

Glen Oaks Housing Association

Service Improvement Group

Customer Service Standards

Inspection Report

15th September 2015

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Glen Oaks Housing Association Service Improvement Group (SIG) is pleased to submit our Customer Service Standards Inspection Report to Glen Oaks Corporate Management Team and Board for their information and consideration.
- 1.2 **Tenant Scrutiny in Context:** Tenant scrutiny is about tenants being actively involved in reviewing how housing services are being delivered, and even more importantly, how they can be improved. The concept of scrutiny is not new in Scotland and has existed in other social policy fields such as education for some time. However, the emphasis on tenant scrutiny and self-assessment is new to the social housing sector here in Scotland and represents a very significant opportunity to develop partnership working between tenants and landlords to deliver excellent housing services.
- 1.3 **Understanding Tenant Led Inspections:** Tenant Led Inspections (TLIs) are a popular way of involving tenants in improving housing services. This is a process where tenants independently inspect a housing service to review how well it is working and to identify recommendations for improvements. It is a tangible way of involving tenants where everyone can see positive results at the end of the process.

Tenant Led Inspections provide opportunities to:

- Inspect housing services from a tenant's perspective
- Hold service providers to account
- Contribute to improvement in housing services, whilst ensuring policies and procedures are clearly understood and implemented
- Inform policy development and delivery
- Ensure resources are used effectively and services delivered provide value for money
- Benchmark and share good practice

The benefits of TLIs are far reaching and include:

- Opportunities to involve new people in tenant participation activities
- Building the capacity of organisations and individuals
- Involving tenants in a constructive and practical way
- Enhancing the landlord's customer care focus
- Developing relationships between tenants, tenants' organisations and landlord staff
- Meeting the requirements of the Scottish Housing Regulator and Scottish Social Housing Charter
- Driving forward improvements in housing services.

- 1.4 **Independent Advice and Development Support:** Glen Oaks Housing Association (the Association) bought in the services of the Tenant Information

Service (TIS) to provide Independent Tenant Advice and Development Support to the tenants and staff involved in the Service Improvement Group scrutiny work.

TIS Mission Statement:

“The Tenants Information Service is the leading organisation in Scotland promoting and inspiring innovative tenant participation practice. We achieve this by providing independent advice, support and training for tenants and landlords”.

1.5 Service Improvement Group Membership

The Service Improvement Group is made of tenants who responded to an Association recruitment drive with tenants and applicants interested in participating in tenant scrutiny. SIG members are:

- Eleanor Stewart
- Elizabeth Rice
- Eva Gotowicz
- James Stewart
- Jamie Rice
- William Irvine
- William Monaghan

2. The Inspection Process

2.1 The Service Improvement Group worked with TIS to:

- Develop and agree a terms of reference and code of conduct for SIG members for approval by the Association
- Increase awareness of tenant scrutiny, the Scottish Social Housing Charter and the Scottish Housing Regulator
- Identify an initial aspect of the Association’s services for inspection
- Increase awareness and application of scrutiny techniques and
- Plan and prepare to carry out an initial inspection

2.2 Agreeing what would be inspected:

SIG members decided that the initial inspection would look at the Association’s Customer Service Standards as this is integral to all aspects of the work of the Association. To allow the SIG members to “test the water” in relation to being involved in an inspection and as requests for a housing application form is often the first time a prospective tenant may communicate with the Association, it was agreed that the first inspection would focus on Customer Service in relation to accessing a housing application form and information.

2.3 What the SIG members did:

Supported by TIS, the SIG members carried out a number of tasks in order to carry out the inspection. This included:

- Consideration of their own views of the positive and negative aspects of Customer Service in their wider experiences
- Discussion on their Customer Service expectations
- Consideration and understanding of the Association's Customer Service Standards
- A mystery shopping exercise in relation to the Customer Service Standards evidenced when making enquiries on how to access a housing application form. This was carried out individually by SIG members through:
 - Research on the Association web site
 - Telephone calls to the office
 - E-mail requests and
 - Office visits

3. Findings and Recommendations

3.1 What the Service Improvement Group liked during the inspection process:

- The Glen Oaks "Guide to our Customer Service Standards" document is an easy to read document that outlines the standards tenants and others should expect in a clear and concise manner.
- The Customer Service Standards are admirable and what tenants and other customers should expect from the Association.
- Although relatively small, the office is welcoming, clean and tidy.
- The office has private rooms to accommodate tenant requests or need to meet staff in private.
- Staff servicing the reception desk during visits or telephone enquiries responded to SIG members promptly and in a welcoming manner.
- Reception staff acknowledge and welcome tenants and visitors to the office and know the names of tenants who use or visit the office regularly.
- When calling the office, staff advised of their names and were able to deal with the enquiry or transfer calls to the relevant person.
- SIG members consider we were treated fairly and with respect by the staff we encountered.
- Responses to SIG member requests for an application form by e-mail were professional in tone and manner.
- The web site is fair to all who browse it, is easy to use and not full of unnecessary advertising.

- Staff advise that hard copies of documents can be sent out if people are unable to download or print documents requested.

	Findings	Recommendations
	The “Guide to our Customer Service Standards”	
A	<p>The SIG members agree that the Standards are positive and that the document is relatively easy to read. However note that English is the only language used and no graphics are used to assist those who may struggle with reading.</p>	<p>1. When printing the document in future, that consideration is given to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of pictures or graphics • Community language information on how to access the document is included on the front cover
	Staffing	
B	<p>The staff members encountered during the inspection process were polite, courteous and friendly. Staff responding to telephone calls advised of their names.</p> <p>However due to the style of name badges used, it is not always easy to read the names on the badges and in some cases staff badges were not worn.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“it’s on the desk”</i> <i>“someone is using it to access the photocopier”</i></p> <p>given as reasons for badges not being worn.</p>	<p>2. The Association provides staff with a “lapel pin” style name badge as well as the type currently used for identification, access to office, use of equipment etc.</p> <p>3. The Association ensures that all staff wear identification badges at all times.</p> <p>4. The Association considers an alternative method to access the photocopier that means staff do not have to remove or share their name badges.</p>
	The Office	
C	<p>The office is clean, tidy, welcoming and accessible with a wide door and access ramp.</p>	<p>5. The Association considers lowering the height of the reception desk to accommodate easier use by Customers using wheelchairs.</p>

	<p>However some improvements could enhance upon the customer experience of the office.</p> <p>The lack of sound proofing in interview rooms means that tenants and other customers in the reception area can hear discussions taking place in these rooms.</p>	<p>6. The Association considers improving the interview rooms in terms of sound proofing and size to accommodate Customers using wheelchairs, prams or accompanied by children or other family members and to allow conversations taking place to be private and confidential.</p> <p>7. The Association considers a more prominent display of the information regarding the availability of a hearing loop system and ensures that all staff are aware of this and it is operation.</p>
	Provision of information requested	
<p>D</p>	<p>Overall SIG member requests for a housing application form were met favourably with members receiving the form and the information booklet quickly after the request was made. However a few improvements could be made based on our experiences such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One e-mail was not responded to for almost a week, with no explanation as to why (<i>when this was checked, it was discovered that the email had never been received</i>) • The allocation booklet is not easy to find on the web site • Staff did not advise that assistance to complete the form can be given • Assistance may be offered to complete form once it has been received at the office, however tenants are not made aware of this. 	<p>8. A supply of forms and information booklets should be kept at the reception desk for staff to hand to Customers, rather than being advised “they are on the stand”.</p> <p>SIG members consider this provides a better customer experience and provides a better service for people who may struggle with reading.</p> <p>9. Information booklets and forms are displayed in alphabetical order and that consideration is given to the use of different colours on each document to allow people to differentiate between each document more easily.</p> <p>10. The Association ensures that both the application form and the information booklet are given out at the same time, either by post, e-mail or in person.</p> <p>11. Staff advise that assistance is available to complete the application form when the form is requested either by phone, e-mail</p>

		<p>or in person.</p> <p>12. The Association ensures that assistance available is further promoted on the web site.</p> <p>13. The Association reviews the web site to ensure that the allocation information booklet is easier to find than at present.</p>
--	--	---

4. Other comments

4.1 During the course of the SIG inspection the following was noted:

- Telephone calls made out of hours are redirected to the out of hours' service as per the Customer Service Standards.
- Where a tenant has left an answering machine message for a staff member, this has been responded to promptly.
- Some of the web site content is out of date, such as information in the properties for rent section, which are at 2013 / 14 figures.

5. Next steps

5.1 The Service Improvement Group requests that the Association responds to the Group within 28 days of receiving this report to receive Association feedback on its content and to agree actions and timescales for the implementation of agreed improvements.

6. Vote of thanks

6.1 The SIG members would like to thank all staff members who assisted in this piece of work and provided information both where this was done knowingly and unknowingly.