



CITY OF WESTMINSTER

CityWest Homes Task Group

NOTES

Notes of a meeting of the **CityWest Homes Task Group** held on **30th August 2018**

Members Present: Councillor Melvyn Caplan (Chairman), Councillor Paul Dimoldenberg, Councillor Richard Elcho, Councillor Pancho Lewis, Councillor Mark Shearer, Councillor James Spencer and Councillor Paul Swaddle

Also Present: Tom McGregor (Director of Housing and Regeneration), Fergus Coleman (Head of Affordable Housing and Strategy), Sandra Skeete (Interim Managing Director, CityWest Homes), Sarah Williams (Contact Centre Manager, CityWest Homes), Edith Brannigan (Area Manager, CityWest Homes), John Millichope (Head of Lessee Services, CityWest Homes), John Hayden (Head of Repairs, Mechanical and Engineering, CityWest Homes), Achim Von Malotki (CityWest Homes Tenant) and Michael Wills (CityWest Homes Leaseholder)

1 Introduction and Apologies

- 1.1 The Chairman welcomed those present. Apologies were received from Councillor Adam Hug.

2 CityWest Homes – Customer Service

- 2.1 Achim Von Malotki was in attendance to give the task group the perspective of a CityWest Homes (CWH) tenant. Mr Von Malotki told the task group that:
- For the majority of his 21 years as a CWH he had experienced good services, the services only deteriorated in summer 2017 when CWH changed its operating model, contact centre and repairs contractor.
 - Since summer 2017 CWH's contractors face very little scrutiny or monitoring before, during and after work. CWH relies on residents to raise issues with contractors' work.
 - There was a lack of presence on the ground from CWH. This caused particular issues in areas that residents could not monitor, such as rooftops.
 - Since the estate offices were closed there only four reception areas. This has led to issues such as a lack of confidentiality when residents are raising personal issues in crowded reception areas and a lack of personal relationships with CWH staff.

- Communal smart boilers in Lisson Grove were an example of where CWH had not undertaken major works well or checked if proposed benefits had materialised.
- It is difficult for any management company in London to make sure that properties do not appear on sites such as Airbnb, which results in issues of anti-social behaviour.
- Mr Von Malotki raised a time when he had made a complaint by e-mail about anti-social behaviour and had followed it up to find it had not been forwarded to the correct team.
- Reopening estate offices would particularly help on large estates such as Church Street.
- The work of the residents' council and area panels is not well known amongst the majority of residents. One of the issues is that they reflect geographic areas that CWH organises itself into, that might not be how residents define their area. CWH does not publicise the work of the council and panels. CWH had undertaken a good recruitment exercise when setting up the council and panels to ensure diversity, however this had fallen away.

2.2 Michael Wills was in attendance to give a CityWest Homes leaseholder's perspective. He told the task group that:

- Closing the estate offices was a bad idea. The number of people reported as using estate offices before they were closed excluded certain people such as utilities companies asking for directions, or residents from other estates. Mr Wills thought that the number was significantly higher.
- There was a feeling that CWH had distanced itself from residents.
- Surgeries that CWH hold are not well attended and residents did not like having to attend at specified time.
- The people most affected by the closure of estate offices were the elderly and those for whom English was not their first language
- Although it had improved, the call centre had been taking up to 45 minutes to connect calls.
- No single person in CWH has the ownership and pride in an estate
- John Aird Court residents had a positive relationship with the neighbourhood policing panel and local officers that helped to combat anti-social behaviour.
- Residents' panels are not always representative of the local areas (e.g. street properties could be overrepresented)
- Mr Wills echoed concerns about the proliferation of Airbnb style short lets.
- Mr Wills commended the quality of CWH's employees.

2.3 The correct procedure for an anti-social behaviour complaint into the contact centre is for the contact centre to forward it to the correct team who should contact the resident that raised the issue within 2 days. The contact centre would also liaise with other relevant teams (e.g. cleaners).

2.4 The responsibility for managing relationships on estates with residents sits with housing service managers who are able to help residents navigate CWH.

The first point of contact for issues such as complaints or repairs should be the contact centre.

- 2.5 CityWest Homes and the Council are investigating ways of identifying where properties are being let on Airbnb, including the use of technology. A key issue was obtaining the evidence that someone was breaching the terms of their lease. In the past few months, CWH has sent breach notices to residents who have sublet their property for less than 90 days.
- 2.6 Estate surgeries had been established to make staff accessible to residents. The use of surgeries is being reviewed, with surgeries in some areas being more popular than others.
- 2.7 CWH was strengthening the way that it monitored contractors before, during and after works. Performance figures for repairs are reported monthly and the information is made available to the area panels. There are also inspections that take place with the area panels. Mr Von Malotki suggested these should be advertised more widely.
- 2.8 All reception areas have separate rooms where residents can discuss personal matter with staff in private.
- 2.9 There are three CWH newsletters a year which could be used to promote the work of the residents council and area panels and CWH is exploring how best to take this forward.
- 2.10 There is a threshold for residents' association to be recognised by CWH. There are also eligibility criteria for who can be part of a residents' association (e.g. tenants of leaseholders are not recognised). CWH committed to working with WCC to review the threshold if it was felt it no longer reflected the resident population.
- 2.11 Giving residents a named officer for all incidents would have a number of issues such as reducing the efficiency of the centralisation of the contact centre and placing an administrative burden on frontline staff. It was recognised that the responsiveness of the contact centre needed to be improved. The repairs team was working to improve the way that cases were managed, especially complicated repairs.
- 2.12 The contact centre have details of repairs issues raised by residents on the CRM system so can see the details of an issue if a resident calls again. However, some information may be with a sub-contractor. CWH is working on ways of accessing this information quicker, for example co-locating contractors' staff within the contact centre.
- 2.13 The interactive voice response (IVR) system used by the contact centre was complicated, despite there only being three teams in the contact, the IVR has 26 options. An improved IVR system is being investigated; however, CWH did not want to a knee jerk reaction to the issues that would then mean having to change the system again in the near future. CityWest was also investigating better technical solutions for the admin team that was better than

outlook. The current telephony system and the reliance on the provider to make any technical changes also makes it difficult for CWH to make changes quickly.

- 2.14 CWH has implemented a review process including introducing a lessons learnt document so that when a resident complains (e.g. about having to make multiple calls) the root cause of that issue can be identified and addressed.
- 2.15 CWH had correctly focused on improving its key performance indicators; however, this had meant that developing officers' soft skills to improve quality of call handling had suffered. This was being addressed and a service quality framework was being developed.
- 2.16 If a contractor says that a resident was not home when they called, they have to provide photographic evidence that they were at the property, this is loaded on to the contact centre's system. Reducing the number of no access incidents and missed appointments is part of CWH's improvement plan.

3 Future Meetings

- 3rd September 2018, 18:30
- 5th September 2018, 18:30