

**Rents Improvement Panel Meeting
Thursday 17th November, 10.30am
at Kilmory Community Centre**

Attendees:

Elaine Christian (EC)
Maurice Christian (MC)
Alun Jones (AJ)
Colin Porter (CP)
Robert Bartlett (RB)
Patricia Robinson (PR)
Andrew Walker (AW) – Area Manager for Queens Park Estate Office and the Rents Team
Kirsty Rushton (KR) – Housing Assistant for the Rents Team
Jen Taylor (JT) – Customer Involvement and Projects Officer

Apologies:

Pauline Richmond
Mark Tugwood

1. Terms of Reference

All attendees were provided with a copy of the Terms of Reference for this Panel illustrating the purpose of the group which is to monitor and scrutinise the performance of the Rents service. It was stated that all Improvement Panels have now adopted a Terms of Reference and Code of Conduct for each meeting. It is anticipated that after the next meeting a customer Chair and Vice-Chair will be appointed by a ballot process conducted by the Customer Involvement and Projects Officer.

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting/Matters Arising

The minutes of the last meeting were read through and agreed as a true record. The following points were updated:

- **Customer First** – A meeting has taken place to discuss service requirements; AW advised that assistance from the counter is available for the payment machines. It was stated that payment receipts are still not showing proper balances.
- AW stated that his post has now been extended until the end of March 2012.
- **Customer Inductions/DVD** – AW informed attendees that the inductions have been cancelled due to low response. The possibility of creating a DVD to provide new customers with relevant information will be looked at once the Housing Services review has taken place.

3. Quarterly Report/Panel Report

The quarterly report was handed out to attendees and it was advised that this would be sent to members approximately two weeks before future meetings. AW explained that this report comes off the in-house system and includes performance information relating to the local offers, service standards and key performance indicators. Attendees agreed that jargon should be kept to a minimum and numbers (not percentages) should be reported on at future meetings. A discussion took place into the report and the following was raised:

- **We will send tenants a rent statement 4 times a year, unless they have requested otherwise:** A value for money exercise is to be completed to decide whether a statement needs to be sent this often; this will be discussed further at the next meeting.
- **The percentage of tenants who have a payable rent paying by direct debit:** AW explained that direct debit is the cheapest way of collecting rent and an incentive scheme may be used to promote this method. Benchmarking is to be completed and this will be looked at in the future.
- **We will offer you advice and guidance around benefits and managing debts when required:** This relates to the Rents Intervention Officer (RIO) post. Figures for reduction in arrears following assistance from RIO will be brought to future meetings.

4. Service Development and Benchmarking

AW attends a quarterly benchmarking meeting which provides the opportunity to meet with similar organisations to compare services and performance. The group will be meeting in December to discuss preparations for Universal Credit.

AW stated that developing a partnership with the Credit Union is currently being considered to increase tenant membership. A case study article was included in the last Rents Newsletter and will be included again in the winter edition of Viewpoint to further promote the service.

AW explained there are a number of ongoing service developments:

- Satisfaction is due to be measured relating to early intervention work, when a tenancy is terminated and after assistance from the Rents Intervention Officer.
- This Panel will challenge performance and help to ensure services are relevant.
- The Rents Team are currently working with the Homestop Team to develop a termination pack.
- Financial Inclusion Action Plan – the delivery of this is ongoing and links with the Rents Intervention Officer post. AW stated that copies of the Action Plan could be posted to members on request.

5. Complaints, Compliments and Comments

AW advised that one Stage 1 complaint had been received which related to the debt collection agency contacting the wrong person in relation to a former tenant arrear. An apology and compensation was provided to the customer and the tracing agency was informed to ensure they are 100% sure before passing on details.

No stage 2 or 3 complaints were received.

6. Satisfaction Results

The actions from the Rents survey have been agreed and built into the Team Plan. As per item 4, measuring satisfaction is to be developed across the service and completed on an ongoing basis.

7. Customer Involvement Activities

A discussion took place into the quarterly Rents Newsletter and articles due to be included in the next edition. AW stated that a number of articles had been identified: prize draw incentive for clear rent accounts, Christmas saving account through the Credit Union, RIO case study, Panel formalisation, welfare reform update, loan sharks, new rechargeables and basic bank accounts. Members agreed that priorities for the next edition were the welfare reform update and Panel formalisation.

8. Value for Money

A report from the end of the financial year was handed to members and discussed. Updates on the report actions are to be provided at future meetings.

9. Customer Issues

A compliment was received from one member with regards to the Rents Intervention Officer and the assistance received in accessing benefits and managing debts.

10. Any Other Business

None

11. Date and Time of Next Meeting

Thursday 16th February, 10.30am, venue to be advised