

Review Update (Follow up)

Review:	Watford Community Housing Trust
Committee/Task Group:	Watford Community Housing Trust Task Group
Committee/Task Group Chair:	Councillor Asif Khan
Final report published:	26 September 2013
Housing Trust's initial response:	Received by email 30 October 2013 and by post 4 November 2013
Cabinet response:	2 December 2013 – Recommendations endorsed
Scrutiny consideration of response:	28 November 2013

Communication

Recommendation 1:	All new tenants should be visited by an officer of the Trust to ensure that they are satisfied with their living arrangements.
Housing Trust's initial response:	This is currently undertaken by staff. If there have been individual problems, please make us aware of the case(s) and we will investigate.
Latest update:	Councillors are asked to provide information on individual cases, as necessary.

Recommendation 2:	To inform residents that their neighbourhood teams are available to clarify any issues.
Housing Trust's initial response::	This is undertaken on a regular basis via our quarterly newsletter, Gateway News.
Latest update:	See initial response.

Recommendation 3:	The handbook must be made more user-friendly, updated regularly and accessible to all residents.
Housing Trust's initial response::	We are currently in the process of reviewing our handbook and will take on board the comments made by the Task Group.
Latest update:	Draft handbook being discussed by Gateway Communication Group (note this is a group of tenants and residents) for re-issue in 2014/15.

Recommendation 4:	To improve clarity in presentation of bills sent to residents ensuring that all charges are clearly itemised.
Housing Trust's initial response::	As explained at the meeting there is a legal requirement to provide information in a prescribed format. However, we work with our residents in a number of ways to make these more meaningful. We signpost our residents to our staff and also other agencies for assistance if necessary.
Latest update:	See initial response.

Recommendation 5:	To provide a clear process for residents to query any charges with which they disagree.
Housing Trust's initial response::	We encourage customer feedback and any queries are dealt with via this process. Further details are available on request. If there have been individual problems, please make us aware of the case(s) and we will investigate.
Latest update:	See initial response.

Recommendation 6:	To reduce the waiting time for residents to an 'industry acceptable' service. The telephone should be answered within six rings.
Housing Trust's initial response:	As explained at the meeting we are currently reviewing the performance of our Customer Service Centre and this will be picked up as part of this process.
Latest update:	The review of our Customer Service Centre has produced an improvement plan which will be delivered through Q4 2013/14 to improve our service.

Recommendation 7:	A free phone number should be introduced for residents to call the Trust.
Housing Trust's initial response:	This is already in place, the number is 0800 218 2247.
Latest update:	See initial response.

Recommendation 8:	The Trust website must be updated daily to ensure its contact details are current.
Housing Trust's initial response:	Noted
Latest update:	See initial response.

Recommendation 9:	The Trust website must reflect the needs of its tenants and its aims and strategies.
Housing Trust's initial response:	The current website was procured with a team made up of staff and tenants. There is no plan to replace the current website.
Latest update:	See initial response.

Recommendation 10:	Staff who communicate with residents must have regular training.
Housing Trust's initial response:	As noted in our recent Investors in People Gold accreditation we have a committed and well-trained staff team. We continue to provide training to our staff as necessary.
Latest update:	See initial response.

Recommendation 11:	A clear process needs to be put in place where vulnerable residents are recognised and services provided to them to meet their individual needs.
Housing Trust's initial response:	We have undertaken a significant amount of work on the profile of our tenants and are aware of the support needs of a number of tenants. We tailor our services as necessary.
Latest update:	See initial response.

Recommendation 12:	The process to communicate with vulnerable residents must be clear. Staff should be proactive in dealing with vulnerable residents.
Housing Trust's initial response:	See 10 and 11 above.
Latest update:	See initial response.

Service Charges

Recommendation 13:	Service Charges must be constantly reviewed.
Housing Trust's initial response:	Already in place.
Latest update:	See initial response.

Recommendation 14:	Service Charges should be itemised for each individual property and items clearly defined.
Housing Trust's initial response:	Already in place.
Latest update:	See initial response.

Repairs

Recommendation 15:	The 'first time' satisfaction rate must be increased substantially.
Housing Trust's initial response:	As explained at the meeting this is one of our "Top 5 KPIs" and the direction is positive.
Latest update:	Various operational enhancements are being introduced to improve performance.

Recommendation 16:	A much more vigorous monitoring of contractors by managers must be undertaken.
Housing Trust's initial response:	Our new Organisation structure ensures this now takes place.
Latest update:	Robust contractor reviews are being maintained.

Recommendation 17:	Residents to be positively encouraged to return satisfaction surveys.
Housing Trust's initial response:	Noted although as we are sure members are aware it is difficult to get people to complete surveys.
Latest update:	A project is being undertaken to launch a new repairs survey commencing April 2014. (Repairs and the way they are delivered are of course major priority for our customer) The project will look at ways in which we can encourage residents to return them including use of prize draws & whether e-mail approach can improve return rates.

Recommendation 18:	The Trust must be much more accountable to its residents and stakeholders.
Housing Trust's initial response:	Noted, however the Board and membership have agreed our Business Plan 2012 -2017, which clearly states our 4 corporate objectives.
Latest update:	See initial response.

Performance

Recommendation 19:	The Trust should demonstrate to tenants that they are working towards joining the top quartile group of its peers.
Housing Trust's initial response:	As indicated at the meeting, the Trust is working on its Top 5 KPIs.
Latest update:	See initial response.

Recommendation 20:	The Trust should reaffirm its commitment that the development of 500 new homes in the areas of Watford and Three Rivers by 2016 is a main objective of its business plan.
Housing Trust's initial response:	One of the Trust's Corporate Objectives is to deliver 500 new homes by 2017.
Latest update:	The commitment remains unchanged and a potential pipeline of 1,250 will ensure the delivery.