



Report to Customers and Communities Committee

26 July 2012

Title:	Respect – ASB Charter for Housing - A review of anti-social behaviour case management
Report of:	TALISMAN – Tenant and Leaseholder Independent Scrutiny Management Panel

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of the report is to inform the Committee of our review into how The Gateshead Housing Company (TGHC) manages Anti-social behaviour (ASB) and make any recommendations that we as a panel consider will improve service delivery.

Background

2. Since 2010, the Council and Company working with Wood Holmes and Gentoo considered the opportunities to develop an independent tenants' organisation within Gateshead.
3. The Tenant and Leaseholder Independent Scrutiny Management (TALISMAN) panel were appointed in September 2011 from a three stage recruitment process of:
 - Self assessment questionnaire
 - Group exercise
 - Individual interviews

To qualify for selection an applicant would need to be either a tenant or a leaseholder, and be motivated in improving housing and neighbourhood services for the good of all and not for personal gain.

4. The panel have undertaken a series of training activities to develop their skills and experience.
5. TALISMAN have a number of tools at their disposal to collect evidence including:
 - Interviews of individual employees
 - Focus groups of employees or customers including service improvement groups
 - Requesting mystery shopping exercises
 - Completing a 'Request for information' form

- Co-opting external advisors to provide additional information on a specific subject area

Selecting an area for scrutiny

6. It was proposed the first area to scrutinise would be the ASB Charter for Housing - Respect. This is a sector-owned replacement for the Respect Standard for Housing Management and was developed by Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), Social Landlords Crime and Nuisance Group (SLCNG) and Housemark.
7. The purpose of the Charter is to be outcome focused and improve services dealing with ASB. There are seven commitments: -
 - Demonstrating leadership and strategic commitment
 - Providing an accessible and accountable service
 - Taking swift action to protect communities
 - Adopting a supportive approach to working with victims and witnesses
 - Encouraging individual and community responsibility
 - Having a clear focus on prevention and early intervention
 - Ensuring a value for money approach is embedded in the service
8. The Charter framework was a natural first point of consideration to establish how TGHC deals with ASB. The framework was examined in detail and led to investigation of how the company puts this into practise when delivering the Neighbourhood Relations Service in Gateshead.
9. The panel were assisted by their Customer Panel Support Officer throughout the scrutiny activity and held their inaugural meeting in December 2011. TALISMAN reviewed the breadth of the charter and decided to focus their review on ASB case management. The findings and recommendation within this report therefore focus on this area.

Overall findings

10. Overall findings showed that there is a high level of commitment by managers and employees to tackle and support customers experiencing ASB.
11. There is a range of positive practise identified which is summarised in the Appendix.
12. Using the scrutiny tools at their disposal and following extensive and methodical research by the panel they also identified a number of recommendations. These are detailed in the Appendix.
13. The following sections explain the work undertaken by TALISMAN to gain a broad perspective of the service and how they have arrived at their final recommendations.

Website and desktop review

14. TALISMAN scrutinised the company website as they considered for those customers experiencing ASB this would be a natural source of information. The ASB section was easily accessed, showed clearly the company's commitment to

dealing with ASB and how customers could gain further information or assistance by contacting housing offices or reporting ASB via the on line tool.

15. However some conflicting information was identified that may mislead or confuse customers. For instance the out of hours service is actually available until 7pm however some web pages showed the service available until 8pm. In addition there were problems downloading documents advertised which were no longer available.

Desktop Review

16. Through extensive desktop research TALISMAN concluded TGHC have robust and efficient policies and procedures in place for tackling ASB. Research also identified the high level of victim & witness support available, performance targets were met consistently, reports to TGHC board are detailed, informative and available to customers via the website.
17. A number of tools can be used to manage ASB including formal warnings, extending introductory tenancies, acceptable behaviour agreements and much more. TALISMAN were impressed with standard and quantity of literature available to customers. All information was clearly set out, easily understood and available in accessible formats upon request.
18. Information leaflets are available in housing offices and to download from the website however, there was some information in the leaflets which was identified as out of date. This included references to UNITE mediation which the company no longer have a contract for and the Neighbourhood Wardens service which has been withdrawn. TALISMAN were concerned that when customers were at their most vulnerable they would be misinformed, misdirected and their expectations falsely raised.

Mystery Shopper Exercise

19. TALISMAN commissioned the assistance of independent, trained, mystery shoppers in order to gather evidence on their behalf relating to customers experiences reporting anti social behaviour in Gateshead. The exercise took place on 2 April 2012, for the duration of 2 hours to encompass a busy Monday morning and lunch time period.
20. Mystery shoppers were to remain anonymous, scenarios used were developed with mystery shoppers and based on standards set out in 'A guide to the services you can expect from The Gateshead Housing Company'. They focused on the theme of case management related to noise nuisance and hate crime.
21. Mystery shoppers gained valuable service delivery information from across the borough. Results identified: -
 - Employees in all offices contacted gave the company name in their greeting
 - The approach provided to customers varied from office to office depending upon the query and on the level of experience of those employees
 - When calls were made anonymously some employees were reluctant to provide detailed advice

Neighbourhood Relations Team Manager Presentation and Question and Answer session

22. Neighbourhood Relations Team (NRT) Managers delivered a presentation to TALISMAN in March 2012, this was followed by a question and answer session in May to allow TALISMAN to clarify and explore further areas. It was evident managers were highly committed, passionate about improving service delivery and enhancing the customer's quality of life.
23. This exercise has shown TGHC focus on all parties to ensure fairness in dealing with ASB. The emphasis on support for victims, witnesses and perpetrators displays an impartial compassion by the organisation and its employees for all those affected by ASB.
24. TGHC partnership working with Northumbria Police, Gateshead Council's Safer Communities Team, NHS Foundation Trust and others was highlighted as positive practise allowing for an effective joined up approach to managing ASB.
25. Through research it was identified that TGHC's reporting of performance and service standards was good and results generally positive. TALISMAN however identified that the process to randomly select customers to survey should be more rigorous and IT based as opposed to the current manual system. The percentage of customers surveyed should be increased to allow for more meaningful statistical returns. This will ensure more robust data collection which could be used by managers and the SIG to improve procedures, systems and customer service delivery.

Neighbourhood Relations Team Service Improvement Group

26. TALISMAN met with representatives from the ASB Service Improvement Group (SIG) to understand their role more thoroughly and how TGHC tackles and manages ASB.
27. The SIG receive regular performance indicator (PI) information and have worked with officers to ensure performance report comments are more descriptive.
28. The SIG are involved in performance target setting. Although comparative information with other housing providers isn't shared with the group, there have been previous discussions on learning from other housing providers such as South Tyneside and this is an area of development the SIG would like to explore.
29. TALISMAN noted the SIG felt empowered, were enthusiastic and committed to their involvement. They showed an excellent understanding of the service and benefits of partnership working to enhance service delivery on estates.

Employee Focus Group

30. In May TALISMAN met an employee focus group which was made up of Neighbourhood Relations Officers (NRO) and Estate Officers (EO) to talk about their role in ASB case management.
31. The focus group felt the most effective aspects of the service included: -

- Mental Health Link Worker (MHLW) who provides a good, effective, direct link to the NHS for employees and vulnerable customers
 - An EO in Central area considered Caretakers and Concierge in multi storey blocks to be an excellent resource for collecting evidence to support customer ASB cases. This is a good example of using wider services to gain a thorough understanding of what is happening in the local neighbourhood.
 - Employees highlighted they have a 'two way relationship' with Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) and their involvement helps to reduce ASB. PCSO have an interest in their patrol areas, a good local knowledge, will take part in joint visits to perpetrators, provide a visual deterrent on estates and will increase patrols when requested.
32. The focus group identified obstacles to carrying out their role some of which they felt to be an 'occupational hazard' such as the length of time to conclude ASB cases when the legal system is involved. TALISMAN acknowledged that the loss of support services has impacted on the company's ability to deliver effective housing services including the loss of Neighbourhood Wardens, mediation service UNITE, victim support services and family intervention officer. Employees also discussed referring cases to children and adult social services, highlighting that currently they were not aware of one central named contact or a direct link into these services.
33. Employees combat these hurdles by managing customer expectations with empathy and understanding, they also: -
- Provide customers with realistic timescales to achieve positive ASB resolution
 - Agree an action plan with customers
 - Work with Police to progress (where involved)
 - Keep customers updated on all case developments
34. Overall TALISMAN were impressed by the level of experience and immense amount of knowledge amongst individuals and the group. This was underpinned by the strong working relationships established between NRO's and EO's. Employees showed a high level of commitment and passion to carrying out their roles to enhance the lives of customers.
35. The discussions did however show that a great deal of knowledge is based on experience which was highlighted by TALISMAN as a possible issue for new officers or any less experienced customer facing employees. It was considered that the *ASB Guidance Procedures (revised in January 2011)* accessed by the Managing Tenancies Intranet should be updated periodically and drawn to the attention of employees. This will provide a resource to all employees and ensure that the service is delivered consistently across the borough.

Summary

36. TALISMAN conducted their first scrutiny activity within six months and utilised all resources available to ensure sound and accurate evidence was collected.
37. Scrutiny of the service has highlighted ten areas of positive practise including how officers manage the service using the estate matrix, partnership working and supporting customers experiencing ASB.

38. It also resulted in the identification of ten recommendations which if implemented will result in tangible improvements to customer service delivery and assist in managing the service more effectively.

Communicating Findings

39. Following presentation of the findings at this committee some further actions will be taken:
- Discussion and feedback with the service about how the recommendations were reached to inform the action plan and response
 - Article in TGHC news summarising the review
 - Article in the Annual Report to Tenants and Leaseholders to include information on this review
 - Feedback to Gateshead Council's Housing Services and Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Link to values

40. This report relates to the following company values: -
- Being a listening and learning organisation
 - Being honest, accountable and transparent
 - Being customer focused, innovative and professional
 - Caring and respecting

Impact on tenants

40. TALISMAN's focus has been to drive forward service improvements in this emotive area of customer service delivery. It is envisaged that recommendations made will improve the lives of customers.
41. Tenants and leaseholders are likely to be more satisfied where they feel they have had the opportunity to influence service provision. Regular publicity will inform the wider tenant population of the company's willingness to progress under co-regulation.

Risk Management Implications

42. The regulatory framework places a requirement on registered providers to prevent and tackle ASB in areas where they own properties.
43. Failure to tackle ASB effectively has been identified as a risk for the company and recommendations made support the framework requirement.

Financial Implications

44. Recommendations made have no significant financial implications and relate to improving processes, protocol and service delivery.

Equality and Diversity Implications

45. TALISMAN's code of conduct includes specific expectations around equality and diversity. They have undertaken training to ensure that scrutiny activities conducted and recommendations made are accessible and inclusive to all.
46. Part of questioning and investigation in this review was specifically related to considering how people with different needs use the service.

Value for Money Implications

47. TALISMAN have a remit to consider value for money within the scrutiny activities they conduct. Recommendations made will help improve customer satisfaction whilst encompassing the Value for Money regulatory standards.

Health Implications

48. TALISMAN felt that managing ASB effectively is essential due to the serious impact it has on the mental and physical wellbeing of customers.

Environmental Implications

49. There are no direct environment implications associated with this report.

Consultation carried out

50. There has been extensive consultation carried out with NRT managers, the SIG, employee focus group and the use of satisfaction data to gather valuable evidence.

Recommendations

51. The committee is recommended to
 - note recommendations attached and review positive practise; and
 - request a formal response to TALISMAN's recommendations from the Neighbourhood Relations Team to be presented to the next committee and subsequently to report this response and action plan to TALISMAN.

Contact: TALISMAN via Louise Taylor, Involvement and Diversity Manager
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Positive Practice	
Estate Matrix	The Estate Matrix assists officers to improve service delivery by targeting areas experiencing high levels of ASB and allocating human and financial resources effectively where needed. TALISMAN considered this was an excellent tool to combat ASB in Gateshead.
Supporting victims, witnesses & perpetrators	Research has proved TGHC focus on all parties (victims, witnesses & perpetrators) to ensure fairness in dealing with ASB. There is great emphasis on support for victims, witnesses and perpetrators. This displays an impartial compassion by the organisation and its employees for all those affected by ASB.
Performance indicators and service standards	Reporting for key performance indicators and service standards is robust.
Complaints	<p>It is encouraging that there have been few formal complaints made regarding the NRT service which highlights the teams focus on good customer service.</p> <p>Complaints – Over 1,000 new cases were opened within the first three quarters of 2011/12 which generated only six complaints for the Neighbourhood Relations Team, of which three were partially justified and none were fully justified.</p>
Neighbourhood Nuisance leaflet	Although the Neighbourhood Nuisance leaflet needs to be updated it is well presented and readily available via housing offices and on the website in various formats.
Partnership arrangements	The positive partnership working between TGHC, Police, and other parties (such as Neighbourhood watch schemes where present) to identify problem areas and individuals is an area of positive practise for the company.



Positive Practice	
ASB awareness training	Training for Northumbria Police regarding TGHC procedures and processes for ASB awareness and information is an area of positive practise that results in a cohesive approach to addressing ASB in Gateshead.
Families Gateshead	TGHC will be working with other partners on the Gateshead approach to the governments 'Troubled families' initiative, called 'Families Gateshead'. Although only being in the planning stages, partnership working between Gateshead Council and partners including TGHC underpinned by the willingness to maximise funding via this agenda to support vulnerable families in their area was acknowledged. The panel identified an area of positive practise.
Use of human resources	<p>An Estate Officer (EO) in the Central area works with Caretakers and Concierge in multi storey blocks to collect evidence that supports customer ASB cases, such as noise nuisance.</p> <p>The panel thought this was an excellent use of human resources and team work which supported customers, including those that are vulnerable, to collect factual and strong evidence that leads to successful ASB case outcomes.</p>
Employee Focus Group	<p>The employee focus group made up of Neighbourhood Relations Officers (NRO) and Estate Officer (EO) showed a high level of commitment and passion to carry out their roles and improve the lives of customers on their estates.</p> <p>The panel were impressed by the level of experience amongst individuals and the group which was underpinned by the strong working relationships established between NRO's and EO's. The panel felt part of the strength to this was NROs being located within local offices rather than centrally.</p>



Recommendations for Improvement	
Scrutiny	Recommendation
<p>From the TGHC website, Neighbourhood Nuisance Outline page: The website states out of hours service is available up to 8pm Monday to Friday.</p> <p>Victim and witness support protocol. The protocol link on this page did not work when website was reviewed in February and again in May 2012.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and update website on a regularly basis throughout the year.
<p>Leaflet review – Neighbourhood Nuisance and the tools we use to tackle anti-social behaviour</p> <p>Neighbourhood Wardens and Unite Mediation is mentioned in leaflet although through review it has been identified there is now no contract in place.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and update leaflet promptly and on a regularly basis throughout the year.
<p>Investigations have shown that during 2011/12 telephone survey response rate is decreasing for Managing Tenancies And Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) performance indicators 3 & 4.</p> <p>Performance Indicator 3 & 4 survey response rates for 2011/12:</p> <p>Quarter 1 – 17% (77 surveys conducted out of 449 cases closed) Quarter 2 – 17% (82 surveys conducted out of 506 cases closed) Quarter 3 – 15% (43 surveys conducted out of 479 cases closed) Quarter 4 – 15% (59 surveys conducted out of 400 cases closed)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Telephone survey's need to be complimented with the development of web based surveys, as well as conducting additional postal surveys. Reminder letters should be issued. This will allow for a more meaningful statistical return resulting in more robust data collection The random nature of customer survey selection needs to be more rigorous adopting the use of Microsoft office products or similar electronic software products Share survey results with the Service Improvement Group (SIG) to allow customers and officers to work together and identify areas for improvement

Accumulative annually total - 14% (261 surveys conducted out of 1,834 cases closed)	
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Recommendations for Improvement	
Scrutiny	Recommendation
<p>Mystery Shopper Exercise</p> <p>TALISMAN commissioned a mystery shopping exercise to assist in gathering information relating to customers experience of reporting anti social behaviour throughout Gateshead via the housing office network.</p> <p>Mystery shopping is a tool used to test the level of customer service delivery and ensure consistency is achieved across the borough.</p>	<p>Neighbourhood Relations Team (NRT) to circulate a briefing (sharing findings of the mystery shopping exercise) and deliver at housing office training sessions to ensure consistency:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processes/procedures to help customers suffering from anti-social behaviour and that information can be provided to anonymous callers (in line with statement in Guide to Services) • Support services available to help customers through the process to report anti-social behaviour • Tools available to gather evidence <p>Involvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeat annual mystery shopping exercise of the ASB service delivered via the housing office network
<p>Annual Report 2010/11 issued to customers in October 2011 – Neighbourhood and Community ASB section. Statement made:</p> <p><i>'Monitor the average time it takes to resolve an anti-social behaviour case, understanding that the victim's quality of life is impacted by the length of time it can take to resolve some cases'</i></p> <p>During Question & Answer session with Managers it was established that this information was not regularly monitored and could not be provided routinely.</p> <p>The panel also reviewed the annual report with specific reference to the anti-social behaviour section of Neighbourhood and Community to clarify information regarding reporting and managing ASB</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect and report data to Service Improvement Group (SIG) for monitoring purposes • SIG and employees to use data and work together to indentify areas for improvement for the average time to resolve ASB case.

cases.	
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Recommendations for Improvement	
Scrutiny	Recommendation
<p>Neighbourhood Relations Team Service Improvement Group work plan</p> <p>TALISMAN received conflicting evidence on 4 and 21 May 2012 as to the development of NRT's SIG work plan.</p> <p>An 'Information request form' was issued requesting a copy of the agenda and minutes of when the SIG plan was discussed. The panel felt the information provided did not constitute strategic work plan development between customers and officers that would lead to improved customer service delivery.</p>	<p>Neighbourhood Relations Team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop 2012/13 Service Improvement Group work plan with group <p>Involvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TPAS Tenant Involvement Training to be re-run for all SIG leads to concentrate on outcomes of service improvement for customers Review with SIG and managers their original purpose, remind them of their role and how to use data from other organisation to improve TGHC ASB service
<p>Employee focus group 21 May 2012</p> <p>Through discussions with the employee focus group TALISMAN identified that there were barriers to helping customers when the case required access to the Council's adult and children services. Officers were not aware of one central contact as they believe they are not internally co-ordinated by a central section.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish the correct procedure and contact Ensure all front line staff receive training to understand the process to use to access service
<p>Employee focus group 21 May 2012</p> <p>Scrutiny has identified the positive impact the Customer Assessment Tool has had to deliver a more effective customer focus ASB service. As this process is in its infancy there is the potential to make improvements on how it is delivered.</p> <p>TALISMAN established from the working group that this process requires the CAT to be carried out in</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share feedback from customer experience of the Customer Assessment Tool (CAT) process with employees Review the method of completing and signing CAT face to face with customers as this can cause a delay in collecting evidence and providing the customer with a quick response to ASB incidents

<p>person with the customer and that sometimes this can cause potential delays due to their other commitments such as employment. Unless the CAT is signed by the customer then this can cause delays to the case being progressed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate the possibility of completing CAT's by telephone which is followed up by customer signing document.
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Recommendations for Improvement	
Scrutiny	Recommendation
<p>Employee focus group 21 May 2012</p> <p>TALISMAN were impressed by the level of experience and immense amount of knowledge amongst individuals and group. This was underpinned by the strong working relationships of employees across the service. However the panel highlighted a potential issue for new or less experienced officers to ensure that a consistent service continues to be provided across the borough.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regularly review and update promptly where appropriate the <i>ASB Guidance Procedures (revised in January 2011)</i> which is accessed by the Managing Tenancies Intranet resource. This will provide a resource to all employees and ensure that the service is delivered consistently across the borough.
<p>Neighbourhood Relations Team Service Improvement Group 21 May 2012</p> <p>TALISMAN and the Service Improvement Group discussed developing the 2012/13 work plan and it was established that the SIG would like to maintain a number of links with partners to address Hate Crime and tackle drug and alcohol misuse. They were also keen to benchmark TGHCs service with other housing providers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share the annual Housemark ASB report with SIG, employees and Customers and Communities Committee Use the Housemark report and include in the annual SIG work plan Use Housemark report and work with SIG to benchmark TGHC NRT services against other housing providers, learn from best practise, improve performance and Value for Money.