Horizon Housing Association
Customer Project Scrutiny Report

Repairs Communications

April 2017
Contents

1. Introduction

2. Establishing the Horizon Housing Association Resident Improvement Group

3. The Horizon Housing Association Repairs Communication Project

4. Scrutiny of the Repairs Communications Findings and Recommendations

5. Next Steps

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

   Appendices 1-3

Acknowledgements

“The members of the Resident Improvement Group would like to thank Horizon Housing Association Staff who assisted them throughout the Scrutiny Project, through the provision of support, information and for organising and taking part in research activities and meetings”
1.0. Introduction

1.1 Tenant Scrutiny in Context

Tenant scrutiny is about tenants being actively involved in reviewing how housing services are being delivered, and even more importantly, how they can be improved. Since 2013, the concept and emphasis on tenant scrutiny and self-assessment has become embedded in the tenant participation and customer involvement frameworks of the social housing sector in Scotland and represents a very significant opportunity to develop partnership working between tenants and landlords to deliver excellent housing services.

The Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC) focuses on outcomes as a basis for assessing landlord performance and requires landlords to involve their customers (tenants, applicants, sharing owners and those who receive a factoring service) in the self-assessment of housing services.

1.2 Horizon Housing Association Customer Scrutiny

Horizon Housing Association (the Association) identified the need to develop Customer Scrutiny activities in the summer of 2016. Specifically the Association planned to develop a “Tenant Led Inspection” approach to the review of the landlord housing service. This commitment to scrutiny is embedded in the Association’s Strategic Scrutiny Framework.

Association customers undertook a pilot scrutiny project in winter 2016/spring 2017 to look at the Association’s Communications within the repairs service. This pilot and approach of working showed that customer involvement in self-assessment was achieved by developing new interest in customers working with the landlord and enhancing existing tenant participation and scrutiny activities, linking them to the wider tenant participation and governance structures.

During this period the customers also undertook a branding exercise and are known as the Resident Improvement Group (RIG). RIG forms the central point for scrutiny within the Horizon Housing Association which empowers customers to:

- Oversee a range of scrutiny activities
- Integrate these activities with the wider self-assessment activities of the Association
- Make recommendations to challenge and improve the activities of senior officers and members of the governing body.

1.3. Independent Tenant Advice and Development Support

In June 2016, the Association commissioned the services of the Tenant Information Service (TIS) to provide Independent Tenant Advice (ITA) and Development Support to the staff and customers involved in the Customer and Tenant Led Inspection Project (TLI Project). Lynda Johnstone, Development Director, TIS was assigned to this project.

TIS Mission Statement:

“The Tenants Information Service is the leading organisation in Scotland promoting and inspiring innovative tenant participation practice. We achieve this by providing independent
advice, support and training for tenants and landlords”. Further information on TIS can be found at www.tis.org.uk

1.5. Understanding Tenant Led Inspections as an Approach to Scrutiny

Customer involvement in self-assessment and the approaches used to undertake a scrutiny project are a popular way of involving tenants in improving housing services. One such scrutiny approach is a Tenant Led Inspection, a process where tenants and customers independently inspect a housing service to review how well it is working and to identify recommendations for improvements. It is a tangible way of involving tenants where everyone can see positive results at the end of the process. The Horizon TLI Project and RIG have embraced the method of Tenant Led Inspections as an approach to gathering evidence and information to inform the Association of findings and recommendations.

Tenant Led Inspections (TLIs) provide opportunities to:

- Inspect housing services from a customer and tenants’ perspective
- Contribute to improvement in housing services, whilst ensuring policies and procedures are clearly understood and implemented
- Inform policy development and delivery
- Ensure resources are used effectively and services delivered provide value for money
- Benchmark and share good practice

The benefits of TLIs are far reaching and include:

- Opportunities to involve new people in tenant participation activities
- Building the capacity of organisations and individuals
- Involving tenants and other customers in a constructive and practical way
- Enhancing the landlords’ customer care focus
- Developing relationships between tenants, tenants’ organisations, customers and landlord staff
- Meeting the requirements of the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) and Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC)
- Driving forward improvements in housing services.

2.0. Establishing the Horizon Housing Association Resident Improvement Group

2.1. Awareness Raising Sessions

In summer 2016, Horizon customers, tenants and staff took part in a series of road show events, facilitated by Lynda Johnstone, Development Director, TIS. Events took place in Airdrie, Livingston, Glasgow, Dunfermline and at the Association Annual General Meeting.

The events aimed to:

- Raise awareness of customer involvement in self-assessment and tenant scrutiny.
- Understand approaches to scrutiny.
• Explore the benefits and opportunities of customer involvement in self-assessment to both tenants and the landlord.
• Consider possible areas of Horizon’s housing service to scrutinise.
• Encourage customers to become involved in the scrutiny process.

2.2. Membership, Role and Remit of the Resident Improvement Group

Six tenants were recruited to RIG, and a core group of 4 customers have been meeting throughout the scrutiny project. The names of RIG members and the area where they live is detailed in Appendix 1.

Each member was required to consider and agree to the Code of Conduct for remit and behaviour within the Project. It should be noted that this document also clearly states the Horizon Housing Association commitment to scrutiny and the Scrutiny Project.

2.3. Agreeing a Topic for Scrutiny

Following the formation of RIG, members considered the feedback from the roadshows and were also provided with information on the Association’s performance and tenant satisfaction results. Repairs was identified as an area that all RIG members could relate to. In 2015, in partnership with tenants, the Association reviewed the Repairs and Maintenance Policy and Procedure. A review of the information provided, as well as consideration of customer experiences since the implementation of the reviewed policy, allowed the Scrutiny Project to agree that the first scrutiny project would focus on Horizon Housing Association Repairs Communications.

3.0. Horizon Housing Association Repairs Communication Project

3.1. Resident Improvement Group Meetings

RIG members met at meetings from January to April 2017, a total of five times. Meetings were facilitated by Lynda Johnstone, TIS and were also attended by Association staff. Midway through the scrutiny project, the customer members decided that they would like to brand themselves and chose the name Resident Improvement Group and worked in partnership with the Association to design a logo.

3.2 Workplan

The Repairs Communication Scrutiny Project followed an agreed detailed work plan (see Appendix Two) which included:

• Administration
• Agreeing the scope of the project
• Information and relevant fact finding regarding Horizon’s Repairs Policy
• Horizon’s approach to Repairs Communications
• Understanding the procedures, policies and approach on paper
• Reality Checking
• What happens in practice at Horizon
3.3 Collecting Evidence

RIG members undertook a robust process to understand repairs communications and its impact on tenant and the Association.

Members Completed a desk top audit to understand:

- The Association’s Repairs and Maintenance Policy
- What the Scottish Social Housing Charter states in relation to both repairs and communication
- The Scottish Housing Quality Standard
- The range of ways and approaches that the Association communicates repairs information

Received Informative Presentations from Association staff to understand:

- Repairs complaints received from April 2014 to December 2016
- Association repairs performance information including, completion times, tenant satisfaction, the total number of repairs, number of repairs by area
- Repairs cost information

Held discussions with Association staff including:

- Housing Officers
- Asset Management Officer
- Customer Service Officers

The staff interviews / discussions were designed to determine staff role and understanding of the Repairs Communications and how it impacts on the operations and business of the Association. Copies of the staff discussion questions are detailed in Appendix 3.

4.0. Scrutiny of the Letting Standard Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1. What the RIG Liked

4.1.1 The Customer Service Staff provide an efficient service when dealing with repair requests.

4.1.2 There is flexibility in how Customer Service staff receive repairs requests including phone, email and also through notification from other Association staff.

4.1.3 Association staff provide a reactive service to tenants when repairs are reported face to face or when repairs are identified by staff working on estate visits.
4.1.4 It is reassuring that as a result of the stock condition survey work that day to day repairs are identified by staff carrying out surveys and completed in line with the repairs procedure.

4.1.5 The repairs by appointment system is flexible and meets the needs of the tenants ie morning, afternoon or school run slot (10am to 2pm). It also benefits the Association in terms of value for money, timing and staff travel.

4.1.6 Where possible, if a tenant reports multiple repairs reported they are booked into the same day or repair slot thus minimising disruption to the tenant.

4.1.7 A repair appointment can be confirmed in a range of ways including verbal, face to face or on phone, letter, email and text.

4.2. Findings and Recommendations

The RIG research and field work raised a number of issues which this report highlights and suggests recommendations for change. These recommendations were agreed by RIG when all the field work information was collected, considered and analysed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Tenant Led Inspection Project Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Repairs Information</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0. The Association provides a range of information to tenants regarding repairs through staff contact, leaflets, newsletter articles and the website.</td>
<td>1.1. In the review of the website, consideration is given to the inclusion or diagrams and an interactive approach to assist tenants in the reporting of repairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Complaints and Satisfaction</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0. It was reported that at times tenants make a complaint they are not provided with sufficient information about the repair including timing, what will be done, tenant disturbance/disruption.</td>
<td>2.1. In the case of larger more complex repairs, tenants are provided with information in advance of the repair to assist them prepare and manage their expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0. A low number of responses to the repairs survey are received. This means that there is an inaccurate record of satisfaction and dissatisfaction for the total number of repairs done. RIG members reviewed the survey and made no recommendations to the content and questions. RIG members also noted that the repairs service is good and repairs are mainly done right first time.</td>
<td>3.1. Consideration is given to additional ways that the tenant can respond re satisfaction following a repair eg text, website, email. 3.2. The Association further explain to tenants regarding the importance of completing and returning the satisfaction form, detailing how the feedback is useful and used by the Association. This can be done through the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>Tenant Led Inspection Project Recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.0.</strong> The RIG research was unable to fully determine when negative feedback is provided in the Tenant Satisfaction Form that the Association addressed the tenant opinion as a complaint.</td>
<td><strong>4.1.</strong> The Association undertake further research as to how feedback is recorded and addressed linking tenant satisfaction to the complaints policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.0.</strong> Contractors eg Gas Sure use their own repair satisfaction survey. Consequently the Association tenant does not have the opportunity to complete the Association repairs survey.</td>
<td><strong>5.1.</strong> The Association to provide feedback to RIG to explain how contractor eg Gas Sure satisfaction and complaints are carefully measured to ensure service improvements in the Association.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6.0.</strong> Locator Plus is a complex and effective system which allows staff to efficiently log a repair and allocate it to the appropriate trade. It is clear that staff are familiar and competent in its use. Locator Plus holds information about the property.</td>
<td><strong>6.1.</strong> Consideration is given to whether Locator Plus could include repairs information relating to the tenant ie show the tenants history of repairs as some repairs or circumstances may be generated by the tenant and consequently s/he may need support or education on the issue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7.0.</strong> Tenants can sometimes be confused when reporting repairs and are unable to explain the problem correctly.</td>
<td><strong>7.1.</strong> Tenants are provided with or given access to the same diagrams as detailed in Locator Plus to assist them describe the repair. Consideration is given to these diagrams being detailed on the Association website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8.0.</strong> The scrutiny project observed one member of customer service staff efficiently and professionally process telephone and email repairs. RIG noted that no checklist was followed but she relied on her own experience and competency.</td>
<td><strong>8.1.</strong> The Association develop a checklist of key steps and questions which should be asked when processing a repair. This would assist new or more inexperienced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.0.</td>
<td>In most cases, the tenant knows when the repair was reported but customer service staff did not provide a reference number was provided incase further contact needs to be made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1.</td>
<td>A job number is provided to the tenant for reference information at the point of reporting the repair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>Tenants are clearly satisfied with the repair by appointment system and tenant feedback identified that the system is working well. However no information was provided to the tenant to allow them to understand the repair category, timescales etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>Customer Service staff provide the tenant with the following information:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How the repair in categorised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The number of days to compete the repair does not include weekends, except emergency repairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>At times the repair logging and response process is hindered as the tenants contact details on the system are incorrect, specifically telephone numbers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>Through communication and face to face contact, all staff are to ensure that tenant contact details are correct on the system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>Tenants and other customers are provided with ongoing reminders and support to ensure their details are kept up to date and accurate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.0. Next Steps

RIG members considered this report in April 2017. The final agreed report will be submitted to Horizon Housing Association. Thereafter a meeting will take place to allow:

- Staff and tenants who were involved in the scrutiny project to evaluate the process
- Horizon Housing Association to meet with RIG to discuss responses and agree specific actions to the recommendations.
- RIG to agree the actions required to publicise the work of the Project and attract new members.

RIG members would also welcome the opportunity to discuss the report, findings and process with the Horizon Housing Association Management Board.

### 6.0. Monitoring and Evaluation

It is essential that this scrutiny project is monitored and evaluated to find out if agreed objectives have been met, to recognise what works well and what may need to be adapted to meet the changing needs and priorities of the Association and its customers. This is about evaluating the effectiveness of the scrutiny project itself but also monitoring that the implementation of the agreed action plan has been carried out.
RIG recommend that an exercise to review the action plan takes place no later than November 2017.
APPENDIX ONE

The Horizon Housing Association tenants and customers involved in this Scrutiny Project were:

Andrew Perry     Dunfermline
Mary Dickson     Whitburn
Gina Healy       Coatbridge
Margaret Croal   Dunfermline
Ina Bright       Erskine
Edith Harrow     Erskine
### APPENDIX TWO

#### Scrutiny Action Plan

**REPAIRS AND COMMUNICATIONS SCRUTINY PROJECT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1: Fact Finding and Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislation, HHA policies and background information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>How to do it</th>
<th>Outcome required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>What does the Scottish Social Housing Charter say about repairs and communication?</td>
<td>Presentation Scottish Social Housing Charter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>HHA Repairs Policy</td>
<td>Read: HHA Repairs Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Performance information on repairs for last 3 years</td>
<td>Presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Number of repairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Geographical area of repairs etc</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Customer Complaints, Comments, Complements for last 3 years on both repairs standards and customer service associated with reporting repairs and completion of repairs</td>
<td>Presentation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## 1.5 Understanding the Scottish Housing Quality Standard

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Handout and explanation</th>
<th>Identify any themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

## 1.6 Customer Satisfaction Survey

- Tenants survey
- Property management survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presentation</th>
<th>Identify any themes. Do comments from surveys match the number and categories of complaints logged?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Stage 2: Horizon Housing Association’s Corporate Approach

#### HHA’s systems and processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.1</th>
<th>An Effective Repairs Policy</th>
<th>Interview three groups:</th>
<th>What process HHA uses to improve repairs standards, customer satisfaction and value for money</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Customer service staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Housing officers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Repairs and maintenance officers and contract staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 2.3 | Review publications and other information available to tenants relating to rents. | Read: leaflets, newsletter, tenant handbook and website | Send out information ahead of meeting. Review tenant feedback at meeting. Are these measures sufficient? |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.4</th>
<th>Understanding the costs of repairs</th>
<th>Presentation</th>
<th>Are systems and approach efficient?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
### Stage 3: What actually happens
What's happening on the ground and customer experiences

| 3.1 | Customer service staff | • Listen to recorded phonecalls  
• Look at email correspondence | Assess the communication using a checklist to identify good practice |

### Stage 4: Reporting
Identifying good practice and areas for improvement

| 4.1 | Identify what tenants liked. | Scrutiny project notes  
Discuss at meeting | Write scrutiny report |
| 4.2 | Identify areas of concern | Scrutiny Project notes  
Discuss at meeting | Write scrutiny report |
| 4.3 | Agree recommendations | Discuss at meeting | Write scrutiny report |
| 4.4 | Submit final draft report to Horizon HA | | |
APPENDIX THREE

Scrutiny Project Staff Discussion Questions

1. Tell us about your job and what you do regarding the repairs service?

2. What challenges do you face in delivering the repairs service effectively?

3. What information do you feel is important to provide tenants with regarding the repairs service?

4. How do you provide this information?

5. What suggestions would you make to help improve repairs communications both with tenants and also internally at Horizon Housing Association?

6. Is there anything you would like to share with us?