

Your Homes Newcastle Inner West Area Board

13th March 2007

Service standard monitoring and review

Report by: Head of Business Development

Area Implications: Inner West

For information

1. Summary

- 1.1 The service standard monitoring report to Area Boards in January explained the need to revise housing management service standards, and included the proposed revised standards in draft form. A number of comments were made by Area Board members in relation to the draft standards.
- 1.2 This report provides a response to comments made, and includes revised housing management service standards. It also provides an update on the review of all service standards, and links this with monitoring and reporting of the revised standards

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Area board are invited to agree the amended housing management service standards, and to make comments and ask any questions that relate to any aspect of the report.

3. Your Homes Newcastle Strategic Objectives

- 3.1 As an element of performance management, monitoring our performance in relation to our service standards can help us achieve all of our strategic objectives.

4. Housing Management Service Standards

4.1 The review of housing management service standards has followed the process described in earlier reports to Area Boards. The revised draft standards presented in January adopted the approach of separating measurable standards from a list entitled 'what you can expect from the service', without withdrawing any previous commitments. There were no issues raised around this approach, but a number of comments were made about specific areas covered in both the new measurable standards, and the 'what you can expect' list. These comments, and the responses to them, are given below. An amended version of the standards is given as an appendix.

4.2 Repairs. **'It was felt that the standard "we will ensure that repairs are carried out as quickly as possible, and that the average repair time is 9 days or less" needed to be more specific. It was felt instead it should reflect the standards for repair times which were agreed with Neighbourhood Services'**

The following additional bullet point has been added:

- We will ensure that target response times for all categories of repair are achieved. This includes the following targets:
 - Urgent 1 day – 98%
 - Urgent 3 day – 98%
 - 7 day – 96%
 - 28 day – 98%
 - Special agreed (will include Minor Works) – 98%
 - Rapid Response appointments – 97% within 5 days

4.3 Paying Your Rent. **'The debt counselling support and advice that was available should also be emphasised'**

The following bullet point has been added in the section 'if you fall into arrears':

- We will offer you the assistance of an Advice and Support Worker to help with debt problems

4.4 Harassment. **'The bullet point that started "we will begin investigating cases of nuisance or harassment" should include an explanation as to why there were three different timescales for the commencement of an investigation.'**

The following paragraph has been added to the nuisance and harassment section:

'The response time for investigating cases of nuisance and harassment will vary according to its seriousness. This will be discussed with you when you report an incident. There are three categories of response time, as follows:

Category 1-People (response next working day). Examples can include abusive graffiti, assault, domestic violence, racial harassment and criminal activity

Category 2-Property (response within 5 working days). Examples can include property damage and vandalism, loud noise, music and parties, and rubbish dumping

Category 3-Environment (response within 10 working days). Examples can include illegal parking, behaviour of animals, scrap and rubbish accumulation

More detailed information about the above categories is given in the booklet covering service standards for the housing and anti-social behaviour team. A response time for nuisance and harassment will be agreed with you when you report an incident, and these response times are monitored as a housing management service standard'.

- 4.5 **It was felt that the standard to reply when tenants who wrote to YHN within 15 working days was too long. T Healy (Principal Housing Manager, East End) undertook to feedback the requests that consideration be given to a reply being provided in 5 working days unless it was a complicated matter in which cases this would be explained to the tenants.**

The response time for replying to correspondence within 15 days is a corporate target that has been adopted by YHN. It is therefore not feasible at present to introduce a quicker response time. In practice, this is a minimum standard, and it is likely that responses to less complicated correspondence will be considerably less than the 15 day maximum. This issue will be considered further when 'Customer Service' service standards are reviewed.

5. Service Standard Review

- 5.1 At present, eight sets of service standards other than those for housing management have been revised, based on the schedule for review reported to the meeting of this board in July 2006. These are:

Community Care Alarm Service

Sheltered Housing

Inline

Stepping Stones

Right To Buy

Advice and Support

Asylum Seekers Unit

Adaptations

- 5.2 Performance in relation to these revised standards has been reported to meetings of this board since July.

It is important that the remaining sets of service standards should be reviewed

quickly, so that they can be agreed, reprinted and bedded in well before the Audit Commission inspection due to take place in March 2008. For this reason, it is proposed to vary the review schedule and revised service standard reporting arrangements. It is now proposed that revised service standards for all the remaining service areas should be reported for comment to the meetings of this board in May and July. This will cover the following current service standard areas, although four categories should no longer be required following the introduction of the new housing management standards:

Rent Arrears

Nuisance and Harassment

Your Choice Homes

New Tenant

Housing Management

Customer Service

Property Standard

Newcastle Furniture Service

Concierge Service

Leasehold Management

Modern Homes

Repairs and Maintenance

5.3 The July report will also outline a revised programme for reporting performance in relation to the new standards

Between now and July, consultation will take place with service user representatives prior to re-printing and distribution of the revised standards. Primarily, this will involve discussions with the Tenants Federation, who were closely involved in drawing up most of the above sets of service standards, and who have already indicated their interest in being involved in the review of these standards.

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Background Papers: Service standard monitoring reports to YHN Area Boards, July 2006, January 2007

DRAFT HOUSING MANAGEMENT SERVICE STANDARDS

What you can expect from the housing management service

Help with your housing application

Council housing in Newcastle is allocated through the Your Choice Homes scheme. There is a separate booklet which explains the service standards which apply to Your Choice Homes.

We will ensure that your application is registered quickly. We will also ensure that you are kept informed about properties that are available, and will offer you assistance with your application if you need it.

Property Standard

We will make sure that when you move into a new property, it is safe, clean and in good condition. What this means is explained in a separate booklet called Property Standard.

New Tenants

- When you look at a home we will offer to show you around and tell you about the fixtures, fittings and services.
- We will make sure your home is clean and safe and that we have completed all repairs to our empty property standard.
- If your home needs decorating we will talk to you about what we can offer you, and how it will be done.
- We will tell you about the other services we offer that can help you settle into your home. These include help with furniture and gardening, and advice and support in managing your tenancy if you need it.
- We will explain your tenancy agreement to you before you sign it, and provide you with a copy. We will not ask you to sign it until you are sure you understand it.
- We will give you a welcome pack. This will contain information about your home, your local area and its services.
- We will offer you the service of an Advice and Support Worker, or suggest other agencies which may be able to help you settle into your tenancy.
- We will visit you within six weeks of you moving into your new home to make sure that you have no problems with your tenancy.

Repairs

- We will widely publicise how you can report repairs
- We will widely publish the repairs that are your responsibility. If you want us to carry out these repairs, we will do so and charge you.

- We will make sure that all workers provide identification, have the skills they need to carry out your repair and use good quality materials.
- We will make sure that anyone carrying out work for us treats you and your home with respect and tidies up after all work carried out.
- Wherever possible we will try to complete your repair as agreed. If however, we have to cancel your repair or appointment, we will tell you by writing to you, phoning you or visiting you at your home.
- We will inspect a sample of all completed repairs carried out on our behalf to assess the quality of the work and service provided.
- We will keep a record of all complaints made about repairs, and will make sure that they are passed to the relevant person to investigate and reply.
- We will ensure that at least 80% of repairs that are reported to us are completed on the first visit
- We will ensure that repairs are carried out as quickly as possible, and that the average repair times is 9 days or less
- We will make and keep an appointment with you to carry out a gas safety check or gas service every year
- We will ensure that target response times for all categories of repair are achieved. This includes the following targets:
 - Urgent 1 day – 98%
 - Urgent 3 day – 98%
 - 7 day – 96%
 - 28 day – 98%
 - Special agreed (Non-standard repairs) – 98%
 - Rapid Response appointments – 97% within 5 days

Nuisance and harassment

We will help you if you have problems with nuisance or harassment. We also have a specialist Housing and Anti-Social Behaviour Team who deal with serious cases of nuisance and harassment. There is a separate booklet covering service standards for the Housing and Anti-Social Behaviour Team.

We will ensure that you are given a prompt response if you report problems of nuisance and harassment, and that appropriate action is taken to either deal with the problem, or pass details to the Housing and Anti-Social Behaviour Team

The response time for investigating cases of nuisance and harassment will vary according to its seriousness. This will be discussed with you when you report an incident. There are three categories of response time, as follows:

Category 1-People (response next working day). Examples can include abusive graffiti, assault, domestic violence, racial harassment and criminal activity

Category 2-Property (response within 5 working days). Examples can include property damage and vandalism, loud noise, music and parties, and rubbish dumping

Category 3-Environment (response within 10 working days). Examples can include illegal parking, behaviour of animals, scrap and rubbish accumulation

More detailed information about the above categories is given in the booklet covering service standards for the Housing and Anti-social Behaviour Team. A response time for nuisance and harassment will be agreed with you when you report an incident, and these response times are monitored as a housing management service standard'.

Paying your rent

You should pay your rent weekly. You can pay by other frequencies by agreement with us, but if you do this, payments should be in advance.

When you sign up for your tenancy we will tell you:

- How much rent you have to pay for your home;
- How where and when you have to pay it, and
- How to claim housing benefit
- How to get help with managing your rent from our Advice and Support Service, if you need it

If you have an enquiry about your rent account:

- We will offer you a confidential interview and try to deal with your enquiry immediately. If we cannot deal with it there and then we will reply to you in writing within 15 working days
- We will provide details about your account, including balance details, if you need it. If you ask for a statement of your account we will provide it within a maximum of 15 working days and we will also give you a statement of your rent account on a regular basis.

If you fall into rent arrears:

- We will contact you to agree how these will be paid back and confirm in writing any agreement made

If you fail to maintain an agreement with us to pay your arrears:

- We will take legal action to recover your debt. We will explain your legal rights to you and what will happen if we have to take you to court
- We will tell you, in writing, that we are going to go to court, and of the outcome of any legal action
- If you fail to make payments as ordered by the court, we will take action to evict you from your home

After your tenancy has ended

- We will confirm, in writing, if you owe us any rent. We will try to reach an agreement for repayment, and explain to you the problems you may have if you want to apply for another home from us.
- If you do not keep to the agreement, we may pass your debt to a debt-collection agency for them to recover it

Customer Service

We strive to provide excellent customer service to all of our customers. There is a separate booklet covering customer service standards, as these apply to all of our staff.

Housing Management Service Standards

- We will ensure that all Your Choice Homes applications received at Community Housing Offices are registered within 5 working days
- We will give you a copy of our empty property standard. This will tell you about the work we will do to your home before you move in.
- We will arrange to visit you within three weeks of moving into your home and discuss any problems you may have, including paying your rent
- We will offer you the service of an Advice and Support Worker if you are having difficulty paying your rent and have substantial arrears
- When you report a case of nuisance or harassment to us we will complete a complaint form and give you a copy as a receipt.
- We will begin investigating cases of nuisance or harassment either:
 - the next working day
 - within five working days, or
 - within ten working days.
- If you visit any of our offices, our reception staff will see you within five minutes of you arriving
- We will answer all telephone calls within five rings
- If you write to us, we will reply within 15 working days
- To help ensure that estates are well maintained, we will carry out an estate inspection of all estates twice every year
- We will arrange an estate walkabout for all estates on an annual basis, and will invite all tenants to attend
- We will attend all resident and community group meetings to which we are invited