



Queens
Cross
Housing
Association

The Residents Task Force Scrutiny Report

**Review of the communication to residents on
our Estate Caretaker and Handypersons
Services**

June 2018

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1** The Residents Task Force (RTF) are pleased to report the findings of our latest scrutiny inspection for consideration by Queens Cross Housing Association.
- 1.2** This report details the outcome of the group's independent review of Queens Cross Housing Association's communication to residents on its Estate Caretaking and Handypersons Services.

The RTF have been supported by the Association's Performance and Customer Engagement (Scrutiny) Officer in carrying out the review and drafting this report. They all worked closely with the Association's Customer Services Manager, Audrey Murphy and Head of Technical Services, Peter O'Brien to complete this inspection.

- 1.3** This scrutiny activity was carried out by a sub group of the RTF and the three RTF members who participated are Anne McCurley, Christine Wilson and David Rogers.

A full list of the RTF members is included as Appendix 1 of this report. Staff members who were involved in the inspection will also be listed in Appendix 2.

2.0 Background

- 2.1** It had been a recurring theme at service improvement meetings that our customers are not clear on the service they should receive from Queens Cross Housing Association's Estate Caretaker and Handyperson services. This is largely due to a lack of information available on the Association's website or in booklet format for either service.
- 2.2** The Performance and Customer Engagement (Scrutiny) Officer queried whether this was something that the RTF would like to look at in more detail as a group with a view to making recommendations for improvement.
- 2.3** After some discussion with staff who manage each of these services, it was agreed that a sub group of volunteers from the Resident Task Force should be involved in suggesting ideas on the best way to communicate the services available for residents. It was agreed that the Performance and Customer Engagement (Scrutiny) Officer would lead RTF Members Anne McCurley, Christine Wilson and David Rogers on this scrutiny inspection with involvement from Audrey Murphy, Customer Services Manager and Peter O'Brien, Head of Technical Services.
- 2.4** The Customer Services Manager and Head of Technical Services were both keen to hear the views of residents who use our services and use this to help inform improvements. The Customer Services Manager explained her reasons for getting involved are to find a way of communicating the responsibilities of tenants and Queens Cross HA .It was agreed that the inspection would begin

in May 2017 with October 2017 cited as an approximate timescale for completion. (Due to unforeseen circumstances, the inspection was delayed by a few months).

2.5 The Performance and Customer Engagement (Scrutiny) Officer organised the first meeting of the Estate Services and Handypersons scrutiny inspection for 19 May 2017. It was agreed that three members of the RTF who expressed a particular interest in this topic would participate in the inspection.

2.6 The RTF has been established to:

- Develop an annual programme for scrutiny work at the beginning of each year. Meetings are held every six to eight weeks.
- Identify areas of QCHAs services that need to be reviewed.
- Independently scrutinise services and performance in accordance with the Charter.
- Make recommendations to QCHAs Management Teams and the Board
- Report to tenants and other customers on progress being made
- To review QCHAs Annual Return of the Charter to the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR)
- Act as a critical friend of QCHA
- Review and monitor its own performance
- Challenge weakness
- Promote equality and diversity.

3.0 The Scrutiny Inspection – *What we did*

3.1 *Scrutiny Toolkit*

The Performance and Customer Engagement (Scrutiny) Officer designed a scrutiny toolkit to assist members in the inspection. It can be used as a record of the scrutiny inspection. It was explained to the panel and staff present that this is a toolkit that can be universally applied to any inspection in future.

3.2 At the first inspection meeting on 19 May, everyone present completed an inspection form citing the start date of the scrutiny activity with an approximate completion date set for October 2017.

3.3 RTF members and staff scoped out the inspection together; first of all by linking it to the relevant Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC) outcomes. Members referenced charter outcomes 1, 2, 6 and 13 as being significant to this inspection. The inspection is most likely to impact four charter outcomes and those identified as being of most importance are:

- 1. Equalities**
- 2. Communication**
- 3. Estate Management, Anti-Social Behaviour, Neighbour Nuisance and Tenancy Disputes**
- 4. Value for Money**

3.4 For the first meeting, members were provided with an information pack that included;

- 1. Scottish Social Housing Charter (revised April 2017)**
- 2. Customer Service Standards**
- 3. Annual Performance Reports 2016 and 2017**
- 4. ARC Benchmarking results – Satisfaction with management of neighbourhood 2015 and 2016**

Prior to this, at an RTF meeting in April, members received a presentation giving an overview on the Estate Caretaking Service from the Customer Services Manager.

Members also heard a presentation from Peter O'Brien, Head of Technical Services on the service provided by the handypersons team.

3.4 *Gathering Information*

3.5 The group held a discussion about progressing the scrutiny inspection. Members felt that there is very little information available for residents on these two services and that it would be useful to conduct a scrutiny of how both these services **are** communicated to residents.

3.6 For the next meeting, each member was assigned a task that involved gathering information. Two members had access to the internet and one member did not. It was agreed the two members with internet access would test the information currently available on Queens Cross Housing Association's website and compare this with other Housing Associations websites. They would feedback their findings at the next meeting. The third member of the group (without internet access) agreed to test the information available in one of our local neighbourhood offices and also report back.

3.7 Members received a copy of a draft Estate Services and Handypersons Guide which the Customer Services Manager and Head of Technical Services had prepared prior to the meeting for members to review and comment on.

3.8 During the timespan of this inspection, the RTF were given the opportunity to interview Team Leaders of both services to get an understanding of the tasks carried out by them and their staff teams.

3.9 In preparation for the interviews with Team Leaders; the RTF received copies of the job descriptions for each service's Team Leader which gave them insight into the nature of their job role prior to meeting.

3.10 The report will now outline the recommendations made by the RTF regarding Queens Cross Housing Association's communication for residents on the Estate Caretaking and Handypersons Services.

4.0 *Recommendations - Review of Communication on Estate Caretaking and Handypersons Services*

- 4.1 During the course of this scrutiny inspection, the RTF researched information on the Association's website and met with Team Leaders of each service to get an understanding of what is currently available for customers. They were also able to draw on their own personal experiences of being tenants of Queens Cross. They concluded the following and made **sixteen recommendations for Queens Cross Housing Association's consideration**;
- 4.2 The RTF noted that there are **no service standards available online** or in leaflet format on either service. The RTF recommended QCHA should publish service standards online that are relevant to repairs and maintenance to advise customers of timescales and categories for emergency, urgent, routine and non-urgent repairs.
- 4.3 The RTF advised it was easy to find information on QCHA's website about maintenance in general but there is nothing explaining the type of tasks that the handypersons and estate caretakers perform. The RTF would like to see information that lets customers know what they **can** expect from their Handypersons and Estate Caretaking teams.
- 4.4 The RTF would also like to see a section in the leaflet that clarifies what the handypersons and estate caretakers **don't** do.
- 4.5 Some members of the RTF did not know that QCHA had a handypersons team and only became aware when they had the opportunity to interview the Handypersons Team Leader. It is understood that this may be because the estate caretakers and handypersons both wear the same colour of polo shirt making it difficult for customers to distinguish the two. **The RTF recommended that each team should wear a different colour of polo shirt** to ensure they are easily identified.
- 4.6 The RTF would like to see contact details for staff members on the website so that they know who to contact.
- 4.7 The RTF proof read draft guides prepared by managers of each service and made several suggestions for improvement. These included requesting that the language be kept in **plain English language** for all customers.
- 4.8 The RTF made a suggestion that the Association consider applying a charge to residents in breach of their tenancy agreement who don't fulfil their tenant duties such as keeping their bin area clean and tidy.
- 4.9 The RTF suggested that the Association's values and visions are included in each leaflet.
- 4.10 Members felt strongly that there should be a section on fire safety within the Estate Caretaker Service leaflet.
- 4.11 The RTF recommended that it would be easier reading for customers if the

duties carried out by each service are broken down into bullet points rather than lengthy sentences.

- 4.12** The RTF felt that it would be reasonable to introduce a small charge for providing some services such as lock changes, replacing WC seats and changing batteries in smoke detectors and hanging curtain poles for example.
- 4.13** The RTF recommended including an 'if you see it, report it' section to the leaflet. They felt that this would encourage residents to take some responsibility for ensuring their neighbourhoods are well maintained.
- 4.14** The RTF would like to see 'fix my street' and other useful contact numbers included in the leaflet.
- 4.15** The RTF recommended that the out of hour's service should be referred to or signposted in this guide. They also felt that it was important that the out of hour's service is differentiated and that business hours for out of service contact are clarified in the leaflet
- 4.16** The RTF recommended that the Association publicise the new leaflet so that customers' know when it will be available and where they can access it.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1** The RTF worked with staff on this scrutiny inspection for a year and assisted in the development of a new leaflet which they hope will be approved by the Association.
- 5.2** The RTF made *sixteen* recommendations for improvement in total and it is hoped that these have been helpful in supporting Queens Cross Housing Association to improve its communication to tenants on the services provided by our Estate Caretakers and Handypersons Teams.
- 5.3** The RTF look forward to continuing to work in partnership with Queens Cross Housing Association to help with service improvements in future.

Appendix 1

Resident Task Force Members

Anne McCurley	-	Dundasvale Resident
Christine Wilson	-	Queens Cross Resident
David Rogers (resigned)	-	Dundasvale Resident
Jean McPetrie	-	Woodside Resident
Robert Alston	-	Woodside Resident
Marie Anderson	-	Queens Cross Resident
Rosemary Taggart	-	Dundasvale Resident
Sally O'Donnell	-	Queens Cross Resident
Colin Thomson	-	Queens Cross Resident
Andrew Wallis	-	Woodside Resident
Betty McAllister	-	Queens Cross Resident

Appendix 2

Staff members involved in Scrutiny Inspection

Audrey Murphy	-	Customer Services Manager
Peter O'Brien	-	Head of Technical Services
Jacqui Mills	-	Performance & Customer Engagement (Scrutiny) Officer
Gerry O'Donnell	-	Handypersons Team Leader
Stephen Floyd	-	Estate Caretaking Team Leader
Craig Stirling	-	Estate Caretaking Team Leader