

**Vela Improvement People**

**Project group 3**

**“Evaluation of the High Rise Support Service”**

**(Report - April 2014)**

1. **Background**

Paul Noddings, Housing Operations Manager for Tristar Homes put forward a proposal in October 2013 for a VIP group to review the following;

* The new High Rise Support Service (HRSS) which was introduced in July 2013 to replace the previous Concierge Service

Following the transfer of Stockton Borough Council properties to Tristar Homes in December 2010, the Concierge Service provided by the Council remained in the 11 High Rise blocks which Tristar inherited. The total number of properties covered by this service amounts to 1006.

At this time the service cost £1.3M to deliver at a cost of just under £18 a week per tenant and employed 22 staff. A comprehensive review of the service had taken place further back in 2007-8 however, which resulted in the staffing levels being reduced down to this level. The service was then reviewed in 2012-13 to gauge customers’ perception of the service but mainly due to the cost of the service of £1.3M not being fully met by the income received by the customers (£800K) in the high rise blocks. This shortfall of £0.5M was in effect being subsidised and paid for by Tristar Homes, whose main source of income is from other Tristar customers.

This review gave rise to the current service which now employs 8 full time staff and in effect has reduced the cost for the service to the customer down to approximately £9 a week. As a result the current contract with Stockton Borough Council is only £400K.

A survey of the customers in the High Rise blocks was carried out in Sept 2013 about the new HRSS following which 146 surveys were returned across the 11 blocks. The purpose of the VIP project was to check in with customers more informally about their perceptions and views about the new service, the changes to the staffing levels and its effects on the service.

1. **Project group**

VIP – Brenda Pearce

VIP – Jean Price

VIP – Cath Torley

VIP – John Hare

VIP – Jenny Shotton

Paul Noddings (Housing Operations Manager, Tristar)

Jonathan Cannon (Customer Involvement officer)

1. **Methodology**

The approach to the project was as follows;

* Presentation by the Housing Operations Manager for Tristar Homes outlining the background to the changes made to the HRSS and the rationale for the VIP project
* A number of meetings agreeing the approach and methodology in more details
* Visit to the bunker to meet the manager of the HRST and see first-hand how the cameras are monitored and calls taken regarding door entry and intercom calls from the properties
* Visit to the High Rise blocks within the scope with the Patch Manager, to get a feel for the blocks and to check communal areas were suitable for focus groups
* Flyers produced inviting all customers in the three blocks within the scope, to the focus groups, hand delivered by the HRST. A £10 shopping voucher was offered to people taking part in the focus groups.
* Focus groups held in the communal areas of the three blocks
* Phone survey of customers in Prior and Melsonby Court
* Meeting of VIPs to agree findings and recommendations
* Report completed and sent to VIPs for consideration
* Draft report sent to all project team and High Rise Support staff group (this report)
* Draft report presented to High Rise Support staff by the VIPs Final report produced and circulated to officers and involved customers.
* Report placed on website and sent to those who took part in the focus groups.

Following the satisfaction survey of High Rise customers across the 11 blocks in Sept 2013**, the majority of the customers in 7 of the blocks scored customer satisfaction highly across all areas,** however four blocks showed scores which were causing some concern, these being;

* Hume House (128 flats, in central Stockton)
* Nolan house (128 flats, adjacent to Hume House)
* Hudson House (118 flats in Thornaby)

In addition Melsonby Court (66 flats, part of two high rise blocks next to each other in Billingham) showed a particularly low score with regard to satisfaction with the patrols of the block and so this block was also included in the scope of the project.

The issues being raised and the levels of dissatisfaction varied across the three blocks however patrols of the building, ability to contact staff, confidence in the staff and safety of visitors to the buildings were the most prevalent concerns.

Given the recent timing of these surveys it was proposed to run focus groups in the communal areas of the three blocks mentioned above to gather more detailed information which might be causing such low scores.

Due to the lack of a communal area within which to hold a focus group for Melsonby Court it was decided to carry out a phone survey of some customers in this block and its neighbouring block, Prior Court to investigate the low scores regarding patrols.

In addition the VIPs visited the control centre where the HRS team are based to view the operational side of the security system and to speak with the manager of the service from Stockton Borough Council. Following this they visited the four blocks in question with the Patch Managers, to get a feel for the blocks and identify the rooms for the focus groups.

Invite flyers were hand-delivered by the HRST to all customers in the three blocks; inviting them to the focus groups and offering a £10 shopping voucher in return for their attendance **(see Appendix 1)**. In addition flyers were posted in the communal areas of each block.

The questions used in the focus groups were agreed to reflect and complement those used in the survey, a copy of which can be found in **Appendix 2**

1. **Findings from the focus groups**

The following show the variety of responses given by customers to each of the focus group questions. Note the answers have been grouped together from all three focus groups. As the focus groups are the main approach to this project we have included all of the comments made. This does mean comments are repeated in various questions it also shows the extent of those comments overall.

1. **Has safety in your block improved, stayed the same or got a bit worse since the new service has been in place? Supplementary question - Is there any time during the day or during the week that the safety is worse or better?**

The residents feel that safety has worsened since the change mainly at night, people of all ages tailgating residents and visitors to the flats. Young people with bikes skateboards etc. then let other young people in. The young people are eating, drinking etc. in the communal and foyer areas and running up and down stairs and abusing the lifts. We were told that there was once sixteen young people in the foyer.

On one occasion they phoned the high rise support service about the young people The concierge said “Have sent a member of staff over.” He talked to them and then just left them alone. He did not move them along. It is “dodgy” coming in at night.

When high rise service contacted on the system the resident was asked ‘what did they want him to do about it’ poor staff attitude when customers ring bunker sometimes

Elderly lady 101 years old has been burgled, which has made the residents feel very insecure. Residents feel that, since the change, their lives have been put at risk.

One resident was frightened to enter the building and sat in her car in the car park waiting for the intruders to leave or rang one of her neighbours to come down so that she was not on her own when entering the building.

The residents and their visitors feel they cannot stop the tailgating due to intimidation and fear of injury especially for the elderly and infirm among them. There is also a lot of mess left by them. They also had drunks and ‘druggies’ tailgating people coming into the block and some had been found sleeping in the blocks overnight in both the bin chute rooms on each floor, laundry rooms and on the stairs by tenants. Some residents had seen drug dealing taking place both in and outside the building and in the resident car park

The residents now get a lot of junk mail and unwanted callers trying to sell things and have been getting junk mail since the concierge service finished, the concierge used to stop this happening. Also said they had people getting in and selling things.

Customers felt that the cameras were not working or not in the right place or not utilised to the best advantage they also felt that when they complain about things nothing is done.

One lady reported to the bunker that someone had been urinating in the lift and asked the bunker to look at the camera footage to see if the people responsible could be identified but did not get any feedback on the matter and as she could not stand the smell in the lift she cleaned it. This has happened more than once mainly on an evening and the cleaners are not at work till the next day.

Customers also said that they hear people trying their door handles at night.

In one block customers said that certain local enforcement officers use the facilities in the communal areas (toilets).

Key safe for building keys not always locked and people accessing safe who do not have permission. People such as police being able to get into building but not having any access to flats if needed in an emergency.

People accessing and using laundry rooms who do not live in building. Tokens available from community centre people not always asked for proof that they live in block.

In one block residents are taking it in turns to sit in the communal area on an evening to check who is going in and out(they do this in pairs for safety).

People knocking on windows of people living on ground floor and asking to be let in to the building.

1. **Has the reduction in the service charge for the high rise support service been of help to you? Supplementary question - do you pay the service charge? We wanted to try and make sure that we got a range of both people who paid for the service and people who had the service charge paid by Housing Benefit.**

Not helped at all most said they paid for the service. One or two said they would be willing to pay more

Eight of the nine tenants in Nolan and felt the reduction in charge had not helped them. Most said they paid for the service and one or two said they would be willing to pay more for a better service. In Hudson House most said they would be willing to pay more if they got a better service.

Customers would be willing to pay more for a better service. They want the full service back again. Paying £9 and not seeing the concierge does not make people feel cared for. The concierges come in their vans, but do not always enter the building. They have been seen sitting in the van for 10 minutes, filling in a sheet and then driving off.

Don’t see any difference with having a little extra money. Most of those present said they paid full rent and charges. Lack of service is rotten. Old system much better. The residents felt that this new system was “cut and dried” even before they had a meeting with Tristar staff.

1. **How easy is it for you to contact the service? A supplementary question to this was how long did it take for the support team to answer?**

Most said it can take a while to contact the service if you needed to from the front entrance to the flats but some said it was quite easy to contact the team from their flats.

Care workers have difficulty accessing the property to see clients. Most tenants let care workers in because it can take quite a while for them to get in and they know that they have limited time with each of their clients.

Some customers have only seen the staff once or twice in the last six months.

If problems seen on CCTV or reported to staff they don’t always come out to sort the problems out, they have heard the staff asking the unwanted visitors to leave over the intercom, they have also seen a member of staff come out and talk to the young people but then leave with the young people staying behind.

Sometimes if they ring the bunker they are told there are no other staff on so the person in the bunker cannot do anything about whatever is happening at the time.

Community Enforcement officers using facilities (toilets).

It is sometimes difficult to contact the service. Many residents have to rely on a family member phoning them when they are outside to let them into the building as the concierge does not.

It has taken at least ¾ hr for someone to come from Thornaby. Response times are bad.

There has been a time when the concierge took an extremely long time to arrive at the premises when told a lady had had an accident and hurt her head. Excuse is that they do not have enough staff. It took one hour to get to the high rise from Billingham!

Not easy – if you forget your key you are left outside for ages.

1. **What improvements do you think could be made to the service?**

Residents felt they did not have enough information about the service so could not say if it was working correctly or not. They did not know how often the service did patrols and floor checks and did not know all of the staff.

Customers felt that having someone on the desk on an evening between 8pm and 6am in Nolan and between 6pm and 10pm in Hudson would stop the tailgating. They would also like proof that staff had actually been in the building and for how long.

Customers felt that having a small monitor in each flat so they could see who was at the main entrance and could let their own visitors in could cut down on the workload for the team.

Customers did say if they reported any problems to the team they would like some feedback as they never found out what happened, if anything.

The residents did have specific times for the bin store rooms to be locked and opened but these were not kept to by the staff. Sometimes they were locked late at night and opened very early (3am-4am) in the morning sometimes they were not locked at all. Chute room doors and laundry room doors locked on night or at all times with entry by key fob only.

Would like the desk manned between 6pm-10pm. Old service restored or limited onsite service. If staff in bunker identifying things happening on camera why don’t they come out instead of asking the kids or others to leave using the intercom.

Would like carers to have a code they can use to access building instead of them being stood outside waiting for staff to let them in.

Go back to the old system or employ more people. Ensure concierges do spend time with the tenants and converse with them. Be more “seen.” They do not know the residents now.

More staff needed. Someone on the desk full time. If this is not possible, then someone on duty from 8pm. to 6am. Staff to be seen regularly.

Residents feel that floor checks are not carried out. Their concierge from Billingham is good. They want to feel much more secure and as though they matter to the company. No improvements at all. The service is awful. Very insecure.

1. **How often do you see the patrol round your block?**

In both buildings most residents say they rarely saw any staff. The staff had been seen sat in their van in the car park filling in paperwork but not coming into the blocks before they left the area. Staff only seen when workmen need access to the building.

Rarely see high rise staff only come when repair staff need to be let in. When improvements were done to flats were asked to leave flat doors unlocked but no security left in building to make sure people who don’t live in the flats could access them

Sign in form in foyer which tenants can look at and see when a concierge has visited their block. Some people laughed at this, saying the concierge would “fiddle” this.

The residents do not see much of the staff at all and, consequently, do not feel secure.

Coming home after a night out (8.45 pm) one lady told us she felt vulnerable with people she did not know jumping in the lift, she was afraid.

Another concern is strangers walking around the floors late in the evening or early morning. Problems with non-residents waiting around outside the block.

Not often – more on a night, but no checks are done. Bin chute opened at 3 a.m. when it should be closed. Chute rooms shutters closed at 8 p.m. Laundry doors open always. Have had a problem with someone sleeping in the chute area.

1. **How have you found the staff from the service ? are they friendly and approachable and sensitive to your situation and needs?**

The residents say that some staff are helpful but say some are not and some residents no longer get in touch with the team at the bunker because of this. Staff attitude asking the resident’ what do you want me to do about it’ or laughing when answering the phone.

One lady mentioned that when she wanted a large piece of furniture removed, the concierge was unable to come because he was the only person on duty. The new staff are a little abrupt. There is no need for rudeness. Again it was mentioned that residents have had relations waiting outside the flats for long periods of time before being allowed to enter. The service was so much better the old way.

Residents do not see anyone. They have been given an answer from the person in the bunker “What do you want me to do about it?” Attitudes of concierges have been both good and bad.

The concierges do not wait long enough to hear the residents before they put the telephone down. Often visitors cannot gain access to the building without waiting for long periods of time.

The concierges do not know the residents and vice-versa.

Care assistants have been left outside for quite a time, not being able to get to see their clients. They are also on a timed visit.

The second meeting promised by the company 6 months after the original one, has not come to fruition.

1. **What are the main issues with the high rise support service?**

The main issue for all residents seems to be lack of safety within the blocks. A lot of people moved into the blocks before the concierge staff team was cut and changed. They moved in because they wanted the extra security offered by the service at the time. They no longer feel they have this and feel let down by the system.

Customers feel that there were not enough discussions around the change of service, that they were not being consulted that the decision was already made.

Customers also feel that since the change over to the compass system for letting of flats that they are now getting drunks and drug addicts as customers who let anyone into the flats and do not make sure that their own visitors leave the building when they leave their flat.

Customers were told about something that happened during refurbishment of the flats. People were asked to leave their flat doors open for access but no security was left in the block and they felt vulnerable.

No response on intercom when they ring. No feedback if they make a complaint. Drugs being smoked in some flats and smell wafting through whole of building. Drug Dealing

Security, security, security. Do not just sit outside in van and leave. Visit the block and get to know whether it is secure and the residents happy. Learn who live in the block. It is not residents walking around the corridors at 4 in the morning. “Burglars don’t have a set time, they sleep during the day and “work” at night. This is very scary. Knocking on doors also is a concern.

Cameras on the stairs would be a great help. Chute rooms are never locked at the right time and should be. Drug users shooting up in the vicinity. Could a GPS system not be used to show when such people have been in the building?

A fire door was smashed completely by a visitor. The police arrived before the concierge. The fire door has not yet been replaced. Resident has been told “If you don’t like it, move out.” Residents feel as though they are second class citizens. A camera outside would be beneficial to stop folk congregating there and also to stop cars being broken into.

The residents wondered why letters have been delivered by hand late in the evening and why fire alarms have been set off at night too. Again it was brought out that doors to the flats had been tried at night, this makes residents feel insecure.

Residents also mentioned that it was strange to see the concierge today when our meeting was to take place. He had not been seen for a few days. Disillusioned with the present system and would like the old system back again. Concierge sitting on the wall smoking is not a help to them. They feel that nobody cares about them.

“Who are they?” We do not see them. The van comes in, but they don’t come in. They do not come onto the floors to check all is well. Only the lad from Billingham actually patrols the floors. As with Hume House people try doors and roam around floors – take newspapers from one flat and put into letter-box of another flat. Concierges signing in and out would be a help.

Residents have had to bleach and clean the lifts because of people spitting and urinating in them. Cameras would help inside the lifts and on the floors to see what exactly happens. Flat tenants do need to report incidents such as these, so those in the bunker can check recordings and find the culprits.

Everyone seems to know the number of the key box, which is a cause for concern.

Police kicked tenant’s door in because concierge was not around. Door has been secured, but not replaced/repaired (floor 12.)

All residents feel very insecure. They would feel much safer if controlled cameras could be in each flat so the tenant can let visitors into their own properties. This could free up time for the person in the bunker to do other duties.

A resident was asked to leave the door open and when she refused to do this was told to “f\*\*\* off.”

Flat has been turned down by 3 people because of the smell of alcohol/urine etc. Tenant lets the youth into the building and into her own premises. The residents believe she gives alcohol and cigarettes to these youth.

One resident’s comment to the company was “They do not have to live in the blocks and don’t realise what it is like. We were not given the choice to pay more for a better service.”

She moved into her flat in 2006 and had been very happy there. She felt safe, but does not feel so now. As she is a cancer sufferer and very nervous she needs to feel secure in her own property, and does not. Druggies, shouting go on and this is scary. She is scared of going in and out of the property, especially when it is dark. The door handle to the flat is “clicked” at odd times of day. With residing on the ground floor she is worried when people knock on her window to be let into the building. Also when people look through her window.

When the full service was in operation she felt safe and secure but does not feel so now. There are far too many young people causing noise and other problems. She is scared to say anything to the noisy folk and wonders why she should have to consider moving away from her much loved home just because the good system of security has been changed to a poor one.

1. **Findings from the phone survey**

Phone surveys were carried out with customers from Prior and Melsonby Court to gather their views about the patrols of the building, which had scored poorly in the satisfaction surveys carried out in September 2013. The following is a summary of the surveys;

Melsonby Court

22 calls were made and 4 surveys carried out

3 males aged 49-59 years

1 female aged 49-59 years

2 customers started their tenancies prior to 2008, with 2 moving in on 2013

Prior Court

14 calls were made and 5 surveys carried out

3 males aged 32-51 years

2 females aged 43-51 years

3 customers had tenancies of over 6 years and 2 were new tenants in 2013

Comments and feedback from customers:

I only see them now and again

Only see them when they change the bins over.

I’ve seen them twice in four months

I see them quite often.

One customer had complaint made by new customer with a baby living on floor below staff asked him to stop flushing his toilet as it was disturbing her. Staff could have been more sensitive when they talked to customer. They could have asked to come in and listened to the noise made when the toilet was flushed in case there was a problem with the toilet that meant it was noisy when flushed. Both new tenants felt that the staff were friendly and helpful.

The above have been incorporated into the recommendations listed below.

1. **Recommendations (from sections 4 and 5)**

When considering the recommendations below it should be borne in mind that these are based on the views of only customers from the four blocks considered within the scope of this report. As mentioned previously 7 of the 11 block scored highly in customer satisfaction across all areas and as such were not included in this project.

The high levels of customer satisfaction reported from the other 7 blocks should be considered as a strength, in that the majority of customers are happy with the service, and this needs to be balanced with the views expressed in this report when considering actions that could be taken.

Had time allowed further consultation with these 7 blocks would have been useful as it might be that the problems being reported through this report are “block-specific”.

The following are recommendations generated from both the focus groups and the phone surveys, with the primary influence coming from the focus groups.

1. The issue of security and access is the primary concern and cause of most peoples’ concerns. While we understand this is not an easy area to address, the customers and the VIPs feel the only way to improve control over access is to have a physical presence near the doors of the building on a more regular basis. There are key times and days when this issue presents itself and we recommend that staff are present at these times. We understand this would require an increase in staffing levels or a restructure of the current approach but suggestions from the VIPs are that a varied rota system is introduced which changes every month so unwanted visitors cannot predict which blocks will be manned. We would welcome further discussion on how this could be achieved.
2. Staffing levels in the bunker be doubled so one person can answer the door entry/intercom and one person monitor the cameras. This could be managed according to the busiest times for both. VIPs and customers feel that with only one member of staff in the bunker cameras cannot be adequately monitored because as well as the cameras they are also answering door entry requests and intercoms from flats.
3. Where customers report an incident and ask for camera evidence then feedback is given to the customer within an agreed timescale, such as 24 hours for example to inform the customer what action has been taken. This could be adopted as a service standard and reported on the notice board monthly.
4. Where other staff eg enforcement officers are given access to the building, customers are informed and photos of these staff displayed on the notice boards.
5. Bin stores and chutes are not being locked at the times they should be. People have also been found sleeping in the bin chute room. This duty could be given to a responsible and willing group of customers or an electronic remote locking system be installed. This could also apply to the laundry rooms as there are similar issues being reported.
6. The issue of laundry tokens and how to get them needs re-evaluating as it seems it is being abused by people who do not live in the blocks. Perhaps the issuing of tokens by a responsible groups of customers could be piloted.
7. Tristar Homes consider an options appraisal relating to various levels of service delivery and service charge implications, which is then offered to all customers for their views, thereby giving customers a choice of an increased level of service at an increased price.
8. A more robust system for clocking HRST presence in the blocks should be considered. This could take the form of a new electronic fob system at various levels/points within the building which can be monitored and reported back to customers and management.
9. A time sheet to be displayed in the communal area of each block, on the notice board for the HRST to fill in, as and when, they have patrolled the building. This should be placed where it can be monitored by camera. This would provide reassurance to customers of their presence and allow for more effective time management of staff.
10. There are concerns from customers about response times to incidents. Given the 45 minute response target currently in place, we suggest that performance against this (eg response times/average response times) are displayed on the notice board to improve service standards. Consider reduction in this target over time to improve response time to incidents.
11. There are some concerns that people are accessing the building via the HRST without this being checked with the customer, that the visitor is claiming they are going to visit. All customers should be contacted prior to entry being given to confirm they are who they say they are. Given call volumes in the bunker for one staff we appreciate this would be difficult, which reinforces our previous recommendation that two staff are needed.
12. Consider the introduction of video camera monitors in each flat and feedback potential service charge costs to all customers. Consult customers so they can make a choice as to whether they are prepared to pay for this added service.
13. There were some reported incidents of staff being abrupt or rude with customers. This is clearly not acceptable even if bunker staff are very busy. We recommend that some Customer Care training be delivered to the HRST and a poster be displayed on the notice board directing customers to Tristar’s Complaints procedures/team.
14. Customers need clarification of the lettings policy for the blocks, as they understood the flats are for over 25s only, but some younger customers are being given properties. There is a feeling from customers that more people with high support needs such as drug/alcohol are living in the blocks. The VIPs recommend that allocations in future consider the balance of such persons with the safety of the blocks and positive steps are taken to reduce the number in future.
15. We welcome the production of the High Rise Support newsletter and recommend that a quarterly meeting of HRST and customers be held in the communal areas to monitor performance and provide feedback on the service. Customers should be given a chance to have some input into the newsletter.

**Appendix 1 – example of the flyer posted to all customers**



**Nolan House**

**Our involved customers would like to speak with you, and you could win a £10 shopping voucher!**

At Tristar Homes, we are always trying to improve the services we provide and to be able to do this independently we have trained a group of tenants who are interested in getting your views and experiences.

One project they are looking at is the new High Rise Support Service introduced in July of last year and as you are receiving this service we would like your feedback on how you are finding it.

You can do this by attending a focus group we are holding in the Communal room on the ground floor. We would like a maximum of 12 customers but if more people turn up we will try and accommodate you given the space. We will be raffling five £10 gift vouchers at the focus group

The focus group will be held in the Communal room on the ground floor and will be run by three of the tenants mentioned above on…..

**Monday 27th January between 1 - 2.15pm**

If you would like to attend the focus group just turn up at the time and place above and hopefully we can fit everyone in!

The information you provide will be treated in utmost confidence and only used to improve our services generally. Your name and details will not be shared with anyone, including staff, however some of your comments may be used anonymously in reports.

**Jonathan Cannon**

**Customer Involvement officer**

**Appendix 2 - Questions used in the focus groups**

Introduction

1. Welcome all the residents
2. House rules – fire alarms, toilets (go when you want), no coffee break
3. Say who we are (introduce each other) and where we are from
4. Explain that the concept of VIPs was that we feel that by customers talking to customers we will get a more honest understanding of what the concerns are. Give brief history of how this project came about with Paul Noddings and what he’s interested in finding out from yourselves.
5. Explain the group will last approx. an hour and we will give the £10 vouchers out at the end. If it overruns and people need to leave then we will give them their vouchers at that point.
6. Explain that all the information shared in this group will be held confidentially by the VIP group, and ask that you don’t share anything personal or private that you hear in the meeting with other residents or staff….. explain we may use some quotes but will not give peoples’ names

**Questions**

1. Has safety in your block improved, stayed the same or got a bit worse since the new service has been in place? We decided to ask a supplementary question with this question which was as follows, Is there any time during the day or during the week that the safety is worse or better?
2. Has the reduction in the service charge for the high rise support service been of help to you? A supplementary question with this was do you pay the service charge? We wanted to try and make sure that we got a range of both people who paid for the service and people who had the service charge paid by Housing Benefit.
3. How easy is it for you to contact the service? A supplementary question to this was how long did it take for the support team to answer?
4. What improvements do you think could be made to the service?
5. How often do you see the patrol round your block?
6. How have you found the staff from the service? Are they friendly and approachable and sensitive to your situation and needs?
7. What are the main issues with the high rise support service?

**Appendix 3 – (Timeline of events)**

**Timeline**

15th October

VIP meeting outlining the project with presentation from Paul Noddings to the project group

31st October

VIP meeting agreeing the approach and methodology

20th November

VIP meeting producing the questions for the surveys and planning focus groups.

15th January

VIP meeting with Mick McLone at the “bunker”, followed by visits to the four High Rise blocks with Patch Managers

27th January

Three focus groups held in Hume, Nolan and Hudson House by the VIPs

10th February

Meeting of VIPs and Jonathan Cannon to agree findings and recommendations. Report completed and sent to VIPs for consideration

14th February

Report sent to all project team and High Rise Support staff group

18th February

Report presented to High Rise Support staff by the VIPs, St Peters House

9th April

Response and action plan presented by Paul Noddings to the VIP group with timescales for implementation

**Response to the recommendations and action plan (Appendix 4)**

In response to the recommendations, the High Rise Service Review group have met and considered appropriate responses. These have been incorporated into an Action Plan which forms part of this report. Whilst taking on board actions and delivery timescales, the issue of Value For Money must be considered at all times. In addition, the recent merger to form the Thirteen Group will clearly consider as part of its role, the future delivery of services to all high rise blocks within the new group.

The remit of the VIP review focused on the four blocks where satisfaction had not met the high satisfaction levels of the other seven blocks. Any reduction in satisfaction levels should be assessed against the fact that the blocks are safe and clean places to live. They have low incidents of anti-social behaviour and crime and are supported by a 24/7 CCTV monitoring and door entry control, supported by patrols every evening.

There is no excuse for poor customer service and there is a long term commitment to continue to listen to customers and have an open dialogue about the effectiveness of the service. Customers will be encouraged to contact more frequently if they see something wrong or experience service that is not in line with the agreed service standards.

Despite the reduction in the cost of the service, a small number of high profile incidents have happened in the review period and the service has managed to respond in a proactive way. The service is flexible and shift patterns adjusted to reflect the times incidents are occurring.

There is a recognition that people’s perceptions of the service mean we have to work very hard to reassure them, though it must be recognised that the new service is not yet twelve months old and there is a long term commitment to deliver a high quality and accountable High Rise Support Team service.

A number of incidents highlighted in the report are historical, have been dealt with and they has been no repetition. All incidents are logged, recorded and investigated and an audit trail available on what actions occurred and when. Recorded incidents are used to regularly to review the deployment of resources.

The findings of the review highlight diverse opinion about the blocks and the cost of the service which the review will continue to address. The reduction in service cost of £9 per week is vitally important to customers whose incomes are being under pressure due to rising utility costs and changes to welfare benefits. The reduced charge also increases the long term viability of each block, by making them more sustainable, at a time when the demand for some of the blocks is reducing.

**High Rise Support Team Action Plan (Appendix 4)**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Recommendation** | **Action** | **Accountable Officer** | **Deadline**  |
| **1.** The issue of security and access is the primary concern and cause of most peoples’ concerns. While we understand this is not an easy area to address, the customers and the VIPs feel the only way to improve control over access is to have a physical presence near the doors of the building on a more regular basis. There are key times and days when this issue presents itself and we recommend that staff are present at these times. We understand this would require an increase in staffing levels or a restructure of the current approach but suggestions from the VIPs are that a varied rota system is introduced which changes every month so unwanted visitors cannot predict which blocks will be manned. We would welcome further discussion on how this could be achieved. | 1. MM to develop tracking and recording system logging officers on and leaving site. This will be done via collating DGX information, allowing a random sample of monthly data to be available.
2. Information/updates/outcomes to be shared with customers block by block regularly, behind lockable notice board.
3. HRST to carry out personal visits whilst on site.
4. Flexible approach to staff patterns driven by intelligence. Resources freed by the investment in Kennedy Gardens will be utilised to deliver increased patrols within the blocks. The intention is evaluate the impact of changes to shift patterns and deployment of resources and reassess every six months (see below)
 | Mick McLone (MM) Paul Noddings (PN) Steve Sykes (SS)Elaine Horrocks (EH) Purpose of this work is to win ‘hearts & minds’ | 31/5/2014 |
| **2.** Staffing levels in the bunker be doubled so one person can answer the door entry/intercom and one person monitor the cameras. This could be managed according to the busiest times for both. VIPs and customers feel that with only one member of staff in the bunker cameras cannot be adequately monitored because as well as the cameras they are also answering door entry requests and intercoms from flats. | 1. Installation of refuse chutes in Kennedy 1, 2, 3 will free up significant resources to double up in bunker.
2. Average waiting time per block to be publicised in quarterly newsletter.
 | Graeme Small (GS) PN/SS | 31/10/2014 |
| 1. Where customers report an incident and ask for camera evidence then feedback is given to the customer within an agreed timescale, such as 24 hours for example to inform the customer what action has been taken. This could be adopted as a service standard and reported on the notice board monthly.
 | 1. To be incorporated as a service standard at the next service review
2. Anonymous updates where possible in Quarterly Newsletter highlighting positive outcomes
 | Mick McLone MM /PN/SS | 31/10/14 |
| **4.** Where other staff e.g. enforcement officers are given access to the building, customers are informed and photos of these staff displayed on the notice boards. | 1. Enforcement Officers to be encouraged to call in where resources allow.
2. Note in notice board highlighting EO just visiting.
 | GS/PN/SS | 31/5/2014 |
| **5.** Bin stores and chutes are not being locked at the times they should be. People have also been found sleeping in the bin chute room. This duty could be given to a responsible and willing group of customers or an electronic remote locking system be installed. This could also apply to the laundry rooms as there are similar issues being reported. | 1. Feasibility and cost of issuing fobs to customers to be reviewed.
2. Feasibility of fitting electronic/timer control to be investigated.
 | PN/SS | 30/6/2014 |
| **6.** The issue of laundry tokens and how to get them needs re-evaluating as it seems it is being abused by people who do not live in the blocks. Perhaps the issuing of tokens by responsible groups of customers could be piloted. | See 2 above | PN/SS | 30/6/2014 |
| **7.** Tristar Homes consider an options appraisal relating to various levels of service delivery and service charge implications, which is then offered to all customers for their views, thereby giving customers a choice of an increased level of service at an increased price. | 1. Possibility of undertaking a wider Thirteen review at some point in the future.
2. During this review, feasibility of delivering one standard and cost across all blocks with customers, options appraisal (gold, bronze, silver)
 | .SS | 1/4/2015 |
| **8.** A more robust system for clocking HRST presence in the blocks should be considered. This could take the form of a new electronic fob system at various levels/points within the building which can be monitored and reported back to customers and management. | See recommendation 1. 1. High profile patrol, presence ten minutes only in each reception area to spread reassurance to customers. Rota to be amended.
 | MM  | 30/6/2014 |
| **9.** A time sheet to be displayed in the communal area of each block, on the notice board for the HRST to fill in, as and when, they have patrolled the building. This should be placed where it can be monitored by camera. This would provide reassurance to customers of their presence and allow for more effective time management of staff. | 1. Please refer to recommendation 1.
 | GS | To be agreed |
| **10.** There are concerns from customers about response times to incidents. Given the 45 minute response target currently in place, we suggest that performance against this (e.g. response times/average response times) are displayed on the notice board to improve service standards. Consider reduction in this target over time to improve response time to incidents | 1. Agreed to publish response times in block, 40-45 minutes and under 45 minutes.
 | GS/MM | 1/7/2014 |
| **11.** There are some concerns that people are accessing the building via the HRST without this being checked with the customer, that the visitor is claiming they are going to visit. All customers should be contacted prior to entry being given to confirm they are who they say they are. Given call volumes in the bunker for one staff we appreciate this would be difficult, which reinforces our previous recommendation two staff are needed. | 1. 1. Commitment given to increase resources in bunker, on-going shift patterns/rota, Efficiencies delivered from Investment programme.
2. Reiteration of standards required to staff
3. Promotional material in next quarterly newsletter on opting out and the consequences of not adhering to the wider safety of the block
 | MM/GS/SS | On-going |
| **12.** Consider the introduction of video camera monitors in each flat and feedback potential service charge costs to all customers. Consult customers so they can make a choice as to whether they are prepared to pay for this added service | 1. Acknowledgement that this proposal is only feasible if built into refurbishment of block and all customers agree service charge
2. PN to assess proposed costs for a block
 | PN | 31/5/2014 |
| **13.** There were some reported incidents of staff being abrupt or rude with customers. This is clearly not acceptable even if bunker staff are very busy. We recommend that some Customer Care training be delivered to the HRST and a poster be displayed on the notice board directing customers to Tristar’s Complaints procedures/team. | No complaints ever recorded.1. Invitation to CI framework scrutiny to carry out some mystery shopping.
2. Supervisors carry out internal checks.
3. Promotion to customers of how to make a complaint in the blocks 03001111000
4. Deliver training on Thirteen values and new customer service standards to HRST
5. Opportunity HRST to spend some time in Customer Service Centre (Contact Centre)
 | EH/MM  | 31/7/2014 |
| **14.** Customers need clarification of the lettings policy for the blocks, as they understood the flats are for over 25s only, but some younger customers are being given properties. There is a feeling from customers that more people with high support needs such as drug/alcohol are living in the blocks. The VIPs recommend that allocations in future consider the balance of such persons with the safety of the blocks and positive steps are taken to reduce the number in future. | 1. Patch Managers/Neighbourhood Officers have formal working arrangements in place with Compass, this will continue
2. Compass team to review age profile of each block, if unbalanced to address
3. Demand for some properties, P and M for example is very low
 | SS/ PN/EH  | 31/5/2014 |
| **15.** We welcome the production of the HRS newsletter and recommend that a quarterly meeting of HRST and customers be held in the communal areas to monitor performance and provide feedback on the service. Customers should be given a chance to have some input into the newsletter. | 1. Commitment made to involve customers from Q3 newsletter
2. Agreement to deliver updates, in line with Customer Involvement development of discussion infrastructure
3. Outcomes/minutes of the Customer High Rise Group to be made available
 | PN/SS/JC/EH  | 30/4/14 |