

**Hammersmith and Fulham Local Scrutiny Panel**

**Minutes of meeting held on 28 November 2017**

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**Present:**

**Interim Chair:**

(PO)

**Residents:**

(AB), (NGM), (FHA), (MPN), (JQ), (JS), (SV), (LV), (SG),

**Leashold:**

(GG) - PA to Director of NH Home Ownership  
(TN) - New Build Operations Manager  
(CJF) - Housing Operations Manager ATB7  
(SA) - Housing Operations Manager ATB6  
(AC) - Regional Head of Housing  
(DF) - Complaints Officer

**Observers:**

(RW) -Resident Involvement Community Connector

**Apologies:**

Staff: (JP) -Project Manager, Tenancy Support Programme

**1. a. Chair's welcome and opening remarks**

1a.1 Chair welcomed the panel to the meeting and apologised on behalf of those that could not attend. JP hoped to be able to give her presentation via Skype.

1a.2 All present introduced themselves. There had been several changes to staff. GG has replaced LD as PA to Director of NH Home Ownership. SA has taken over Team 6.

**b. Housekeeping, minutes of last meeting (5<sup>th</sup> September 2018) & matters arising**

1b.1 Re. point 2a.7- AB said the words 'dismissive and informative' should be changed as they did not reflect his views, he felt 'did not answer the question' would be better.

1b.2 Re. Point 2a.19- AB felt the point had not been actioned. AC reassured AB that SA had been brought in to improve performance. PO asked to address the issue later.

1b.3 All agreed on the minutes from the previous meeting.

**2. a. Performance Report- Leasehold**

- 2a.1 TN pointed out a fall in satisfaction across the borough. He explained it is common at this time of year due to service charges. There has been no increase in arrears; this may be due to bills being sent out later.
- 2a.2 TN stressed repairs as the main area for improvement in H&F. He explained NHH efforts to digitalise the system to improve efficiency. MPN added he had tested the new system app at NHH Offices and it worked well.
- 2a.4 MPN asked if the new repairs app would depend on residents having internet access. TN assured the residents that housing officers would continue to operate so if people preferred to do things through more traditional channels they still could.
- 2a.8 PO asked if LSP members would be able to test the new app. SG and JQ volunteered to do so. TN explained staff were still testing the app at the moment. **TN to circulate more information about the app and testing it in Six Week Update if available.**
- 2a.5 TN stated customer satisfaction with the value for money of the service charge has fallen. He indicated staff training and the website as ways to improve this.
- 2a.6 TN highlighted the fall in arrears as a possible result of improvements in PMOs approach to budgeting. **TN to include the top 10 arrears in the Six Week Update.**
- 2a.7 LV asked what the correlation was between budgeting and fewer arrears more widely. TN clarified it is hard to tell when looking at the borough as a whole. **TN to look into the possibility of picking apart the figures for the Six Week Update.**
- 2a.8 PO wanted to know what action NHH was taking to improve satisfaction. TN explained NHH had procured a new service charge system that aimed to improve transparency.
- 2a.9 PO asked if the timing of questionnaires had an effect. TN said yes, NHH tries to time them for the best results.
- 2a.10 TN explained NHH is actively looking to reassess the repairs system to stop the disparity between payments being made and actions being taken. He gave the example of Plentific being trialled by Home Options Extra Care.
- 2a.11 AB asked if there was another way of reporting repairs statistics over a longer period to identify problems. **TN will look into including a longer scale of data in future.**
- 2a.12 TN stated there was 1 complaint review that had been handled on time. AB requested trends in complaints be highlighted. JS asked if the LSP could know the outcome of the review case. **TN to find out what categories complaints fall into and how much information can be shared about individual complaints.**

#### **b. Performance Report- Permanent Rented Housing**

- 2b.1 CJF highlighted staff changes.
- 2b.2 CJF regretted arrears were below target so in future there would be a more joined up approach between the 3 teams in H&F to improve consistency.
- 2b.3 CJF noted the positive result of support from H&F council on tenancy sustainment.

- 2b.4 CJF was pleased lettings were all on target especially given staff changes.
- 2b.5 CJF stated complaint reviews had improved with Team 7 the strongest. However Stage 1 complaints responses could be better so continuing to remind and support staff.
- 2b.6 CJF stressed inspections as a key area for improvement. Several new starters had been unable to find inspections but this will not be relevant as staff get to know estates.
- 2b.7 CJF admitted there is still a way to go to improve on arrears, especially for Teams 6 and 7 but measures and staff are being put in place to deal with it.
- 2b.9 AC added debt in Team 6 had stagnated. Team 5 had done some very positive work that had helped across the board. Team 6's annual visits had also stagnated. FHA questioned if annual visits should be standard practice. AC clarified yes.
- 2b.11. AC said Team 6's voids had also stagnated and their estate visits had dropped off. However the problems with Team 6 were largely due to staff changes and sickness and the situation has improved.
- 2b.12 AC emphasised now SA was in place there are clear action plans for individual performance areas and more generally for different works streams i.e. voids etc. Noted we would expect voids to spike then decrease in the longer term as we work through these.
- 2b.13 NGM posed two questions. 1. Do staff have an exit interview when they leave and can NHH offer more opportunities to hold onto staff for longer? 2. Is one floating Housing Officer enough?
- 2b.14 AC said that as part of the leavers process an exit interview is offered for staff and NHH staff turnover is no higher than other equivalent organisations as a lot of the movement was internal. **AC suggested a future LSP session be focussed on recruitment and staffing if of specific interest.**
- 2b.15 CJF explained that although there is only 1 floating officer at the moment, there are plan to get another before long.
- 2b.16 MPN asked how sickness leave was covered. CJF explained NHH use temp staff to cover as much as possible because they recognise the importance of a staff presence.
- 2b.17 PO asked about why there are such differences between teams' performance. SA explained ATB1 had different arrangements and ATB6's problems were staffing-related.
- 2b.18 FHA asked how many voids there were and why they were empty. **CJF and SA to give details of current voids at next meeting**
- 2b.18 AB wanted to know if movement of staff within NHH was because Housing Officer was seen as a stepping stone, not a long term role.
- 2b.19 SA underlined it is an entry level job. JS added people in housing tend to move roles a lot. AC reemphasised NHH staff changes are similar to other Housing Associations.
- 2b.20 FHA requested statistics on staff changes. The relevance of this to the LSP was discussed. CJF explained the breadth of experience gained from the Housing Officer role

made officers very employable. TN added NHH has been offering a lot of secondments and opportunities to act up etc so when people are returned to their original role, they often get put with a different team.

- 2b.21 LV asked for an explanation for the drop in external cleaning. **CJF to find out more for the Six Week Update.**
- 2b.22 LV suggested some complaint themes could be grouped together as problems with staff/training. CJF responded that. NHH is doing a lot of work with housing officers to improve communications and build relationships with tenants, for example 'Lunch and Learns' to deal with difficult issues. **CJF to look for statistics of how these are working.**
- 2b.23 LV wondered whether the high volume of repairs requests faced by Wates in the first week of their contract was due to problems left over from before. CJF explained the statistics were largely due to IT problems which will be resolved as soon as possible.
- 2b.24 NGM wanted to recognise there had been more positive, proactive behaviour by NHH and that the statistics reflect this. PO agreed.
- 2b.25 JS asked if some of the complaints themes listed in the figures could be counted under repairs. **CJF agreed to show an overview of repairs complaints as well as a breakdown.**
- 2b.26 SV asked what was considered an acceptable timeframe to reply to emails. CJF said NHH has no official deadline but staff reply as soon as they can. SA added staff try to acknowledge they have received an email, even if they can't reply until later.
- 2b.27 JS asked if staff email accounts have automatic responses to say an email has been received. SA said this is not standard at NHH.
- 2b.28 **FHA wanted to know how things were going with Wates.** CJF admitted NHH were working with Wates to resolve ongoing issues and HOs would follow up with customers.
- 2b.29 AB enquired how Universal Credit would effect H&F. **CJF will deliver a report on measures being implemented to deal with Universal Credit at the next LSP.**

### **3. Tenancy Support**

- 3.1 JP sent her apologies; she was absent due to illness. Sound problems meant giving the presentation Skype was not possible. CJF ran through the presentation with any questions to be forwarded to JP and responded to in the Six Week Update.
- 3.2 The presentation highlighted four aspects of tenancy support: the volunteering programme, hardship funds, social value contracts, and the partnerships network.
- 3.3 The seven step process by which partnerships work was explained.
- 3.4 Most of Tenancy Support's work relates to Welfare reform cutting people's income. For example Moneywise workshops train people to budget effectively.
- 3.5 The biggest obstacle for the programme is people have to agree to be referred to training. PO asked if there were measures in place to engage people who refuse. CJF explained support agencies and housing officers do follow-up with these individuals.

3.6 Statistics demonstrated a decline in arrears among successful referrals with 44% of people's arrears decreasing after a successful outcome.

3.7 **PDF version of presentation to be distributed by email.**

#### **4. Complaints Procedure Changes**

4.1 DF introduced himself and his role investigating how to improve complaints procedures.

4.2 Initial research into complaints was done in the summer and now DF's team were taking feedback on the changes they proposed. They hope to go to the policy forum in January.

4.3 DF outlined the trends of the feedback received so far through surveys done by The Leadership Factor. The main areas improvements are levels of contact; speed of responses; the lack of objectivity in complaint handling; the follow-up process.

4.4 DF regretted NHH were rated in the bottom 10% for complaint handling in a recent sample compiled by The Leadership Factor. Two key problems are maladministration of repair follow-ups and communications, and escalation of complaints caused by mishandling at the early stages.

4.5 SV asked how someone could complain about a Housing Officer. DF explained a manager should deal with any complaints about Housing Officers.

4.6 DF's first proposal change was for managers to sign off all complaint responses to improve objectivity. SV thought it unnecessary unless complaints were very serious.

4.7 FHA suggested a centralised complaints team to relieve pressure on housing officers. JS added staff could specialise in different problem areas to make it easier to spot trends.

4.8 JS asked if it is viable to have a complaints manager. FHA agreed; from her experience as a complaints receiver she believed a separate complaints officer would be more neutral. DF noted the idea but it was beyond his scope. LV felt a complaints manager sign-off could further delay responses to complaints.

4.9 AB proposed staff training in objectivity. LV added written records should be made of phone conversations for clarity and to reference later.

4.10 DF's second suggestion was a timeline negotiated with the customer, case-by-case instead of the 10 working day deadline. PO voiced her preference for 10 days because it gave a goal. LV agreed the deadline should be applied but with flexibility.

4.11 NGM suggested a holding letter be sent to acknowledge receipt of complaints even if the response came later.

4.12 DF moved on to propose more compensation be awarded at stage 1 to reduce unnecessary costly Stage 2 reviews. SV was concerned this might create a culture of automatic compensation to improve customer satisfaction ratings. LV asked for data on the costs of stage 2 complaints.

4.14 DF explained there may be future investigation into the follow-up process. PO suggested asking for residents what was/wasn't dealt with after they complained.

## 5. Update on Chair

- 5.1 PO asked anyone was interested in being the permanent chair to speak to OL from RI
- 5.2 PO happy to continue as Interim Chair.

## 6. Discussion points for next meeting

- 6.1 **GG to send actions to PO as soon as possible (within 10 days latest) to decide discussion points for next meeting.**

## 7. AOB

- 7.1 GG gave an overview of the progress on the merger between NHH and Genesis. She said little has been decided except a shadow Executive Board and a potential directorate structure.
- 7.2 AC highlighted a number of consultations with residents to collect their views, the main points from which will be put in a document and given to shareholders. He reminded everyone it is not a forgone conclusion.
- 7.3 PO stated the cut-off date for consultations was 6<sup>th</sup> December.
- 7.4 LV raised the issue she had received leaflets to give out to reassure people but did not feel comfortable doing so. **TN to feed this back to Resident Involvement.**
- 7.5 AB emphasised the importance of resident involvement if the merger goes ahead. **AC suggested the panel take the theme forward for escalation to MV and AMF.**

**MEETING CLOSED**