

REPORT TO THE BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

December 2013

Tenant Scrutiny Panel

Communications Review

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To make recommendations for improvements to Cadwyn's written communication with tenants.

2.0 Background and Context

- 2.1 The 2011 Tenant Satisfaction survey highlighted a drop in satisfaction in two communications areas, although generally tenants were satisfied with communications methods and felt listened to;
 - 2.1.1 Letters are easy to understand (45% strongly agree v 57% in 2008)
 - 2.1.2 Communicating in the language of choice (56% v 64%)
- 2.2 The panel's review of complaints (July 2013) identified communication as an issue.
- 2.3 Three new tenants have joined the panel and have undertaken training to support this review.
- 2.4 The panel focused their review on written communication after discussing a range of communication methods. Communications as a whole was found to be a very broad area of service and the panel acknowledge there is scope for further review in this area.
- 2.5 The review process has included;
 - 2.5.1 Understanding Cadwyn's Customer Service Standards
 - 2.5.2 Interviewing key staff
 - 2.5.3 Reviewing rent statements sent out to tenants
 - 2.5.4 Examining letters and correspondence to tenants.

3.0 Delivery Outcomes

- 3.1 We place the people who use our services at the heart of our work, putting the citizen first.
- 3.2 We know our current and potential service users and tailor our services and activities accordingly.
- 3.3 Our customers will benefit from cost effective and quality services.
- 3.4 Increased tenant satisfaction for tenants understanding letters and communicating in language of choice.

4.0 Risk

- 4.1 There are no operational or financial risks anticipated with these recommendations as they should be covered by existing budgets.

5.0 Summary

- 5.1 The panel felt that Cadwyn utilises a wide range of options for communication with tenants but there is room for improvement. It was agreed that Cadwyn's use of social media, the website and texting is a positive and often simpler way to contact tenants and keep them informed and involved. The panel would like to add that the new telephone menu system is an improvement, making it easier to speak to the relevant person when they call. The panel thanks staff for their continued support and involvement.
- 5.2 There was particular concern that written correspondence to tenants was at times impersonal, confusing, over-long and suffered from a lack of attention to detail. It was agreed that the Customer Service Standards were not always adhered to (particularly by external contractors). The panel agreed that Rent Statements could be presented in a more user-friendly way.

6.0 Recommendations

- 6.1 Rent Statement: redesign with a summary of total charges, total payments and balance on the front page.
- 6.2 Make letters more understandable to tenants by avoiding complicated or technical language or jargon. Also;
 - 6.2.1 Highlight important information at the start of a letter – or in subject line
 - 6.2.2 Use bullet points rather than long paragraphs
 - 6.2.3 Where possible keep letters to one sheet of A4
 - 6.2.4 Proof read correspondence before sending out
 - 6.2.5 Use illustrations, where appropriate, for clarity
 - 6.2.6 Staff sign own letters, not pp on someone's behalf.
- 6.3 Make a phone call or visit instead of sending a letter, where possible
- 6.4 Ensure that all Cadwyn staff are routinely collating contact and accessibility information on tenants and send out correspondence as requested
- 6.5 An appropriate member of staff should take responsibility for ensuring letters involving multiple queries from a tenant are actioned and resolved.
- 6.6 All staff should demonstrate active listening and note taking to minimise confusion and miscommunication when dealing with tenants over the phone or in person.
- 6.7 Make better use of Cadwyn's tenant database (Open Housing) to record all communication with tenants more effectively.
- 6.8 There should be more regular checks to ensure that the Customer Service standards are being maintained.
- 6.9 Regular and ongoing staff training to include customer service, letter writing and active listening skills.
- 6.10 More tenant involvement in the production of the newsletter and website, with more visible opportunities for tenants to give feedback on aspects of Cadwyn's communication.