



# Greatwell Homes Ground Maintenance Service

Scrutiny  
2021

## **Introduction**

This review is part of the scrutiny programme for 2021 as agreed with the Customer Assembly, Scrutiny Team and Greatwell Homes.

The Scrutiny Team for this review consisted of Sharon Medlin, Mary Reeves, John Hook, Peter Allington, Des Desai, Andrew Prigmore and Alexa Varga.

The Scrutiny Team carried out the project between September and November 2021

## **Scope Overview**

The scrutiny will look at:

- The Grounds Maintenance service. Specifically, the communication of the Service Level Agreement
- The relationships that Greatwell Places staff have with customers
- The feedback that those customers give to Greatwell Homes about their satisfaction with the Grounds Maintenance service
- How consultation should be done on specific topics relating to Grounds Maintenance
- This scrutiny review will look at evidence provided
- Carry out research
- Provide evidence-based recommendations on how to improve communication, relationships, and customer satisfaction

## **Determining Question**

1. Do customers know what to expect of the Grounds Maintenance service?
2. How do we communicate customers about delays in services?
3. How can Greatwell Places staff engage with customers and communities within the existing capacity of their job?
4. How can Greatwell Homes encourage customers to be involved in maintaining and improving their neighbourhood through grounds maintenance?
5. How should we consult with customers on issues such as bedding and planting; mulching vs collecting grass; wildflower areas?
6. How can we maximise satisfaction feedback from customers?

## **Exclusions**

Team structure and service charges are outside the scope of the Grounds Maintenance scrutiny review.

Other aspects of Greatwell Places role (such as cleaning indoor communal areas, graffiti removal, fly tipping) is outside the scope of the Grounds Maintenance scrutiny review.

## **Method Breakdown and Research Findings**

Research Tasks:

- Researching best practice
- Policies review
- Tenant survey
- Staff focus groups
- Tenants focus groups
- Performance information

## **Policies Review**

- Service level agreement
- Service charge statement
- Customer charter
- Neighbourhood Management Policy

- Neighbourhood and Community Standard
- Feedback data
- Key and Operational Performance Indicators data
- Communications Plan for Greatwell Places
- Fly Tipping scrutiny report (2021)
- Estate Services scrutiny report (2017)
- Supporting Communities scrutiny report (2020)
- Estate Services Operative job description
- Asset Strategy
- Community Clean Up Risk Assessment

### **Customer Charter**

“We will always listen to you and provide a variety of ways for you to shape and influence our services.”

“We will work in partnership to help your neighbourhood stay safe and well maintained.”

### **Researching Best Practice**

Responses from other Housing Associations.

From over 40 Housing Associations contacted by phone or email we received 10 replies, four from the East Midlands Tenant Participation Forum, and six from the TPAS forum.

Many Housing providers have a customer monitoring scheme (eg Green Ambassadors, Tenant Inspectors). We also found that many of these organisations use contractors for grounds maintenance rather than in-house teams. We have decided not to recommend a customer monitoring scheme because the new area-based teams should be allowed at least year to see how the service settles.

Housing providers also reported name badges having a positive impact on staff relationships with customers. Name badges are separate to ID lanyards. They are first name only and more visible to customers from a distance.

### **Responses from Other Housing Associations**

How do you communicate your Service Level Agreement to customers?

Website	Notices boards/letters	Promise
3	1	1

Do your customers receive a yearly rota of dates of service and what service is done on a particular day?

Website	Notices boards/letters	Not informed
4	1	

If a delay to your service occurs, do you inform your customers and if so, how?

Website	Notices boards/letters	Not informed	Helpline
3	2	2	1

Do you have area-based teams?

yes	No	Contractor
2		3

Do you ask customers for any input regarding the grounds/gardens near them?

yes	NO
4	1

### Web Site

Users of the website must navigate several pages when searching for information they need (Grounds Maintenance in this case). Scrutiny Team members could not find where to pay a compliment to Ground Maintenance operatives. They did find where to raise a concern or make a complaint easily.

### Tenant Survey

We had 120 survey responses this told us that

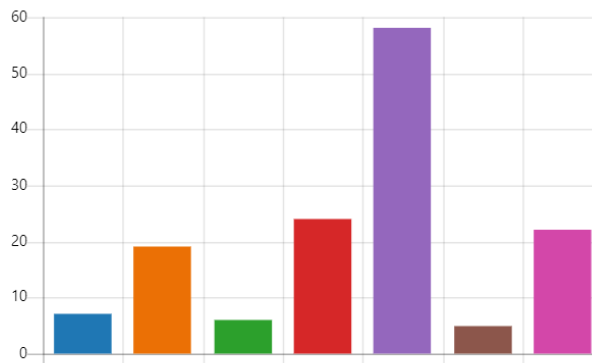
- 65 tenants said they get no information on Grounds Maintenance
- 94 said they do not look on the web site
- 58 people want to be contacted by email, 24 text, 19 website and 19 letter
- 53 tenants were unhappy with the service scoring just 1 or 2. With 37 scoring 4 or 5



2.69 Average Rating

How would you like to receive information about grounds maintenance?

● App	7
● Website	19
● Social media	6
● Text message	24
● Email	58
● Phone call to Greatwell Homes	5
● Other	22



### Staff Focus Groups

The Ground Maintenance Team are not consulted about the choice of plants used, how and where to plant in new builds and environmental works. This has led to overgrown plants and weed-infested borders because no weed suppressant membrane was used, and a very thin layer of bark put down, at the first strong wind most of it blew away.

Ground workers are happy to talk to tenants and tenants are happy to talk to workers.

Ground Maintenance workers would like to spend less time filling out time sheets. An app is being created to stop the use of time sheets. This has been under production for a while and will aid operators as a time saver.

When work sheets are posted in the schemes they are often changed, go missing or defaced.

Tenants are not aware of whether Greatwell Homes or Norse are responsible for grounds near them.

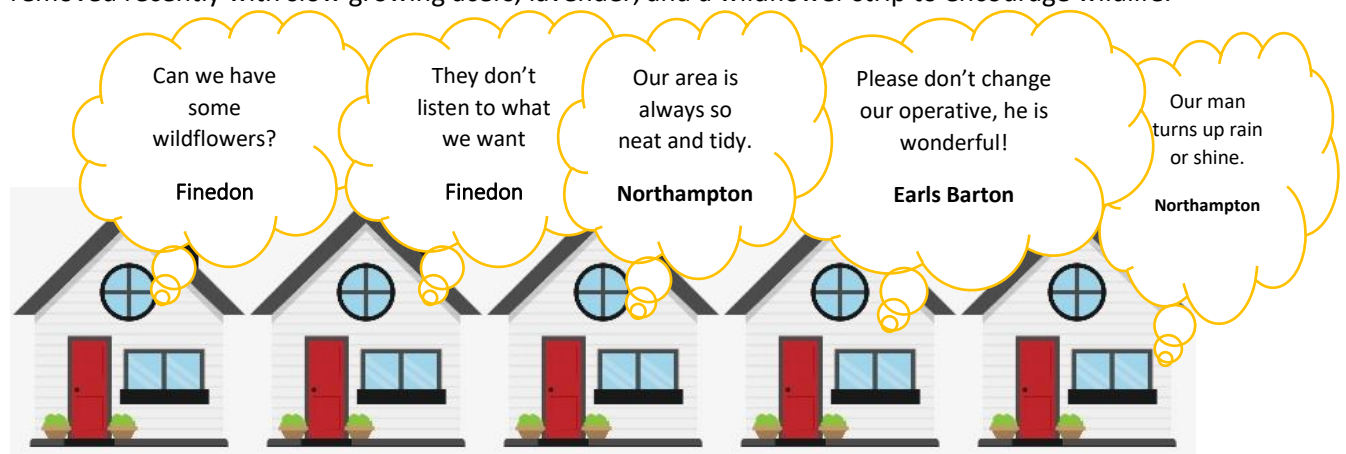
In April our contract with Norse expires and Greatwell Homes will be responsible for all ground works on our estates. Many areas have been neglected and it will take some time to rectify this

(months, not weeks). In April Greatwell Homes will be increasing the Ground Maintenance Team so teams will be allocated to specific areas. There will also be two more tree surgeons employed as some trees have not been touched in years.

Housing Officers and Independent Living Officers said that Greatwell Homes need to remove the defined timings for grass cutting etc. in the sign-up pack. Inform tenants when there is a delay in the service. When it comes to Independent Living Schemes a holistic approach needs to be taken with regards to communication. Letters, emails, text messages, notice boards and word of mouth. This should limit the number of complaints staff deal with regularly.

### **Tenants Focus Groups**

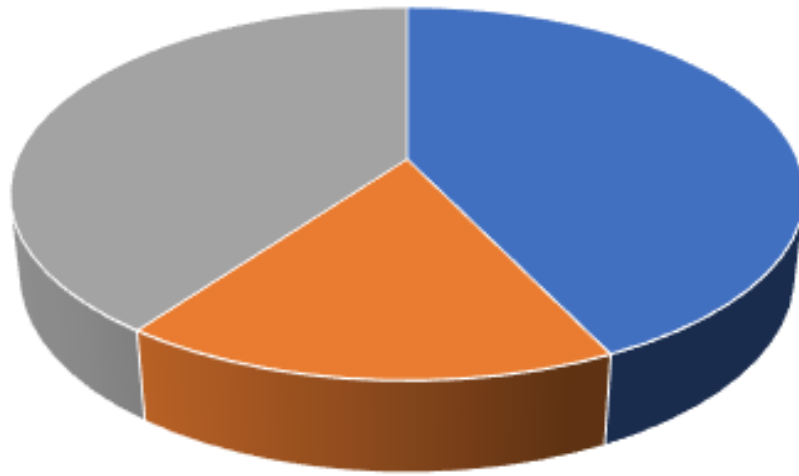
Talking to the tenants in Independent Living Schemes we found that a lot had mobile phones, but only use them to make and receive calls, so have no access to the internet and miss out on social media and the digital newsletter. However, they do look at the notice boards so changing our notice boards to digital ones would allow them to see all updates plus much more like before and after pictures of work carried out where they live. Residents at Knights Court were unhappy with the service. Pots and the bird table have been knocked over. Grass cutting not completed as edges not trimmed. They asked for yearly meetings with Ground Maintenance staff (March or April time) to talk about the plans for the coming year. In Finedon they would like a say in replacing the trees that have been removed recently with slow growing acers, lavender, and a wildflower strip to encourage wildlife.



### **Performance information**

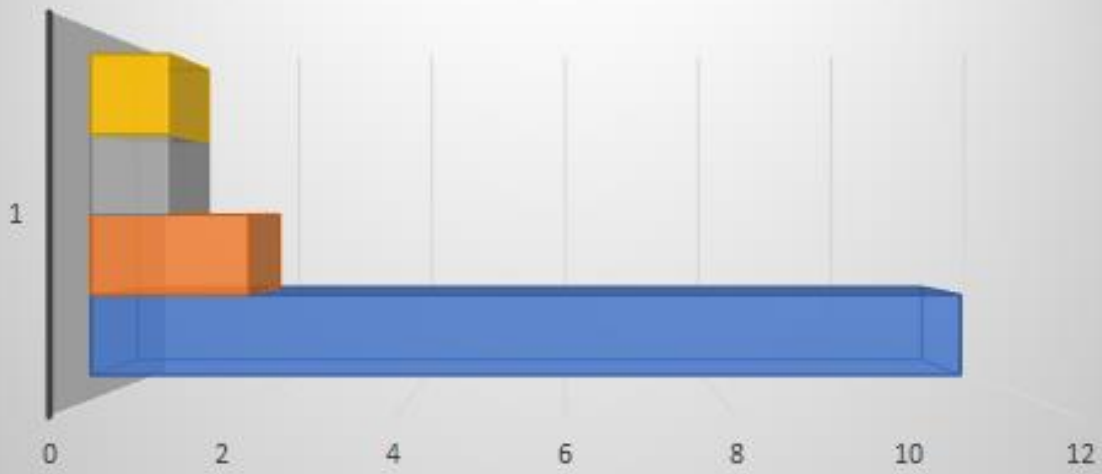
As you can see from the diagrams below Ground Maintenance get as many compliments as they do complaints.

### 2020/21 data analysis



■ Compliments ■ Concerns ■ Compliments

### Causes of complaints



■ Not following procedure ■ Not listening ■ Poor quality ■ Unresolved issues

	Recommendations	Benefits	Response	Person Responsible	Date
1	<p>1. Website needs an overhaul and ensuring the information is updated regularly and with the correct information. Include a way to promote the good things Greatwell Homes have done with before and after pictures/videos.</p> <p>2. Also, that you install digital notice boards in all the schemes which could be easier to update letting the tenants know when ground maintenance is coming and what is being done, with before and after pictures (could also put up the monthly newsletter etc.)</p> <p>3. Many tenants have requested area maps be on the website so they can determine who is responsible for maintaining grounds near them.</p>	<p>Tenants can access information themselves which would ease the Customer Services dealing with some inquiries.</p> <p>It will mean that tenants have other information they were not previously able to access.</p> <p><b>Monitored by CA</b></p>	<p>1. <b>Agree</b> Website information to be overhauled before and after photos and videos produced and published on website. Using land rationalisation land as example.</p> <p>2. <b>Partially agree</b> Setup of TV screens to be implemented in schemes which will be updated via USB sticks (subject to final budget approval by Board in Feb 22)</p> <p>3. <b>Agree</b> Mapping project in progress to go live April 2022.</p>	LLA/SJ/AM	<p>Mar 22</p> <p>Jun 22</p> <p>Jun 22</p>
2	<p>1. Begin a campaign in early 2022 to inform tenants about the changes that are happening in April. This will include Greatwell Homes taking over land previously maintained by the Council, explain how area teams will work and how service will be improved. Introduce the team members to the tenants.</p> <p>Give clear information about how the service will be improved.</p> <p>2. All Ground Maintenance operatives to wear name badges.</p>	<p>Tenants will be aware of the time scale allowed for a particular job to be done and give tenants a better understanding of how things are planned and hopefully to fewer complaints.</p>	<p>1. <b>Agree</b> Communication plan being designed to explain service changes from April 2022. Rollout to commence in Feb 22.</p> <p>2. <b>Disagree</b> Operatives already wear ID badges on belt or lanyard and name badges are logistically not practical. Operative names to be included as part of communication plan on area-based teams.</p>	LLA/AM	Jun 22

3	Contractors must consult with the Grounds Maintenance team regarding all new build and environmental works. Contractors should be given a list of permitted plants and those not wanted. Where and how to plant them. Most important is to lay down weed suppressant membrane prior to planting.	Operatives will not have to rectify the contractors' errors.  <b>Monitored by CA and Alan Miller</b>	<b>Agree</b> Regular meetings to discuss new development specifications.	GC/JT	Dec 22
4	To have annual meetings in Independent Living Schemes and community halls (or similar for General Needs tenants) to discuss the services for the year ahead and their implementation	Tenants will be aware of what will be happening for the year and be able to make suggestions to the Grounds Maintenance Team.  <b>Question added to yearly survey</b>	<b>Agree</b> meetings being set up by independent living officers and estates to attend	SJ/AM	Mar 22
5	Grounds Maintenance should have quarterly reviews of the complaints received to look for any trends so they can be resolved	Could prevent further complaints.  <b>Monitored by CA</b>	<b>Agree</b> quarterly reviews to be completed and trends to be analysed. Detailed information/trends to be provided to Customer Assembly in Q3 2022 as expecting high level of customer feedback following the end of the Norse contract.	LH	Mar 22  Dec 22
6	An app to be created to replace time sheets. Operators can log in and log out at the beginning and end of service.	This will allow operatives more time to complete their tasks.  <b>Monitored by Alan Miller</b>	<b>Agree</b> App currently in testing	JT	Mar 22
7	All information regarding what the Ground Maintenance operators do and don't do be included in a Home User Guide.	Tenants will have a better understanding of how the service is run.  <b>Monitored CA</b>	<b>Agree</b> SLA information to be added to sign up pack and portal	AD/FS/LL A	Jun 22 Portal Jun 22
8	Remove grass cutting being done 10 times a year as the local area team will decide when the grass needs cutting.	Grass is not cut unnecessarily.  <b>Monitored CA</b>	<b>Agree</b> SLA to be reviewed to reflect new area based service.	AM	Jun 22



9	Housing to investigate why tenants above the ground floor feel they don't have the right to use the communal garden	They pay for the Grounds Maintenance to do the necessary work in the garden, so they have every right to use it.  <b>Monitored CA</b>	<b>Agree</b> investigation to be completed	KG/LC	Mar 22
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**We would like to thank everyone who took part in this review without the help of staff, other Housing Associations, and tenants this could not happen so thank you all.**