

Scrutiny Panel



June 2014

Gas Safety Service Review Report

1. Introduction

SLH Scrutiny Panel's fourth service review covers its approach to gas safety. The service review was requested by SLH's Senior Team to ensure that SLH continue to be compliant in this important area of work, ensure that the health and safety of tenants is maintained and to ensure compliancy with the service according to the regulator expectations. The panel is aware of housing associations who have recently suffered downgrades in regulatory judgements caused by the gas safety service.

The panel set aims at the start of the review which were to support SLH to achieve:

- 100% homes with gas safety certificates
- Every home safe
- Clear communication channels between contractor and customer

This report details how the service was completed, what the findings were and recommendations for service improvement.



Where this symbol appears in the report an example of a finding is given to support the conclusion.

2. Recommendations

As a result of the review, the Scrutiny Panel make a series of recommendations (Appendix A) which have been considered by SLH and their responses are attached in the action plan.

3. Methodology

The review was carried out in six parts:

- Staff interviews
- Contractor interviews
- Policy review
- Comparison with others

- Customer feedback
- Communication review

This report will cover the findings and recommendation for each element of the review.

4. Detail

4.1 Staff interviews

The panel interviewed three SLH staff all responsible for the operational delivery of the gas service:

- Property Services Manager
- Senior Property Surveyor
- Property Investment Surveyor

The staff members were all met separately with general questions raised about delivery of the service. Discussions were held about the delivery of the service with suggested improvements made which were well received by the team.

The team were extremely open in the interviews and supportive of the panel review which we would like to thank them for.

4.2 Contractor interviews

The panel attended Sure's office to discuss delivery of the contract. The panel were impressed by Sure and their openness to discussing new ways of working to improve the service.

The panel concentrated on five areas of improvement with Sure:

- Text facilities – the panel asked if Sure is able to introduce a text facility to tell tenants they are on their way to the appointment within 30 minutes of the appointment or could text if they were going to be delayed. Sure were open to this and the panel feel it will support increased access but the panel would like to ensure that SLH continue to keep telephone numbers up to date to make sure that a text facility is as effective as it can be
- Appointment date – before the service review the tenant was asked to make an appointment and informed when Sure would be in the area, after discussions with the panel a revised system has been implemented where an initial appointment is sent on the first notice letter. However the panel is concerned that the appointment slot provided is for 8am to 6pm slots which is too long for a tenant to wait in and could increase no accesses
- For servicing appointments, the panel asked that slots should be on reduced from four hours to two hours. Sure is happy to offer this on request

- Improve the initial letter sent by Sure which the panel felt to be wordy, confusing, could contribute to appointments being missed and felt like a 'sales pitch' for further work by Sure. Sure agreed and have now updated the letter which the panel are happy is clearer. Some of the information about the extra services Sure offered will now be contained in a flyer to be provided at the check by the engineer. The panel would like to ensure that an alternative format flag is included on the reverse of this letter, as is standard for SLH communication
- The panel would like SLH and Sure to consider further how vulnerable tenants access to the service can be improved. The panel felt that there was a clear service available for deaf tenants but there was not clarity over whether they receive additional information from SLH to respond to all needs and whether alert information from Orchard is shared with Sure regularly and not at the start of the programme

The panel were impressed by the work that Sure is doing to deliver an excellent service for SLH. This included employing a female operative to complete checks which the panel note will particularly support vulnerable tenants who may feel more comfortable with a female in their home.

4.3 Policy review

The Scrutiny Panel received SLH's policy related documents and is concerned that SLH do not have a formal policy on Gas Safety despite it being mentioned in the Repairs & Maintenance Policy that one exists. The panel feel that a policy document should support this important service.

The panel feel that this policy should also detail the approach to dealing with those that don't provide access and in particular repeat offenders as there is a lack of a clear and coordinated response for these cases. Staff were unable to confirm the profile of those that don't provide access and if they are indeed repeat offenders. The panel recommend that this analysis needs to take place and a process for dealing with tenants that don't provide access in the year are contacted earlier in the following years programme.

4.4 Comparison with others

From looking at HouseMark data comparing our performance to others, we are clear that there is some learning that we can take from those considered to be the best performers. As part of the comparison with others, the panel invited in the top performer in our peer group 'City

South Manchester' to discuss their service with both panel members and officers.

The following are learning points:

- The City South team has two dedicated administrators who support achievement of 100% access and 68% access on first visit
- A prize draw for access is included in the first appointment letter
- Appointment made in the first letter
- Clear profiling of those most likely not to allow access to make it easier to be proactive and gain access into those homes
- Clear communication material for customers

In terms of cost, the panel is satisfied that SLH is achieving the best possible contract price but feel more efficiencies around contact arrangements could be achieved to improve the service further.

4.5 Customer feedback

The Neighbourhood Engagement Team, at the request of the panel, invited tenants who had recently undergone a gas service to a focus group to discuss their experiences.

From the two tenants that attended this focus group:

- One tenant requested an appointment avoiding a specific period and was advised that this would be possible, however their plans changed and they returned home early to find Sure was already there. The tenant felt that they would have been carded for no access had they not returned early.
- The second tenant was satisfied with the service she received

Both tenants were querying if weekend appointments were available. Whilst they are, the panel would recommend these are used more to support access where appointments have been missed or access difficult to offer increased flexibility.

A suggestion came from the focus group to have a gas safety stall at Neighbours Day to increase awareness of why gas servicing is so important to tenants and neighbours.

In addition to this, the panel commissioned a mystery shopping exercise. This was targeted at tenants who were due a gas service in April. They were asked if they would keep a diary of their experience so as to support the panel to understand true customer experiences.

A separate mystery shopping review report was developed which highlighted that overall the process is followed but fire alarm checks

need to be completed during all gas safety visits and the process for follow up repairs needs to be reviewed.

4.6 Communication review

As detailed above, the panel feel that the initial letter from Sure and subsequent letters need to ensure they are clear and consistent. The panel feel that this first letter had too much information in and was too long and are satisfied that the revisions made during the review will support an enhanced understanding from customers.

Having reviewed the factsheet that SLH has developed, the panel feel that this is a really clear way of getting the message out so would like this to accompany the initial letter sent by Sure.

In terms of communication through the process, the panel support the use of a key covering sticker where access has not been gained, the panel feel that the sticker is:

- Too big to cover a lock
- Has too much information on the sticker telling more to neighbours and passers-by. The panel feel that a smaller sticker covering the key lock to support identification of whether the tenant has accessed the home along with a clear statement of intent posted through the door would work better.

When a new tenancy begins, it is vital that new tenants are aware of their responsibilities to allow access to their home for gas safety checks so it creates good habits through the tenancy. The panel is pleased this is covered by the first time tenants workshop but would like the gas safety message to be reinforced at sign up and at the 9 month starter tenancy visit (as the gas safety check will be due shortly after this visit).

5. Conclusions

Whilst SLH is performing well at the moment, the panel feel that there are a number of recommendations made within this report that will enhance the customer's understanding of their responsibilities to allow access to their home for a Landlord Gas Safety Check whilst also saving SLH unnecessary costs for pursuing access at homes. The panel aim to increase access to homes first time through the recommendations made.

Report compiled by:

SLH Scrutiny Panel

Number	Recommendation	SMT response	Status	Action to be completed by	Delivered by
1	Text facilities to be introduced when the contractor is on the way to complete the service / repair	Currently this facility is not possible as an automated text from our contractors Job Management system, However we can introduce a phone ahead process from engineers when on route to an appointment	Pending	31/07/14	Gareth Rigby
2	Appointment date is provided with the first letter with two hour appointment slots	Appointment date on first access letter was launched from 01/04/14. 2hr appointment slots are not recommended by both the Health & Safety Executive and Gas Safe as it is deemed to be an approach of quantity of Gas Services during the day and not quality. For SLH to go from no fixed appointment for Gas Servicing pre April 2014 to 2hr appointment slots carries with it a lot of risk and would not be	Pending	31/08/14	Gareth Rigby

		recommended, However to match the appointment availability of all other works that SLH offer to tenants we will be launching AM/PM appointments for Gas Servicing.			
3	Improve the initial letter sent by Sure and produce supporting flyer to be provided at the service	Implemented by Sure	Complete	N/A	Gareth Rigby
4	Investigate further how vulnerable tenants access to the service can be improved including profiling those most likely not to provide access	Agree, best practice examples to be reviewed	Pending	31/08/14	Gareth Rigby
5	SLH do not have a formal policy on Gas Safety despite it being mentioned in the Repairs & Maintenance Policy. A policy document should be developed	Agree, best practice examples to be reviewed	Pending	30/09/2014	Gareth Rigby

6	Consider if current administrative support for the service is sufficient	Review already ongoing of Property Services Team which will cover gas servicing	Pending	30/09/14	Gareth Rigby / Wayne Gales
7	Consider using a prize draw to support access	Recommendation to wait until the launch of AM/PM appointments in August 2014 and then monitor access over the first quarter before agreeing if we need to review more innovative ways of gaining access	Pending	31/01/15	Gareth Rigby
8	Review all communication material to make it easy to understand and ensure important messages are included. This includes reviewing the sticker used to cover locks	Agree	Pending	31/07/14	Gareth Rigby / Claire Ryan
9	Gas safety message reinforced at sign up and at the 9 month starter tenancy visit (as the gas safety check will be due shortly after this visit)	Agree	Pending	30/06/14	Gareth Rigby

10	Use social media to push monthly messages about the programme “It’s April & if you live in xx neighbourhood your gas service is due this month, make sure you are at home for the service or contact us to make a new date”	Agree. PS team to publish information to BE team at the end of each month with the address list for the following month to be posted on Facebook / Twitter. This will need to be an address list rather than neighbourhoods as we now complete Gas Services on a date basis rather than area.	Pending	30/06/14	Eddie McDermott
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