

Greatwell Homes Customer Scrutiny Panel (CSP) First Year of a Tenancy

This review is part of the Scrutiny Programme for 2019 as agreed with the Customer Scrutiny Panel (CSP) and Customer Assembly (CA).

CSP for this report consisted of Sharon Medlin, Nicky Blakey, Lucy Moorcroft, Mary Reeves and Francine Pierre.

The Scrutiny Panel carried out this project between January and March 2019.

Scope:

The Scrutiny Panel will look at:

- 1. What support is provided to customer in the first year to make their tenancy sustainable?**
- 2. What are the reasons for tenancy failure?**
- 3. How can we ensure the support we provide is at the right level, right time and value for money?**
- 4. How can we best measure the effectiveness and success of the customer journey in the first year of the tenancy?**

Objective

The purpose of this scrutiny is to review our approach to the first year of a tenancy to ensure that our customers receive the right amount of tenancy support to help all customers to have a successful first year in their tenancy.

Our recommendations are based on desktop research, interviews and internal evidence provided by Greatwell Homes.

Determining Questions

As a new customer to Greatwell Homes what would your ideal expectations be to ensure you were successful in the first year of your tenancy?

- Could we offer different levels of support for different customers?
- How would we identify the levels of support needed?
- How could we tailor our service to support those who have a history of tenancy failure or who have an identified risk of tenancy failure?

Is our current process fit for purpose?

- How do we know that this process is the right one?

- What measures could we introduce to show that tenants have the right level of support?

How could we tailor this process to ensure every customer has the correct amount of support in the first year of the tenancy?

- Are there any trends or patterns from the tenancy failures we should consider?
- What could we learn from customers who have recently completed their 12 month probation to help us improve our service?
- What plans of action do we need to have in place to address those trends?

Exclusions

- Income recovery process.
- Independent living.
- Voids Process (being bought back in-house from April 2019)
- Process prior to being nominated to Greatwell Homes.
- Process following day 365 of customer's tenancy.

What We Did:

Research was divided up between panel members.

- Desktop research
Conducted primarily by Nicky Blakey as the panel's remote researcher.
This included searching for best practice by contacting the East Midlands Tenant Participation Forum and TPAS.
The main finding was that no other Housing Providers have undertaken a scrutiny to this extent of the first year of tenancy.
- Policies and procedures
Documents were provided at the start of this project by James Waterton, with other documents being provided on request.
Documents reviewed include abandoned properties procedure, allocations policy, safer neighbourhood's policy, tenancy flow chart from PTI to PTV, and ASB procedure
These documents informed the panel of how Neighbourhood Housing Officers manage tenancies, in conjunction with the focus group interviews with staff.
- Shadowing
Mary attended some post tenancy visits with Neighbourhood Housing Officer Marie.
This was to see how the visits went in reality, for both the customer and the Housing Officer.
- Reviewed tenancy data
The panel looked for patterns in data provided around the number of days between nomination and tenancy start, void reasons, and length of tenancies.

The most significant finding from this research was identifying age as an indicator of tenancy failure within the first year.

- Reviewed welcome packs
The panel worked with the Housing Admin Assistants to ask why certain information was included in the welcome pack, and why other information was left out.
The panel also found that Derby City Homes have reduced the size of their welcome pack by including some more pertinent information in the tenancy agreement.
- Interviews with Greatwell Homes Housing Officers
Mary and Francine attended a Housing Services team meeting on 13th February 2019 to conduct a group interview with the Neighbourhood Housing Officers, the Voids Letting Co-ordinator and the Housing Admin Assistants.
The questions asked included 'what queries do you get most from new tenants?', 'Do you think the support offered to new tenants is sufficient?', 'Are you confident about dealing with tenants masking problems?' and 'Do you stress to new tenants that they are on a probationary tenancy and can be evicted if they do not adhere to it?'
- Telephone questionnaires
A list of 100 customers that had recently completed the first year of their tenancy were contacted by telephone by Mary and the Involvement team to ask questions set out by the Scrutiny Panel.
Questions included 'did you receive a welcome pack and did you find it useful?', 'did you have a 4-6 week post tenancy visit, and was it useful?', and 'was the 9 month post tenancy visit helpful in supporting you with your tenancy?'
40 Customers responded to the questionnaire.
Customers were happy with the welcome pack. Suggestions for missing information included energy saving advice, out of hour's services, decorating and gardening services, and pull cord information.
Responses around areas for improvement centred around the lettable standard and void repairs.
- Customer focus group
Sharon and Mary held a customer focus group on 8th March. Three customers attended
- The session was to delve more into the responses given in the questionnaire, however the responses from the customers in attendance focussed solely on void repairs which was outside the scope of the project.

Evidence on request

Please see the attached index of all of the documents that we have looked at during this scrutiny.

Time taken on report

The total time the Scrutiny Panel spent on the research and then creating this report was 200+ hours.

Constraints

- The scope of the scrutiny project was too large to complete. We selected some key areas to review but intend to look into the first year of tenancy in more detail in the future.
- There was a lack of information available for this review (such as best practice scrutiny examples from other landlords in this area) and detailed reasons for ending tenancies (as Greatwell Homes doesn't collect it).

Index of Documentation Used for 1st Year Tenancy Scrutiny

Document Name	Date Provided to Panel	Info provided to	Used as evidence
Scope – v1	07.01.2019	All	✓
Week by week plan	17.01.2019	All	✓
Scope - Final	22.01.2019	All	✓
Tenancy Flowchart - PTI to PTV	22.01.2019	All	✓
Tenancy Follow Up Checklist	22.01.2019	All	✓
Starter Tenancy Review Sheet	22.01.2019	All	✓
9 Month review let 1	22.01.2019	All	✓
9 Month review let 2	22.01.2019	All	✓
Corby Borough Council Pre-tenancy Training Powerpoint	11.01.2019	Provided to NB, remote researcher	✓
Essay: Thinking, on Poverty. A blog for the Social Housing Sector	11.01.2019	Provided to NB, remote researcher	✓
Kettering Borough Council Welcome Meeting Powerpoint	11.01.2019	Provided to NB, remote researcher	✓
Abandoned Properties Procedure	28.01.2019	All	✓
Allocations Policy	28.01.2019	All	✓
ASB Procedure and Toolkit	28.01.2019	All	✓
Income Management Procedural Guide	28.01.2019	All	✓
Neighbourhood management Policy	28.01.2019	All	✓
Safer Neighbourhoods Policy	28.01.2019	All	✓
Tenure Policy	28.01.2019	All	✓
Void Reasons Spread Sheet	28.01.2019	All	✓
<u>Welcome Pack:</u>			✓
Asbestos Info Leaflet	28.01.2019	All	✓
Authority for Disclosure Form		All	✓

BCW Change of Address Form		All	✓
BCW CT and HB Claim Form		All	✓
Core Lettings Log		All	✓
Decorating Voucher Calculation		All	✓
Decorating Voucher		All	✓
Direct Debit Form		All	✓
Electrical Installation Report		All	✓
Energy Performance Certificate		All	✓
Fire Safety Leaflet		All	✓
Gas, Electric, Appliance Advice		All	✓
Home Contents Insurance		All	✓
Moving In Checklist		All	✓
Notice To Quit Form		All	✓
Sign Up Documents Checklist		All	✓
SofaWise Referral Form		All	✓
Welcome Pack Checklist		All	✓
WH Benefits Checklist		All	✓
Understanding acronyms and specialist housing language 19	30.01.2019	In addition to Glossary of Abbreviations doc	✓
Cross Keys Voids Policy Procedure	11.02.2019	All	✓
Cross Keys Settling In Visits Procedure	11.02.2019	All	✓
Days between Nomination and Tenancy Start Spread Sheet	JW sent to GA 12.02.2019	All	✓
Derby Homes Tenancy Agreement	LM sent to all 12.02.2019	All	✓
Derby Homes Introductory Tenancies	LM sent to all 12.02.2019	All	✓
KBC FYT Scrutiny Report	Emailed to panel 25.02.2019	All	✓
Length of Tenancy Data	Emailed to panel 12.03.2019	With accompanying email from Rachel (BIO)	✓
Cross Keys Settling In Visits Procedure	Emailed to panel 13.03.2019	All	✓

Appendix 2 - Management Response and Action Plan

We would like to thank the Customer Scrutiny Panel for their dedication and effort in producing this review of the first year of a Greatwell Homes tenancy.

There is not a great deal of prior research or scrutiny reviews in this area but the Panel have progressed nonetheless making some key recommendations to us.

Identifying the lack of data in some areas has been a highlight as it directs us to collect information we had not collected before. This will enable us to support our customers more effectively in future to maximise the chances of sustaining a tenancy.

We will work through the recommendations in detail by the dates specified in the table overleaf. We will report progress through our quarterly meetings with the scrutiny panel and share progress with colleagues through quarterly performance and assurance clinics.

The work arising from this scrutiny will support the objectives in our Transforming Our Future strategy. In particular the move towards online tenancy sign ups, and making better use of customer insight data.

Statement from Scott Fitzsimmons

As Chair I would once again like to thank the Scrutiny Panel for another excellent Scrutiny around the first year of tenancy.

Scrutiny has once again put in a lot of time and commitment to complete the report.

I believe it is also a Scrutiny Topic that has not been covered before by any other Housing Association so proved quite tough at the beginning to research.

Hopefully once the actions have been completed it will make the NHO's jobs easier and hopefully help Greatwell Homes customers during their first year of tenancy.

The Customer Assembly look forward to supporting the Scrutiny Panel monitoring the management response and supporting Greatwell Homes staff in implementing the actions.

Scott Fitzsimmons – Chair of Greatwell Homes Customer Assembly.

First year of a tenancy scrutiny report (Jan 2019 – March 2019) – RECOMMENDATIONS

What support is provided to customers in the first year to make their tenancy sustainable?				
<p>Key Finding 1 - Neighbourhood Housing Officers (NHO's) are trusted to use their initiative as to whether a tenant needs more than the standard support. The NHO's stated that the current timescales for visits was sufficient but they do provide extra support when deemed necessary. The need for extra support is identified in a number of ways that include: Schools, Health Visitors, Doctor's surgeries and other professionals that raise concerns to the NHO's. When problems are identified/detected. ASB complaints and reports from the Income Officers are also passed on to the NHO's. There is not a structured procedure in place that details how the NHO's should proceed to help ensure that the tenancy is successful.</p>				
Recommendations:	Benefits	Management Response	Lead Officer	Deadline
1.1 A new in-depth policy and procedure manual be produced for the NHO's to follow in the first year of tenancy. This should cover every hindrance that could affect a successful tenancy.	This will ensure a uniform approach from all NHO's when dealing with a variety of problems.	1.1 Agreed. Once we determine the drivers for failure we will create a procedure to manage the 1 st year of a tenancy	Housing Services Manager	April 2020
1.2 We recommend using 'Crosskeys Homes Settling In Visits Procedure' as a guide.	Tenants will be supported to the highest level at all times.	1.2 Agreed (in part) We will review the cross keys approach and consider this as we design our approach. And procedure	Housing Services Manager	April 2020
<p>Key Finding 2. The Welcome Pack given to tenants contains some unnecessary information unlikely to be needed on a regular basis. Some useful information is missing, especially for tenants new to the area.</p>				
2.1 A review of the contents of the Welcome Pack be done and a new one be made as clear and concise as possible. Useful items would include a list of local numbers such as BCW,	Too much information gets lost and some tenants don't/won't read it. Short, clear and concise information will	2.1 Agreed (in part) We will review the welcome pack to ensure it is fit for purpose. Local information (such as phone numbers might change so we will	Housing Services Manager	July 2019

Doctors surgeries, dentists, schools, hospitals. Bus route information and local taxi firms.	hopefully be read and remembered.	signpost rather than provide detailed addressed / numbers)		
2.2 Put some of the information currently provided in the Welcome Pack online. (NHO's numbers, after hour's number etc.)		2.2 Agreed We are looking at making as much of the sign up process as 'online' as possible, some of this info in on the website already (OOH numbers etc.)	Housing Services Manager / IT Manager	April 2020
2.3 A leaflet be produced with information about Greatwell Homes responsibilities regarding their properties and what is expected of the tenant and for what they are accountable. Including re-charge in the Repairs Policy. What is expected of tenants regarding issues that can become ASB problems. (being a good neighbour by not allowing rubbish to overflow into another property, not play loud music, informing neighbours of a party)		2.3 Agreed (in part) We do not produce leaflets anymore and want to move information online. All this information is included in the tenancy agreement already, but we will explore how this information might be delivered as part of our on-line sign up project.	Housing Services Manager	April 2020
What are the reasons for tenancy failure?				
Key Finding 3. Not enough information is available to determine the root cause of failure in the first year of tenancies. However the figures we could access suggest that 20 – 29 year olds are the most likely to fail in their first tenancy.				
Recommendations:	Benefits	Management Response	Lead Officer	Deadline
3.1 Investigate the reasons for 20 – 29 age group fail their tenancies in the first year.	This will improve the success rate of the 20 – 29 age group.	3.1 Agreed	Housing Services Manager	Dec 2019

		We will further break down tenancy failures by each protected characteristic to define a 'risk profile'		
3.2 Look into ways of supporting this group so they don't fail.		3.2 Agreed. Whilst we endeavour to ensure all customers thrive in their homes we agree that further resources should be made available to those who need it more	Housing Services Manager / Income Services Manager	April 2020
3.3 NHO's to recommend Budgeting Courses or any other useful courses to aid them in their tenancy. Suggest completed courses could have an incentive.		3.3 Agreed (in part) We already do this if we recognise customers are struggling. We do not think this should be incentivised but may revisit this if take up is low. We will link this to the procedure referred to in 1.1 to formalise these activities where they are linked to possible tenancy failure.	Housing Services Manager	April 2020
3.4 Use text messages to inform and advise tenant of relevant information. Items like Rent Balance, gas servicing, rent due date	Courses are available for all tenants.	3.4 Agreed (in part) We already do this, but not regularly. We will look into text messaging software which could help us send text messages automatically	Housing Services Manager / IT Manager	April 2020
3.5 Investigate the use of a reward scheme for responsible tenants (such as 'gold, silver and bronze' awards. Several companies offer various schemes.	This will remind tenants to pay their rent on time and other useful reminders.	3.5 Agreed We will investigate how this might work in practice for Greatwell Homes	Housing Services Manager	July 2020
What are the reasons for tenancy failure?				
Key Finding 4. Keyways alter the wording of the property descriptions that are sent to them.				

Recommendations:	Benefits	Management Response	Lead Officer	Deadline
4.1 Ask BCW not to amend our property descriptions and that all our homes are marked as 'unfurnished'.	This should prevent people bidding on unsuitable properties for their needs.	4.1 Agreed We will discuss with BCW, however we don't own the software so cannot make this happen.	Senior Neighbourhood Housing Officer	May 2019
How can we ensure the support we provide is at the right level, right time and value for money?				
Key Finding 5. There is not enough information collected to provide an analysis of the reasons for tenancy failures.				
Recommendations:	Benefits	Management Response	Lead Officer	Deadline
5.1 Collate, create and run a quarterly report to analyse the potential for tenancy failures.	This will help to prevent future failures.	5.1 Agreed (in part) We already have a single point of contact for arrears in 1 st year. We will link this to the OPI in 5.2 (below)	Housing Services Manager / Business Improvement Manager	April 2020
5.2 Set up a KPI to monitor any trends such as arrears, ASB complaints, number of repairs reported.		5.2 – Agreed (in part) We will create an OPI (not KPI) to track success of the customer journey in year one and use this to develop a 'risk based' approach to visiting tenancies	Housing Services Manager / Business Improvement Manager	April 2020
Key Finding 6. NHO's are unable to provide any practical help to new tenants with regards to furnishings and white good. Most grants, loans and practical help have been stopped making it difficult for a new tenant to furnish a first home				
6.1 Research charities that provide furnishings and white goods to tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit for a small weekly sum.	This will give tenants motivation and encouragement to care for their home.	6.1 - Agreed (in part) We already promote sofa wise who do this. However we will research companies who offer furnishings in return for payment deducted from benefits. We will need to consider this carefully so as not to put customers at risk of rent arrears however.	Housing Services Manager	July 2019
How can we measure the effectiveness and success of the customer journey in the first year?				
Key Finding 7. No information has been collected regarding the effectiveness and success of the customer journey.				

Recommendations:	Benefits	Management Response	Lead Officer	Deadline
7.1 Create a feedback document for the tenant to complete at the end of their first year of tenancy, with an incentive to ensure forms are received back.	This will ensure that new tenants get the correct support in the future.	7.1 Agreed We will create a survey to complete at month 12 (or soon after) and monitor trends to evaluate the customer journey during year one	Housing Services Manager	July 2019