



Scrutiny exercise 7 – WDC New tenant visits.

Introduction.

This is our 7th Scrutiny Exercise and we started this exercise on 7/4/22 and it followed discussion on WDC's Charter performance report for 2021/22. Void performance was an area of particular concern but we agreed to wait until Housing Operations complete their own review to see what impact that has on void performance.

In the meantime we decided to relook at new tenant visits to see if good practice was still in place from when we looked at them in 2018.

Methodology.

Questions for 2 surveys were developed as it was confirmed that new tenant visits were being carried out remotely via telephone calls during the pandemic and actual visits were only resumed by the end March 2022, so a specific survey **NT Ref 2a**, was worded for those who got a phone call and **NT Ref 2b** for those who got a visit.

To comply with GDPR regulations the new tenant details were only shared with the Tenant Participation officer and a covering letter from the Scrutiny Panel was sent out to encourage new tenants to take part in our survey. A £25 shopping voucher in a prize draw was also used to encourage more people to respond.

The survey.

There had been 306 tenancies lets between 1/11/21 and 28/2/22 so they were sent the phone call survey (NT REF 2a). There were 147 tenancies lets between 1/4/22 and 30/6/22 so they were sent the visit survey (NT REF 2b).

In total, 453 surveys were posted out on the 21/7/22 along with a free-post envelope to return the survey in. The survey also had a QR code on it so people could go online and submit the survey themselves.

The aim was to get a 10% response rate but we received 40 responses which equals an 8.8 % response rate but which is still statistically significant.

Survey results.

Generally the results are positive when visits or calls got done. Of those who got a visit or phone call, the majority were happy with the information given and clear on responsibilities.

However, there were some areas of concern, including that the percentage of calls and visits that should have happened but didn't is quite high. Only 66% of respondents got a visit or call within the 8 week target. During the period when only phone calls were being made the figure is even lower and only 31% got a call. Once visits were restarted in March 2022, 78.6% got a visit.

Overall there were more negative comments than positive comments and many related to repairs. Particularly in the survey responses from those who were meant to get a phone call but didn't, there is evidence of a worrying number of issues that were unresolved and this will have had a negative impact on the tenant. The number of comments about repairs would suggest that repairs are not being done right first time or remain outstanding and this will not be a good start to their tenancy. Some comments from those who should have got a phone call included;

- *I have been waiting months for repairs.*
- *I was told my Council Tax was covered at this property until i moved in but it wasn't and now i am in more debt. I put in a complaint and never heard back.*
- *The warden from the sheltered housing gave me information and asked if i needed extra support.*
- *Have problem with the drains since i moved in - they have put a plaster on it about 6 times - I would like it fixed properly.*
- *I love my flat. I feel so safe. I can't understand why you have not done the outside of the building as every other scheme has been done except here. Also the windows are horrendous for the elderly and the disabled.*
- *Only got a call on the day we moved in.*
- *Repairman did look at windows - 1 hanging on 1 hinge. Can't open some windows wide.*
- *Extractor fan not working - repairman never came on 15/2/22. New window if fan cannot be fixed.*
- *I would like to get help for my council Tax deduction.*
- *Noone was willing to commit to being the housing officer. When the repairs manager came to check the repairs he was asking me if my boyfriend could fix majority of the repairs that needed fixed. I feel I've just been put into a flat with no support at all. He even asked me to contact the grass cutting people myself for a first cut. This was at the end of March.*
- *Very happy with the tenancy but waiting for a new fence to meet additional support needs.*

- *Felt like everything was really rushed, no time taken to explain responsibilities. Feel Council haven't met their responsibilities due to failure to complete any repairs.*
- *I feel like I have been let a house without consideration given to my daughter's needs or my needs. I have contacted various times re repairs and only the simple repairs have been completed. I have been trying to get my ceilings replastered since January to no avail - workmen haven't turned up when arranged and no contact made.*
- *I was told Council would take away tree and bramble bushes from front garden which are right in front of my livingroom window. Really need access to lock-up for mobility chair etc.*
- *I raised repairs both internally and externally in nov/Dec of 2021.the housing inspector visited and advised I would receive contact regarding the repairs. I haven't had any contact. I also waited over 3 months for a leaking pipe to be replaced. And when it was finally replaced it was replaced with a white pipe while the rest are black. There's also a keysafe still attached to the wall at my front door.*
- *Never got my new fancy call or visit and still waiting on repairs to be done since November!*
- *The bins are continuing to be an issue and it is not clear about who cleans the communal closes ect.*

These comments show a list of unresolved issues and so if the phone call had been made many of these could have been resolved and shows the importance of the new tenant visit if done and done well.

The majority of the additional comments made by the tenants who had got a visit were more positive and showed that the support and assistance offered at the visit was effective,

- *Pure chufft tay bits so i was.*
- *Met with 2 housing officers, both very nice, professional and answered any questions we had.*
- *Yes i need extra support for my white goods*
- *I'm very happy and satisfied with all the support from WDC staff who were responsible for rehoming me - thank you.*
- *It's great and was also very kindly given a new lawnmower to help with the garden.*

The comment about being given a lawnmower gives a good example of a tenancy sustainment solution and the tenant was very grateful so that obviously had a positive impact and helped them maintain their tenancy.

We specifically included a question about whether extra support was offered as we saw this as an important part of the process. Our survey results show that of those

respondents who got a phone call, 13 tenants (59%) were not asked if they needed extra support. Of those who got a visit, the majority were asked but still meant that 5 tenants (36%) were not. The current new tenant visit procedure (NT Ref 5) and pre-tenancy procedure (NT Ref 6) both state that staff should ask if additional support is needed at various stages so these figures should have been 100%.



What works

We were impressed with tenant visit procedure (NT Ref 5) and pre-tenancy procedure (NT Ref 6) and think the information provided to staff is very thorough. The pre-tenancy procedure (NT Ref 6) is new and dated October 22 so we will consider redoing a survey in a years' time to see if responses have improved.

The positive response from one tenant who received a lawn mower shows that responding to specific issues really can help and we hope staff will continue to listen to tenants and help them settle in their tenancy.

WDC performance and benchmarking.

Tenancy sustainment levels in WDC are improving and now compare well with other landlords.

Performance indicator	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Trend	Comparison
% of all new tenants housed, who were still in their tenancy 12 months later	87.1%	89.8%	91.5%	94.6%		

The 'overall satisfaction with the final outcome' from the exit surveys of new tenants is reasonable (94%) though doesn't tell you if they were happy with the condition of the property.

Summary

The guidance given to staff and the process for new tenant visits is thorough and so an ideal tool for staff. The key issue we identified though is that it isn't consistently followed so the process is not as effective as it could be. If the process was carried out more effectively for every new tenant then the WDC sustainment levels might increase as well as new tenant satisfaction.

Recommendations:

1. Ensuring all new tenants get a visit and the support they need is vital so Housing Operations should monitor closely how many visits are done and be able to report how many new tenants got a visit.
2. Asking if additional support is needed at all the keys stages set out in the current new tenant visit procedure and pre-tenancy procedure must be done consistently

with every new tenant. Therefore this question should be added to the checklist that staff complete and the tenants' response recorded.

3. A phone or visit follow-up should be done after 28 days to ensure that all the outstanding repairs have been completed and a process put in place to deal with any outstanding repairs.
4. Housing Operations Pre- tenancy, Offer and Support Guidance (NT Ref 6) has really useful contact details for staff and will be important that that is kept up to date so recommendation is that this information should be reviewed and updated each year to ensure staff are giving out good information.

Thanks and appreciation

The Scrutiny Panel are grateful for the co-operation of Nicola Pettigrew, Housing Operations Manager and Tracey Crichton, Area Co-ordinator in providing information and assistance in completing this scrutiny exercise.

The Scrutiny Panel members involved in this project were; Rita Howard, Fiona McClymont, Gary McBain, Ian Blair, Alex McMillan and Annabelle McElwaine.

The Panel were supported by Jane Mack, Hanne Thijs (Tenant Participation) and Stefan Kristmanns (Housing Development Co-ordinator).

Referenced documents.

NT Ref 1- email from Rita Howard to Nicola Pettigrew outlining Panel's intended review (26/4/22) and Nicola Pettigrew's response 12/5/22.

NT Ref 2a – New tenant call survey

NT Ref 2b – New tenant visit survey

NT Ref 3 – Sample details of new tenants between 1/11/21 and 28/2/22 who got sent phone survey and those between 1/4/22 and 30/6/22 who got sent visit survey.

NT Ref 4a –Survey responses from 26 respondents who got a phone new tenant visit.

NT Ref 4b – Survey responses from 14 respondents who got a new tenant visit.

NT Ref 5 – New Tenant Visit Guidance Note for Housing Officers

NT Ref 6 – Housing Operations pre-tenancy, offer and support Guidance (Oct 2022).

NT Ref 7 –Covering letter from Scrutiny Panel sent to new tenants with phone or visit survey

NT Ref 8- Housing Service customer satisfaction – year end 2021/22.