Your Homes Newcastle Outer West and North Area Board

15th January 2007

Service standard monitoring and review

Report by: Head of Business Development

Area Implications: Outer West and North

For information

1. Summary

1.1 The report to this Board in November 2006 explained a proposal for a Charter Mark application for the housing management service. It also linked this proposal with the need to establish some housing management service standards. This report provides an update in relation to the development of housing management service standards.

1.2 Performance reports for the two services due to be reviewed this month, rent arrears and nuisance and harassment, have been deferred to a future meeting. This is because the review of standards for these services is linked to the review of housing management service standards.

1.3 This report also covers action being taken to address performance in relation to one of the Right to Buy service standards which was reported as red in November.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Area board are invited 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. Service Standard Review

4.1 Since the November meeting, a draft set of housing management service standards have been developed, and these are attached as an appendix to this report (Appendix 1). These service standards are based on previous standards covering a number of work areas, as follows:

Rent Arrears

Nuisance and harassment

Repairs

Your Choice Homes

New tenant

Customer Service

Property standard

4.2 The methodology followed in developing these draft standards for housing management has followed the process for all service standard reviews, which was described in a previous report. Previous standards in the above work areas have mostly been retained, but these have been separated between service guarantees ('what you can expect from the service') and service standards (standards that will be regularly monitored and performance reported).

4.3 Housing management staff are responsible for elements of all of the above work areas. For three work areas (rent arrears, new tenant and repairs) it is felt that current service standards can all be incorporated within the revised service standards for housing management, and it is proposed not to continue with separate sets of standards for these areas of work. For other areas (eg Your Choice Homes, nuisance and harassment) it is necessary to retain separate service standards either because there are specialist teams covering the services, or because the standards apply to other staff within YHN. These standards will all be reviewed after the new housing management standards have been agreed.

4.4 Current service standards were agreed following full consultation with service users or their representatives. In particular, the Tenants Federation were closely involved in developing the above sets of standards. Subject to any amendments or comments from Area Board members, it is proposed to discuss the revised standards with the Tenants Federation and to introduce them as soon as possible, after ensuring that mechanisms are in place to monitor performance so that this can be reported to a future Area Board meeting

5. Service Standard Monitoring

5.1 Appendix two gives an update in relation to the Right to Buy service standard reported as red to the last meeting of this Board. Action that has been taken since the last meeting is explained.

Contact Officer: Larry Wilson, Performance Management and Policy Team, Telephone: 2788733

Background Papers: Service Standard Monitoring Reports to YHN Area Boards, July, September and November 2006

Appendix 1

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 who may be able to help you settle into your tenancy**.**
- We will visit you within three 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 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.

Nuisance and harassment

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

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 15 working days and we will also give you a statement of your rent account on a regular basis (currently quarterly)

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 or an.
- If you do not keep to the agreement, we will 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

Appendix 2

November Service Standards Report-Red Indicator

Right to Buy

One of the Right to Buy service standards was reported as red in November. This standard was:

‘Following a RTB notice, we will send an offer notice to 90% of customers:

-within 8 weeks for freehold properties and

-within 12 weeks for leasehold properties’

The following information in relation to this standard has been provided by the Principal Administration Officer, who has responsibility for the Right to Buy Team.

The difficulty in achieving the target for Offer Notices is directly linked to the use of external contractors by Property Services in the valuation process. Property Services have met with the failing contractor to agree and enforce the standards expected and the RTB Section are now monitoring progress on a daily basis. The delivery of these services is the subject of an ongoing Service Level Agreement review and Your Homes Newcastle have made clear their concerns about quality of service and control with regard to the external contractors.