

## Minutes of CIG meeting held 28 September 2007 at 10am

Attendees: Niamh Riordain (NR)  
Jim Whoriskey (JW)  
Belinda Stewart (BS)  
Caroline Jenkinson (CJ) (minutes)  
Femi Martin (FM)  
Kevin Murray (KM)  
Michael Wheatley (MW)  
Manjit Sokhi (MS)  
Sheila Whelan (SW)  
Lyn Green (LG)

Apologies: 3 residents

### **1. Introductions**

CIG improvement group is an opportunity for all sections to provide information to SIT to improve the service and to go through performance reports.

### **2. Performance Reports**

FM goes through the complaints reports.

More information is required on reasons why a complaint is escalated to Stage 2/3. Why are they being escalated? Is it because they are not being answered properly at Stage 1?

15 complaints in the last quarter went to Ombudsman. Some complaints have gone direct to Ombudsman and they are being referred back to EH to go through internal complaints procedure.

NR will now be dealing with all Stage 3 responses.

JW says some of the complaints on his desk are trivial – the majority are people not happy with the answers they've been given (i.e. being told no).

Maintenance complaints over the next quarter may go up as the maintenance budget has been cut and only health and safety repairs will be carried out.

NR asks if tenants will be informed of this? JW – they should be informed. On South Acton estate, repairs are being carried out now to blocks to cut down on possible works required in the future.

NR notes there has been a massive reduction in repairs. This report doesn't show Members Enquiries. Is it true that residents go to councillors rather than coming to EH?

JW – on South Acton Estate, the councillor there solicits complaints. A lot of councillors aren't aware of what EH have planned in terms of repairs.

Scrutiny Panel – apart from Cllr Crawford – the majority haven't ever sent a Members Enquiry.

Members Enquiries are still dealt with by Iris at the Council so we don't really deal with them at EH. A Members Enquiry needs to be responded to within 4

days. KM states that 4 days is not long to investigate a complaint. JW agrees and says it can be a problem sometimes.

NR – there has been some confusion as Iris sometimes sends the complaint to 5 people and they don't know who's supposed to respond. She has been advised of the procedure and is working through it. Also some confusion as 4 days is supposed to be acknowledgement period, not full response time. We are seeking clarity on this.

NR – are people who come through the Members Enquiry people who have already sent complaints? Not always. KM – more so for his department as they come direct from councillors.

NR – is there any benefit to inviting Cllrs for information briefings? Yes definitely. Some Cllrs aren't interested as they only have 1 or 2 properties in their ward. Those on the scrutiny panel are keen to come in.

FM – sometimes she's sent in a complaint that has already been responded to as a Members Enquiry. So a copy of that just gets sent to the tenant. Iris doesn't do the same thing – she asks for another full response to be done.

NR – we could have a mailbox to deposit Members Enquiries and their complaints so we can tally up. FM – maybe we can log responses on OHMS as we don't at the moment.

FM – trying to revise the complaints procedure. Trying to advise tenants on what we would escalate complaints for, not just because they're not happy.

There are 3 reasons why complaints can be escalated **SEE FM'S NOTES**

KM asks if this won't just make people go straight to Ombudsman. No, FM tells people on the phone that they can't just escalate a complaint because they're not happy – so now it just needs to be put in the policy. JW suggests that speaking to a manager instead of going to 2 or 3 might close the complaint off. KM – because they have senior caretakers, they can go and resolve the problem on sight without the complaint going forward.

FM – serial complaints – it states in our policy that we don't need to log serial or frivolous complaints. The SIO will investigate serial complaints by going through the housing file and meeting with the tenant to establish if complaints need logging. LG – but if you don't log the complaint, the tenant will just go straight to the Cllr for response.

Repair link calls are recorded so we can listen if the tenant complains about any of the agents.

LG – sometimes when you write to tenants it's not at their level; they don't understand what you're saying. The tone of the letter needs to be more basic.

JW – it's difficult to ensure that a grammatical and stylistic well written letter is also basic enough for certain people to understand. Letters have to be of good quality in case they need to be sent to the Ombudsman. E.g. repairs can't be too technical in the letters but the correct information still needs to be given.

FM – will meet with managers regularly to discuss any issues in order to improve services to tenants. She will also be looking through performance statistics and graphs.

### **3. RIT Feedback**

RIT report comes from a group of residents who inspect Ealing Homes Services. RIT have now taken on internal mystery shopping. They are very honest – they say what they see. They go on site visits, do email checks and telephone calls.

We should publicise that emails will be responded to within 10 working days like letters are. Not immediately like people assume.

MW – can't an automatic response go out stating that an email has been received and will be responded to within 10 days?

LG asks if people sign their names to generic emails? Not necessarily, but a name should be on there. LG received two emails: 1<sup>st</sup> one was excellent and received a response within 30mins of it being sent; 2<sup>nd</sup> one took longer to receive a response, but she preferred it nevertheless as the person had signed their name and she knew who she could contact again in the future.

NR – RIT is preferable to our external mystery shopping as they have standard questions and only sent one email or tried to phone only once.

KM – Copley Close comments on the report are poor. What time was this inspected, as caretakers should pick up on these points. LG was there on the day they were inspected – the caretakers are very good but it's the residents who leave stuff on the stairs once it's been cleaned. KM agrees that this block is generally pretty bad.

### **4. Tenancy Management Service Standards**

NR – this is at the design stage at the moment. It will be sent out to staff and residents again before it goes to print to see if there are any points to go over. It will again be in the next Key Issues. Then translations will be done.

JW – are enough languages being translated? NR – two more languages have been added since last time.

NR – with regards to translations, we have reviewed the service and don't translate every document now as there's no need for it. Translators for meetings are more useful. It's not practical to translate in certain languages, as it's possible that people use different dialects or languages that are just spoken and not written. We have bought some language programs so that standard letters can be sent out. Also, little notices in different languages can be sent out more easily. Translators are expensive.

KM – when do amendments need to be done by? As soon as possible – send them directly to Effy.

### **5. On-line Information**

CJ – IBS have a product which allows residents to view account details such as rents, status of repairs etc. In order for this to be processed, we would like to get feedback from tenants as to whether this will be a useful tool.

LG – Ealing Homes would have to write to every resident to find out what individuals think of this system. Some people don't have access to the internet e.g. older people who don't have PC's.

A simple phone call can be just as easy as the internet.

MW – being able to see it on the screen, you would be able to see when you make payments etc.

JW – will not be suitable to everyone i.e. the partially sighted or blind people.

It would be best to organise a consultation – send out surveys with rent statements or in newsletters – to find out if residents are interested in this scheme.

## **6. Recommendations for Service Improvements**

There were recommendations for:

1. Supported idea for Councillors from the scrutiny panel to visit repair link to understand the service better.
2. Femi's Complaints Procedure to be updated as discussed.
3. The way we write letters to tenants – ensure that it's clear and the language used not too technical.
4. Automatic response for emails coming in to generic addresses advising of response time.
5. Having a personal touch to reduce complaints ie more interaction from frontline staff out on site.
6. Follow up consultation on providing information to tenants on internet – in rent statement or in key issues, and a questionnaire on the internet.

## **7. AOB**

None