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All contractors signup to our code of conduct. • Our largest contractor Engie are members of the Institute of Customer Services and score an overall satisfaction (across all of their contracts) of 78.8%. • Our larger contractors are judged on customer satisfaction, Engie currently is achieving 96% customer satisfaction year to date. • All Contractors will have different approaches (we use in excess of 25) all must be polite and courteous, wear uniform and hold ID.
<p>When are the in-house repairs and maintenance team used and when are external contractors used?</p>	<p>In house staff undertakes the majority of day-to-day repair tasks and works to vacant properties. Contractors are used when:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works are of a specialised nature for servicing (e.g. alarms, emergency lighting etc.) • Works are capital investment planned maintenance (renewal of windows, doors etc.) • Works require specialist knowledge, training or accreditation (Fire risk assessment works, commercial boiler works, sprinkler systems)