Housing Operations Committee

Report title:	SCHape Panel Report		
Meeting date:	5 February 2024		
Report from:	Becci Youlden – Head of Customer Experience		
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Decision type:	~~Assurance~~	Approval	Information

1. Report overview/purpose

1.1 This report provides an overview of the Communal Areas SCHape Panel Review and sets out the recommendations made by the panel.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

(i) DISCUSS the report and recommendations
(ii) AGREE the next steps.

3. Consultation and engagement

3.1 This was a tenant led activity.

4. Financial implications

4.1 Potential financial implication of some of the recommendations. These will be looked at in more detail as part of the action planning.

5. Legal implications

5.1 None.

6. Risk implications

6.1 None.

7. Equalities implications

7.1 None

SCHAPE
Residents Panel
Solihull Community Housing
Achieving Performance Excellence

Communal areas

1. Introduction

As a Panel we have developed a process whereby we choose a subject for review based on performance and feedback from residents. We focus on an area where there may be poorer performance or gaps in services and where the Panel could add value in terms of making recommendations for improvement.

Following a review of data from recent surveys, the panel requested that they review communal areas as the levels of satisfaction were low.

The review has been supported by the Engagement Team and various other officers and the Panel would like to thank those involved.

2. Overview of review process

Working session 1: Overview of service

The Panel received a presentation from officers from the Neighbourhood Services team who explained that communal areas could include services that are managed by Solihull Council as well as those managed by SCH.

Working session 2: Site visits

Members of the Panel made visits to high rise and low rise blocks to get a better understanding of the communal cleaning service. It was also an opportunity to talk to staff who manage and work in this area.

Working session 3: Survey of Estate Assistants

The Panel felt it was important to gauge the views of staff who spend a large part of their working day dealing with issues in the communal areas. This survey gave invaluable insight to the Panel.

Working Session 4: Development of recommendations

Using information gathered during the review, the Panel developed a set of recommendations.

3. Summary of findings

This review has identified that by making some minor changes, for example providing more monitoring and reviewing the process for dealing with complaints, there could be a marked improvement to levels of satisfaction.

However, in order to make these enhancements, more resources will be needed to support this.

Data shows that there is discrepancy between what our residents consider to be communal areas and our own definition. This is highlighted when we drill down into the areas and property types of residents who have taken part in the surveys.

During conversations with staff and residents, we noted that:

- The current cleaning contractor is under-performing and little progress has been made since the start of the contract.
- Generally, the standard of cleaning is higher in the high rises than the low rises. This is attributed to the higher frequency of visits.
- A “one size fits all” approach to low rises doesn’t appear to be providing the best service to our residents, particularly given the different styles of blocks and levels of improvement works undertaken in them (for example the envelope scheme).
- Residents are unclear about whose responsibility services like grounds maintenance and refuse collections are.
- Communication in regard to communal area management isn’t as robust as it could be
- At present, dissatisfaction with the service is investigated by the contractor. It was felt that it was not good practice that the contractor should investigate themselves.

4. Recommendations

Recommendation	Benefits to SCH and customers
Communal cleaning service 1. Pinnacle have been under-performing for a significant amount of time and it is clear that the level of contract management undertaken by SCH has been high. Are these the right contractors for us, considering levels of satisfaction?	Changing contractors should lead to better outcomes for residents More time for staff as the management of the contract is taking a lot of their time
2. Investigate the frequency of visits to low rises with a view to reducing to two visits in some blocks (but with more time spend at each visit). And more visits to others.	Residents will receive a more appropriate service for their block. More time will be spent in blocks where needed.
3. Introduce more monitoring of the service.	Current monitoring programme of monthly in high rises and quarterly in low rises

	does not give SCH a true picture of the service provided to residents.
4. SCH to investigate all dissatisfaction reported about the service (currently these are investigated by Pinnacle).	Provide a more transparent service to residents with better management of the contract and ensure we are meeting our regulatory responsibilities with the Housing Ombudsman.
5. Introduce surveys to all residents of high & low rise blocks asking residents for their views of the service.	Valued feedback from residents will enhance the monitoring of the contract and help to improve the service.
6. Include more information in the high rise welcome visits detailing SCH responsibilities as well as those of the resident.	Residents will be more informed about the communal cleaning service.
7. Introduce a new volunteer role of High Rise Advocate who new tenants can go to for advice about high rise living.	New residents will be supported by the High Rise Advocate, particularly while they settle into their new home.
8. Issue periodic communications to inform residents of what cleaning is done in their blocks.	Residents will be better informed.
9. Provide regular communications with residents (especially in high rises) to remind them of their responsibilities regarding keeping areas clear & not leaving rubbish (especially in stairwells).	Residents will be more aware of the importance of this, particularly with regards to fire safety.
Grass cutting & refuse service 1. Article in spring newsletter about grass cutting, explaining what the service is / isn't.	Residents will have a better understanding of the service provided.
2. More communications to explain the difference between general waste & recycling.	Residents will have a better awareness and understanding of the refuse provision in their block.
Walkways & rear access pathways . Share SMBC's timetable of fly tip removal and weed spraying on our website so that residents are more informed.	Information will be more accessible to residents.
Ad hoc 1. Add some narrative to the survey question.	Residents will be clearer about what is meant by the question.
2. Investigate better working practices for Estate Assistants when bulk removal of soft furnishings is needed.	The current procedure involves multiple visits by the Estate Assistants. Better working practices will free up more time for them, allowing them to focus more time on other duties.

5. Next steps

a. The Panel would ask SCH officers to consider the recommendations and work with the SCHape Panel to develop an action plan of those recommendations that can be reasonably implemented. Timescales and responsible officers should be agreed, and the implementation of the agreed recommendations will be monitored by the Panel.

b. A debrief session will take place to assess what has gone well with the process and methods of the review and what could be improved for the next review. The Terms of Reference will be updated and the process we use be updated.