SOLIHULL COMMUNITY HOUSING

HOUSING OPERATIONS COMMITTEE 15 NOVEMBER 2021

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER SERVICE TRANSFORMATION AND BUSINESS SUPPORT

SCHape Panel Report

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 The attached report provides an overview of the first SCHape Panel Review and sets out the recommendations made by the panel.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is recommended to:

(i) **DISCUSS** the report and recommendations

(ii) **AGREE** the next steps

3. Financial Implications

3.1 There are some financial implications to some of the recommendations. Where this is potentially the case, the Panel have asked that the recommendations be explored rather than implemented to take into account finances.

4. Equality and Diversity Implications

4.1 Some recommendations suggest improvements to the accessibility and quality of information for those with protected characteristics

5. Risk Management Implications

5.1 None.

6. Value for money and efficiency considerations/implications

6.1 The implementation of some recommendations could lead to efficiencies in the process.

7. Tenant Involvement/Consultation

7.1 This was a tenant led activity.

8. Consistent with Strategic Vision

8.1 Always listening to customers: Taking the opportunity to listen to our customers is key to delivering services which are both effective and efficient.

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SCHAPE
Residents Panel
Solihull Community Housing
Achieving Performance Excellence

1. Introduction

This is the first review of the SCHape Panel. A series of training and awareness sessions have taken place over the last five months to cover the following

- An introduction to Scrutiny and getting to know you sessions
- An introduction to SCH (including an introduction to Senior officers)
- How to undertake a review
- Using performance data

The Panel agreed how to undertake the review, using a bootcamp method. This involved scoping out a review and then inviting other relevant tenants and officers to review the subject over two sessions. This should include senior officers who can make decisions at the time of the review. The Panel are keen that the service reviews are done in partnership with SCH and that the Panel is seen as a critical friend.

The review has been supported by Sam Goodwin from TPAS and various officers from SCH and the Panel would like to thank those involved.

2. Choosing the review

Working session 1

As a Panel we considered the following information

- Performance reports for the last 12 months, with comparisons over the last 3 years
- Tenant satisfaction information
- Complaints

Based on the information two key areas were considered, Voids and ASB. After

discussion, and in consultation with SCH officers it was decided to focus on voids. This was because all performance indicators were rated red and tenant satisfaction was below target.

Working session 2: scoping the review

The Panel received a presentation from Carol Trappett and Becci Youlden which provided context around:

- The void process
- The void standard
- What residents are saying about the void process
- The challenges and opportunities
- Current improvement plan

It was acknowledged by the panel that:

- There are significant financial constraints so additional funding for recommendations would be difficult. This included acknowledging that it would be very difficult to make significant changes to the void standard.
- There was a lot of improvement activities to the process of getting properties ready to be let and the Panel would not be able to add much more value in this area
- Communication played a significant part in whether tenants were happy with the process

The Panel did identify several gaps and this formed the focus of the review.

3. Focus of the review

Broadly the focus was on the process of letting empty properties covering:

- Understanding the full customer journey/experience. What works and what doesn't?
- How is communication throughout the process impacting positively/negatively?
- What are we doing about difficult to let?
- How far do we adhere to current lettable Standard?

4. Methods of review

The SCHape Panel invited the Empty Homes Inspectors and new residents to join the Panel members to form a Tenant Action Group (TAG). Executive Directors,

Heads of Service and other officers were also invited to take part.

The review took place over two, three-hour sessions, with additional activity happening between the sessions.

Session one:

- Officers provided TAG with a pack of information containing all key communications used in the process of letting properties
- The TAG worked with SCH officers to map out the process and all of the points customers have contact or should have contact. The TAG explored what was working, what wasn't working and where the gaps were.

There were several questions and pieces of work that TAG agreed to undertake and asked SCH to undertake in-between sessions. Additional activity included:

- TAG to review customer communications
- TAG to undertaken empty home inspections to assess adherence to void standards
- Survey of customers who had refused a property to understand refusal reasons
- Clarification of how outstanding repairs are dealt with

Session two:

- Table activities to discuss different forms of communication (Letters, welcome pack and website)
- Presentation by operatives on dealing with outstanding repairs followed by a Q&A session
- Discussion on reasons for refusal
- Discussion on how we advertise properties for let
- Review of Lettable standard

At the end of the two sessions a number of recommendations had been agreed by the Panel, in conjunction with the senior officers at the meeting.

5. Areas of Good practice

The Panel would like to highlight two areas of good practice:

Voids Customer Service Team

The Team provides an effective service to new tenants. The face-to-face contact seven days after moving in means communication is better, issues can be resolved before they escalate, outstanding repairs are booked in, any vulnerabilities can be identified and referrals to other teams made and the team can communicate any key messages. It is obvious that the team care and the SCHape panel would like to recognise the team as a good practice service

Adherence to lettable standard

The Panel thought that the lettable standard in place is fair and reasonable. The Panel identified that apart from some issues with cleaning, the lettable standard is adhered to in the main. This is good to see from a resident point of view.

6. Recommendations

CONCERN	RECOMMENDATION	BENEFITS FOR SCH AND CUSTOMERS
The increasing amount of works needed to empty properties, a number of which are the tenants' responsibility. This can increase the amount of time a property is empty and results in a greater loss of rent	1. Arrangements are made to inspect the property being vacated as soon as the notice to quit is received.	Tenants will be informed what works they need to carry out before they vacate the property. This will potentially save SCH money as they won't have to carry out works that the tenant is responsible for. This will reduce the void time. It will also reduce the amount of money spent on clearing rubbish, garden works etc It will support the furniture recycling scheme
	2. Strengthen the communications around the existing recharge policy. Promote at sign up and throughout the tenancy using a variety of methods and at the void inspection	
	3. Investigate the possibility of introducing a reward scheme for customers who leave properties in a good condition. (£50 voucher?)	
	4. Use the current ongoing review of the tenancy agreement to reinforce the need for homes to be left	

	empty of rubbish and furniture etc when they are vacated.	
	5. Consider the introduction of annual checks so that the condition of properties can be seen. Prioritise these so that properties that have a high turnover are introduced first.	
There is a lack of communication with successful bidders regarding the progress of repairs work on their prospective new home.	6. Successful bidders should be contacted once a week using their preferred method of communication (phone call, text message or email) and kept informed on the progress of the works to their new home.	Better relationship with incoming tenant. Less likelihood of tenant changing their mind about taking a property This will help to cut down on the numbers of offers that are refused.
	7. SCH to look into the feasibility of producing floor plans for each type of property	
There is no clear information available to applicants registering for housing regarding the number of offers of housing they will receive and the consequences of refusing both offers.	8. Provide clearer and more frequent information about the number of offers that they will be made when they register for the waiting list. The consequences of two refusals should be made clear.	This will help to cut down on the numbers of offers that are refused. Staff will be able to focus on customers who have been shortlisted in first place. Customers will be clearer about the process.
	9. Provide regular updates on the website regarding refusal rates, including equating the costs that SCH incur.	
	10. Investigate what is good practice regarding the length of time that a customer is suspended from bidding following two refusals. Consider increasing this from the current three months if appropriate.	

Concerns about the amount of bulk furniture and white goods left in properties that end up being dumped when it can be given to other tenants in need.	11. When outgoing tenant hands in keys, ask them to sign to say that SCH can dispose of anything left in the property as they see fit. 12. Investigate the feasibility of further developing the furniture recycling project.	This will help new tenants who need white goods and furniture Reduce resource and cost of storing unwanted and non-recyclable goods
Key methods of communication are, at times, not consistent, clear, or effective.	13. Review all letters to check for plain English, that they are jargon free, use the correct grammar and flow well. 14. Set out the letting process from the start for all customers. 15. Review the website, particularly around accessibility, consistency and presentation. 16. Review the Welcome Pack by reducing the content to make it more appealing and relevant. Also ensure that it is inclusive for all. Consider moving some of the content online and in different formats such as videos. 17. Ensure that all methods of communication have the same continuity of language. 18. Revisit the Fair Treatment Assessment to ensure it is up to date and relevant, particularly around options for contacting customers. 19. Use the Readers Group to assist with all communication reviews.	Clear easy to understand processes. It will be easier to manage the expectations of customers. The process will be transparent for all. Better customer experience
Having an SCH website and a separate Home	20. Consider merging the two websites. If this is not possible, make the language	Better customer experience

options website is very confusing in terms of language and navigation	consistent and make the links between the two websites clearer.	
Provision of additional information to residents	21. On Home options website update the “show local services” element of the property adverts to “My Solihull Maps” that has access to more local services. .	Provide more comprehensive information to residents on the local area To help to manage customer’s expectations
	22. Provide clearer and more frequent information on the lettable standard especially at the start of the process. Take before and after photos of void properties and show these on the website.	
	23. Have a regular feature of tenancy do’s and don’ts in the Tenants Newsletter.	
Concerns that there are some inconsistencies in adhering to the lettable standard in relation to cleaning	24. Ensure that the voids cleaning contractors are aware of SCH’s expectations and standards to ensure consistency with the cleaning of voids.	
	25. Enhance the role of empty home inspectors to monitor adherence to cleaning standards.	

7. 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 be 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, facilitated by TPAS 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.