



# **Customer Excellence Panel**

## **Green Space Review**

**January 2010**



**Report by**  
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# Acknowledgements

A special thanks to the Customer Excellence Panel members who took the time to carry out this review.

Andrew Houghton (Green Space Project Manager) provided feedback to the panel and responded to any queries.

The review was facilitated by Nina Peters (Performance and Intelligence Manager) and Graham Jones (Business Support Advisor) supported by Hannah Fitzhenry (Customer Insight Officer).

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to summarise the findings of the Customer Excellence Panel's (CEP) review of the Green Space Service.

The review was carried out in November 2009.

## **Background**

The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) expects housing associations to have a clear strategy for involving tenants and residents in influencing and monitoring service delivery.

Tenants should be clear on how they can be involved in managing their homes, and Helena must demonstrate how services have been modified in response to tenant views.

Over recent years there has been increased emphasis on tenant led regulation; ensuring housing associations are accountable to its customers.

"Making services and decisions accountable to, and contestable by, residents, and responding to the resident voice, are vital to achieving... excellence in housing."

*Chartered Institute of Housing, 2008*

"We expect all housing associations to clearly show how their services have been commented on and influenced by the people living in their homes... We also expect housing associations to be able to show that responding to residents' views is something that runs through all their activities as part of their culture and the way they deliver services."

*Housing Corporation, 2007*

Helena has already made successful inroads to achieving this through its Customer Excellence and Resident Involvement Strategies, by providing greater opportunities for tenants to influence the decision-making process and shape the services that they receive. The Customer Excellence Panel is just one of a range of initiatives aimed at achieving this.

## **Introduction**

Helena Homes wants to ensure that our customers are at the heart of everything that we do.

The Customer Excellence Strategy aims to ensure we deliver high quality services based on what matters most to tenants. We want to ensure that we continually improve and deliver customer led services.

The Customer Excellence Panel have a key role within the Customer Excellence Strategy in helping to improve customer satisfaction and raise the percentage of very satisfied tenants by 25% over the next 5 years. It will help ensure that tenants play an active role in shaping service delivery and identifying areas for improvement.

## **About the Customer Excellence Panel (CEP)**

The Customer Excellence Panel (CEP) was established to provide an enhanced scrutiny role across the services Helena provides. Scrutiny is an important function, which helps to ensure that our customers receive high quality services that are relevant to their needs and demonstrate value for money. It adds a new dimension to Helena's decision-making process by examining and questioning performance and decisions made by the organisation from a tenant's perspective.

## **Aims of the Panel**

The aim of the panel is to help Helena deliver better services by ensuring tenants are able to influence service design and hold Helena to account for performance.

The panel's role is not as a consultation group to advise on policy and procedure, but as a scrutiny panel to challenge the way in which services are provided.

The panel aims to regularly review Helena's performance, actively challenging the way in which we deliver services to assist us in continuous improvement.

The panel will draw on wider sources of information to ensure that they represent the views of the majority of tenants (and residents where applicable). Such information includes customer satisfaction surveys and complaint feedback.

The panel enables tenants to have a greater role in:

- Defining what is important and expressing preference in shaping service delivery, including reviewing and setting service standards
- Monitoring performance and holding Helena to account

In doing this it is hoped that the role of the CEP will help us to increase customer satisfaction with the services Helena provides

Overall the approach will help to further embed a customer focus in the way that Helena behaves, which will lead to better services for customers.

## **Review Process**

The panel has received independent training and support (from the Northern Housing Consortium) in order to build confidence and capacity in their role.

The review entails an overview of service delivery and performance, and questions whether the CEP can further develop a service to improve customer satisfaction and value for money.

To do this the panel is provided with a range of performance information and scrutiny activities to ensure they accurately reflect the customer's experience. The information provided includes:

- Performance data
  - against targets
  - over the past three years (trend analysis)
  - against similar organisations (benchmark information)
- Customer feedback to determine what matters most to tenants
- Complaints information
- Positive feedback and compliments
- Best practice information from other organisations
- Activity Based Costing (ABC) information
- Service Standards
- Findings from Customer Inspector reviews
- One Voice survey findings
- GIS maps to identify geographical trends (where applicable)
- Customer Insight information
- Other information as required

The panel use the stated information to gauge a view of how well a service is performing and ensure that we are working towards meeting tenant priorities and providing value for money. This then enables the panel to recommend service improvements.

If further information is required the panel can request questions to be put to the One Voice tenant panel, or they can request an inspection or a mystery shop by the Customer Inspectors.

As part of the review the panel are also given the opportunity to meet and discuss the service areas performance with the relevant service managers.

This approach helps to ensure that Helena keeps tenants are at the heart of service delivery and that tenant views and opinions are a key consideration in the decision-making process.

### **Green Space Service – Customer Excellence Panel Review**

This is the third service area to be reviewed by the panel.

The schedule of reviews was agreed between the Performance and Intelligence Team and the CEP based on the current corporate priorities and aspects that tenants have identified as key drivers of satisfaction. A copy of the review schedule for 2009/10 can be found on Highway within the Customer Excellence Project section.

The Green Space service is currently going through a significant amount of change, this is a result of a full review of the Green Space service which as a result of a review of the older persons gardening service in 2007. It was established that the service being provided by Glendale's was basic and inflexible. As a result a 'best practice' visit to Sheffield was arranged, it was apparent that Helena had the budget to set up an 'in house' team to carry out environmental works.

The 'in-house team have now been recruited and from January 2010 will take responsibility for the maintenance of Helena Green Space's. To ease with the changes the grass cutting service will be provided by an external contractor (St Helens council).

These changes to service delivery have made it difficult for the Customer Excellence Panel to conduct a full review of this services current performance. Changes are being implemented by the 'in-house' team and as a result panel members have agreed that it is not currently practical to carry out a full review of the Green Space service and considered that any recommendations made to the current service would not apply to the new service.

As the service is going through change and transferring over to Helena, a performance management framework is not currently in place. This was discussed with service managers and the panel. The Green Space team will consult with tenants in the development of performance measures which will be reported back to the Customer Excellence Panel at a later date.

In addition to this the Green Space service managers have not yet agreed a suite of performance indicators or service standards for the new service therefore have no means of discussing amending future service standards or KPI's. The innovative changes to service delivery would also make it difficult to benchmark against traditional performance indicators. Considering this the panel decided to review the Green Space proposals and consider how Helena are accountable for service performance and the best method of identifying service improvements.

*An explanation of the Green Space review process can be found in the 'Approach to the review' section of this report.*

## **Aims of the Review**

Specifically relating to Green Spaces, the aims of this review are:

- To update panel members of the changes to the Green Space service
- To identify what customers have been telling us including the Customer Inspectors
- To identify how we are going to measure improvements and successes with the new improved service

## **Approach to the Review**

Andy Houghton (Green Space, Project Manager) provided the panel with detailed information about the new plans for the Green Space service. Panel members were also given the opportunity to ask any additional questions around the new plans for the service.

A breakout session was held with panel members, facilitated by the Performance and Intelligence team. This allowed panel members to discuss their views and opinions and to consider how they want to monitor the performance of the new service and its processes.

The breakout session was structured around the following:

- What matters most to tenants?
- Expectations and successes
- Available tools

Managers were invited to attend the meeting to respond to any questions the panel raised and explain any reasoning behind the decisions made.

A wrap up session was later held to identify and agree the panel's next steps for monitoring the performance of this service area.

## **Summary**

Overall panel members were impressed with the plans for the new Green Space service and noted them as 'excellent'. Particular praise was given to the plans to engage all age groups of the community. Panel members highlighted that to ensure Helena is acknowledging 'What matters most to tenants?' Tenants should continue to be involved throughout the Green Space developments.

Although based on person opinion it is important to consider that panel members were concerned with the support given to tenants who are unable to maintain their own gardens.

The panel found it difficult to draw any firm conclusions or recommendations for this service area as it had only just transferred to Helena. It is therefore difficult to determine 'what matters most to tenants?' and whether Helena is working towards tenant priorities

Panel members recommended a full service review of the new Green Space service in twelve months time, this gives processes a chance to embed.

In preparation for the next review the panel have requested the following:

- Inspection of a random selection of Green Spaces carried out by the Customer Inspectors
- Comparison of complaints
- Satisfaction with the service from STATUS and One Voice surveys
- Updates on a four monthly basis leading up to the full review

## How are we performing?

The Customer Inspectors provided the panel with details of their Green Space Inspections. Overall the Customer Inspectors rate the Green Spaces as mainly 'satisfied' (8 out of 11) however noted comments highlighted that there is some requirements for improvements. Also in support of this is that when questioned six of eleven Inspectors would be happy to live in view of the area they inspected.

The Green Space Inspection report forms a baseline position for which current performance can be compared.

The CEP members agreed that there was not enough evidence to determine service standards and KPI's for the Green Space service. Any suggestion to service standards and KPI's would have been based on personal opinion rather than the views of the wider tenant base. The panel agreed that an analysis of complaints, additional One Voice survey questions and results of a Customer Inspector inspection will enable them to make an informed decision for the service standards and KPI' s for the Green Space service area.

The next review of the Green Spaces will allow panel members to suggest new service standards and KPI's for the new service.

## What matters most to tenants?

Panel members considered the previous review of ASB and highlighted that when types of nuisance is broken down almost 22% is due to untidy gardens. This is significantly higher than other Northern LSVT's which shows a median percentage of just over 4%.

The ASB review shows panel members to be concerned with the maintenance of gardens. The following extract has been taken from the ASB review document, it highlights the panels concerns with support for elderly and disabled tenants in relation to garden maintenance.

*'This led to panel members being concerned that Helena are not strong enough at combating untidy gardens or quick enough to give support those who are unable to maintain their own gardens including those who have relatives in the borough but who offer them no support. There are clearly issues around perceptions of enforcement and whether we are utilising our powers and resources to the fullest extent.'*

To aid the CEP in their review of a service the Customer Inspectors provide a 'reality check' of the Green Spaces in September 2009, the inspections were a random sample of Helena Green Space areas.

Panel members considered the Inspectors recommendations and suggested that for this review the results are used to identify a baseline position for this service. The recommendations are noted in the table below.

The Customer Inspectors highlighted that the Green Spaces did not provide areas for children to play. A number of suggestions included:

- Football areas
- Playgrounds
- Skating areas

It was also suggested that the children should take part in creating and developing such areas.

*Continued on the following page*

Reference was made throughout the report about the lack of colour and interest in the Green Spaces that were visited. Suggestions were made around incorporating more features, this includes:

- Meadow planting
- Additional flowering trees
- Blossom trees
- Wild life parks
- Hanging baskets
- More colourful flowers
- Bird feeders
- Rockery
- Wall art

The Green Spaces that were visited by the Inspectors were often large green open spaces. The Inspectors suggested breaking this up with interesting pathways.

A number of grassed areas had been ruined by cars parking on the edges, the Inspectors highlighted that if this is the case then part of the areas may be better suited to parking bays.

The Inspectors recommended that benches were placed in areas that have been improved to allow tenants and residents to sit and enjoy the area.

Some of the garage sites and derelict land required tidying and improving. The Inspectors recommended that more planters and hanging baskets were incorporated into such areas. A graffiti wall was also suggested to improve the look of the sites.

*The full Customer Inspector report is available to view on the Customer Excellence section of Helena Highway.*

The panel agreed that the results of the Green Space inspection show a requirement to improve Helena green spaces and considered the current plans to be an “excellent” method of doing this.

The panel requested that the Customer Inspectors conduct another inspection of the Green Spaces in preparation for a full review of the Green Space service. This will allow for a comparison over a twelve month period, this will allow the panel to identify any improvements in performance.

In addition to the Customer Inspectors ‘reality check’ the panel suggested complaints to be a good method of identifying ‘what matter most to tenants’. The types and location of a complaint of Helena Green Spaces can also be used to establish a baseline, this will allow service improvements to be identified.

Panel members suggested that before the next review of the Green Spaces a comparison of complaints is conducted to highlight if service delivery has improved and the number of complaints declined.

Panel members also considered it beneficial to display complaints geographically, this will identify if there are any ‘hotspots’ and if improvements have impacted on the number of complaints.

Survey results are considered a key method of ascertaining tenant feedback for the service. A full review of the service should consider the use of satisfaction surveys in particular the recent STATUS survey and also relevant One Voice feedback.

Panel members are keen to ensure that tenants are consulted throughout any changes to Helena services and processes. The Panel members considered it important to ensure Helena are doing everything they can to help the local community, specifically those who are currently unemployed.



The Green Space team have in place a number of key methods to ensure tenants are involved, the use of apprentices particularly impressed the panel.

The panel members consider the input from tenants to be very important and as a result suggested that the team continue considering the views of tenants. This is the only recommendation that the panel have in relation to the Green Space service.

### **Service Standards and Key Performance Indicators**

The current service standards and KPI's do not apply to the new service and its processes. The new service will be more reactive and be based around the needs of the environment and the local area rather than a timescale for all areas.

A selection of service standards and KPI's will be developed in the next full review of the Green Space service.

Panel members are able to suggest and develop service standards and KPI's for this service area. This will be at the next review of the service as processes require time to 'bed in'.

### **Available tools**

For the next review of the Green Space service, panel members have requested additional performance information. These are detailed below:

- An inspection conducted by the Customer Inspectors
- Comparison of complaints
- Complaints displayed geographically to highlight any 'hotspots'
- Survey feedback

### **Panel Recommendations**

Only one recommendation has been highlighted by the panel this is the following:

- Continue to keep tenants involved with service developments

The panel have suggested the following to allow them to monitor and identify service improvements.

- Full service review in twelve months
- Updates on a four monthly basis

The four monthly update ensure the panel are kept up to date with the changes and developments to the service. Updates will form a trigger for additional performance information in preparation for the next full review. The agreed are noted in the table below.

|        |                           |
|--------|---------------------------|
| Update | Monday 22 February 2010   |
| Update | Thursday 24 June 2010     |
| Update | Thursday 28 October 2010  |
| Review | Thursday 25 November 2010 |

## **Next steps**

Due to imminent proposed changes to service delivery this service review followed a different process and it was therefore only possible to develop a small action plan at this stage. However panel members have expressed how they would like to monitor future performance with the service. This will be the focus for the agreed review in November 2010.

The next review will give the panel members an opportunity to suggest and develop service standards and KPI's for this service.

The outcomes of this report will be presented to the Customer Excellence Strategy Group and Board.

Any amendments to service standards and KPI's identified as part of the next review will be publicised to tenants via Helena Headlines, leaflets and other literature accordingly.

*(Due to such large changes to Helena's Green Space service no performance workbook or detailed action plan has been developed)*

## Action Plan – Green Space CEP Review

| Recommendation  | Action   | Reason   | Service Area Response  | Who              | When                    | Progress update                                   |
|---|--|--|--|------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Involve residents throughout the Green Space developments                       | Green Spaces team to develop a plan for resident consultation for the next twelve months.                          | Panel members highlighted that to ensure Helena is acknowledging 'What matters most to tenants?' Tenants should continue to be involved throughout the Green Space developments.   | An action plan of resident involvement will be developed, including residents already engaged in service set up. Others will be engaged ongoing with aspects of the service as appropriate. The action plan will be reviewed quarterly by a group including residents. | Green Space team | Action plan by 19/03/10 | 29/03/10  |
| Complaints analysis update  | Conduct a comparison of complaints in preparation for the full review of the Green Spaces in November 2010.        | Panel members suggested that before the next review of the Green Spaces a comparison of complaints is conducted to highlight if service delivery has improved and the number of complaints declined.   | CEP members will be updated on complaints.   | PIT              | Quarter 3               | Quarter 3   |
| Customer Inspector Inspection of Green Spaces                                   | In preparation for the next review of the Green Space service the Customer Inspectors will carry out an inspection | The panel requested that the Customer Inspectors conduct another inspection of the Green Spaces in preparation for a full review of the Green Space service. This will allow for a comparison over a twelve month period, this will allow the panel to identify any improvements in performance. | An inspection of the Green Spaces will be incorporated into the Customer Inspector timetable for 2010/11.  | PIT              | Quarter 3               | Quarter 3   |
| Additional satisfaction information highlighting 'What matters most to tenants' | Additional information sought from the One Voice consultation panel.   | Ascertain 'what matters most to tenants' to help with the future Green Space review.   | Question included as part of a One Voice questionnaire.  | PIT              | 25/11/10                | Completed – One Voice focus group in December 09. |