

Regenda Resident Scrutiny Panel

Review of Housing Officer (Communities) Role

1. Introduction

- a) The RSP decided to carry out a review of the Housing Officers' role as a result of considering performance information, customer complaints and results from NPS. The NPS scores relating to neighbourhoods were low for each of the regions.
- b) A review of reasons for the scores would have had a very wide scope; therefore, the panel asked Housing Managers to provide a presentation about the work of the different housing officers and the main challenges they deal with. As a result of the presentation, the Panel decided to focus on the role of the Housing Officers (Communities), as their role is very varied, and the Panel questioned whether the officers had sufficient capacity to deal with the demands in their areas.

2. Activities carried out

- a) During the review, the Panel members completed the following activities:
 - Received a presentation from managers about the roles of housing officers, demand from customers and the main challenges they encounter
 - Shadowed Housing Officers in Fleetwood, Merseyside, Macclesfield and Greater Manchester
 - Received information from Housing Officers about how they split their time between administration and patch-based work
 - Received information about Regenda's plans for agile working
 - Carried out a survey of Housing Officers (Communities) to ask them what works well, what does not and what improvements they thought would be useful
 - Carried out good practice research; the Panel reviewed local housing organisations websites to find examples of support offered to vulnerable customers
- b) The Panel would like to thank one of the Customer Inspectors who helped by shadowing one of the Housing Officers.

3. Main findings: strengths

- a) There are 3 regional teams, with 19 HO's community in total. Patch sizes vary and depend on geographic spread and demands for services. The largest patch is 934 (Tameside & Trafford), smallest is 342 (Thornton & Cleveleys).
- b) The role includes a wide range of responsibilities, covering tenancy and estate management functions, plus supporting vulnerable

residents. Diary returns, shadowing and responses to the Panel's survey revealed that HOs have a wide variety of activities, including time spent in meetings, estate inspections, customer visits, dealing with low level ASB, garden checks, property inspections

- c) The survey completed by HOs revealed the following:
- H.O.s spend 70% of time on patch (on average). 20% of their time is spent on resident engagement, 2% on ASB, 1 % on development, 2% on lettings, 5% other activities.
 - Overall – 16 out of 20 respondents said that they spend 50% or more of time with customers
 - Top 3 answers regarding what would you change about your job: 8 said 'nothing'; 4 said the amount of time spent on administrative task; 3 said they need more time
- d) Officers are dealing with some complex cases e.g. domestic violence involving multiple agencies. One of the officers the Panel shadowed handled a very sensitive case with expertise and exceptional customer care.
- e) The officers who the Panel shadowed demonstrated great commitment, knowledge and customer focus. The Panel members were impressed with the professionalism of the officers.
- f) One officer, who was shadowed by a Panel member, was observed dealing with a complex suspected abandoned property. This was a challenging situation that was handled well by the officer.
- g) All housing teams help each other; good support
- h) HOs carry out regular walkabouts and the Environmental Officer offers valuable service e.g. litter, fly tipping, small communal repairs etc
- i) One of the shadowing visits involved observation of how the Housing Officer dealt with an ASB issue caused by mixed lifestyles, and a complex case involving a vulnerable customer who has been rehoused away from ex-partner where another agency has given details (mistakenly) to ex-partner. In both instances, the officer took time to reassure, support and provide advice
- j) H.O.s informed the Panel members that training is provided in dealing with a range of vulnerabilities e.g. safeguarding, DV, abuse, substance misuse. Plus, HOs have good relationships with multiple agencies

- k) Safety arrangements are in place for officers, to ensure their safety when out on their patches and carrying out home visits
- l) Agile working is to be introduced from April 2019 and will enable HOs to spend more time on their patches and should result in less office-based administration.
- m) Overall, the Panel were impressed with the officers they shadowed and were struck by the complexities of some of the issues that involve vulnerable customers and those with chaotic life styles.

4. Main findings: areas for improvement

- a) Managers mentioned that patch sizes are having an adverse impact, given the variety of activities involved in the HO role and increasing numbers of customers who need support. This was backed up by conversations with HOs as part of the shadowing.
- b) Limited information from diaries, also diaries covered a very short period of time, but they revealed that some officers appear to spend more time with customers than others. The HO survey results revealed the following:
 - 4 out of 8 Greater Manchester H.O.s who responded said that they spend most time on administrative work
 - Overall 3 officers said they spend 70% of time on administrative tasks; 9 said 50% of their time
 - Overall 3 respondents spent less than 50% of time with customers – 2 spent as little as 20% of time with customers
 - 10 out of 20 respondents said that support needed for vulnerable customers; next highest answer (5 out of 20 respondents) was that a handy person and/or gardening assistance is needed for some customers
 - Administrative tasks, estate inspections and residents who need more support were the top 3 answers relating to which part of the job is most stressful.
 - When asked which part of job you would discard, 6 said 'nothing' and 6 said estate inspections
- c) One HO has some lengthy journeys as their patch is spread out (Garstang, Leyland, Blackburn)

- d) One of the Cheshire HOs mentioned they have an increasing caseload, including many residents who are vulnerable and in need of intensive support. The H.O said there was not enough capacity in external agencies to offer support.
- e) Some HOs told Panel members that they had not received training in terms of supporting vulnerable customers, rather they “learn on the job”. However, the Panel was informed that some training is to be rolled out soon
- f) Specific appointment times are not given according to one HO (for home visits). This is something that Panel members felt should be relatively straight forward to sort out

5. Recommendations

- a) Overall the panel were very positive about the commitment, professionalism and customer focus of the Housing Officers (Communities). However, they were particularly concerned about:
 - The amount of time that many of the HOs spend on administrative tasks compared to time spent on their patches and with customers
 - The information they received about the growing demands on H.O.s time and whether they had enough time and adequate training to support vulnerable customers.
- b) While Managers and some H.O.s said that they would prefer estate inspections to be carried by another person or team, the Panel felt that this is an integral part of a HO’s role and should be retained. Also, once agile working is rolled out, it should free up more HO time to deal with estate-based issues, with support from colleagues in other teams, e.g. Environmental Officer and M&Y.
- c) The Panel’s recommendations are set out in the table below:

Recommendation	Expected benefit
<p>a. Pilot Tenancy Support Officer role, in one of the regions, using existing resources (i.e. allocate the role to one of the existing HOs and re-distribute their patch). The role would focus on supporting customers who are vulnerable or who need support because of additional needs. The post holder would liaise with other agencies to ensure the appropriate support was provided to customers. The role would not include financial inclusion support as this is already covered in other roles within Regenda.</p> <p>The panel found examples of similar roles at other housing providers, e.g. First Choice Homes Oldham, MHS and Halton Housing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help vulnerable customers and others with additional support needs to sustain their tenancy effectively. • Free up Housing Officers' time to focus on tenancy and estate management for remaining customers
<p>b. Prioritise Housing Officers (Communities), within the programme for rolling agile working</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable HOs to spend less time on administrative tasks in the office and ensure they maximise the time they spend with customers and inspecting their patches. • Frees up capacity to pilot a Tenancy Support worker role.
<p>c. Monitor the amount of time officers spend on their patches after the role out of agile working, to ensure that this way of working is delivering improved value for money</p>	
<p>d. Provide community hubs where customers can meet up with customers. These could be spaces in existing buildings that Regenda</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved access to H.O.s, so that customers can build relationships with their H.O and so that the H.O.s can build up a better understanding of the demands and needs in their

Recommendation	Expected benefit
has access to	patches.

6. Concluding remarks

The Panel would like to thank all the managers and Housing Officers who supported them in completing this review. Their co-operation is greatly appreciated.

The Panel would like the relevant managers to prepare an action plan in response to the above recommendations and present it to the Panel at their next meeting.

[Appendix A: Survey results charts](#)