



Appendix 1

Report to Board from Trust Customer Panel on Outcome 2 – Communication – December 2016

The Trust Customer Panel's Mission Statement is:

The Trust Customer Panel aims to review and scrutinise the policies, services and standards provided to tenants by Trust Housing Association in an independent way, with the intention of identifying what works well and what could be improved, to ensure all tenants receive the best possible services, standards and value-for-money.

To fulfil this Mission Statement, the Panel has been scrutinising the extent to which Trust meets Outcome 2 of the Scottish Social Housing Charter:

“Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides. This outcome covers all aspects of landlords' communication with tenants and other customers. It is not just about how clearly and effectively a landlord gives information to those who want it. It also covers making it easy for tenants and other customers to make complaints and provide feedback on services, using that information to improve services and performance, and letting people know what they have done in response to complaints and feedback. It does not require landlords to provide legally protected, personal or commercial information.”

Beginning in July 2016, the Panel has undertaken this through a wide variety of tasks to explore communication across Trust, including:


- Surveying all Trust tenants by post to gain an insight to their satisfaction with Communication
- Questioning a significant number of Trust staff, across the whole range of departments and grades
- Meeting with a number of other housing providers to assess their practice
- Analysing Trust policies and procedures
- Looking at existing communication methods and templates
- Looking at the relevant results in the recent Customer Satisfaction Survey
- Using “real life experiences” as “mystery shopping”

- Visiting a number of developments to speak with different tenants.

The Panel was also keen to examine how easy it is for Trust tenants across the country to communicate with one another.

When we analysed our findings from these different pieces of work, we established that, in general, tenants and staff are positive about communication across Trust.

We have identified a number of things which we would want to highlight as Good Practice and would encourage that these continue to be supported:

- Communication by Trust staff (in both developments and offices) was highly praised in the tenants' survey.
- Regular newsletters in developments work well – especially where they are issued on a weekly basis.
- Trust Talk is well liked and provides useful information.
- Development Improvement Plans should prove to be a very good way of bringing progress on most issues into one document that can be easily tracked by tenants.
- Happy to Translate is a very helpful tool for people whose first language is not English.
- The Panel praises the excellent communication from [REDACTED] around their own travel plans etc. 
- Whiteboards / Daily News Boards work well in some developments.

We also make the following recommendations that we believe would enhance tenants' experiences of communication across Trust:

	Customer Panel findings and recommendations	Staff response
1	General	
1.1	Tenants reported that the language and tone of some written communication can be “intimidating” as it is too formal and stiff, with too much technical language and jargon. All communication should be in simple plain English that is as easy to understand as possible.	Specific examples would be helpful so that these can be investigated and addressed. Agreed
1.2	A Working Group, including tenants, should look at existing standard letters to simplify their language. However, standard letters and other communications regarding rent arrears should be examined by the Panel as a separate exercise.	Agreed Agreed
1.3	It is very important that tenants’ individual needs in relation to communication are met in every communication with them. Trust should improve the processes to ensure that people get the right font size, format etc every time, regardless of who in Trust sends the communication.	Specific examples would be helpful so that these can be investigated and addressed. The Core Data and Systems Reimplementation Project is already working on inclusive communications, and the Panel will be kept up-to-date.
1.4	Trust should find out whether people prefer to be communicated with by letter / email / phone call etc and this method should then be used every time.	The Core Data and Project is already working on this and the Panel will be kept up-to-date.
1.5	Where tenants require coordinator support to understand documents etc, this should be identified and coordinators made aware of the need for support ahead of every communication.	The Core Data and Systems Reimplementation Project is already working on inclusive communications and the Panel will be kept up-to-date.
1.6	Trust should explore working with the British Deaf Association (BDA) and the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) to	We don’t use less than font size 12, as per the RNIB recommendations. Generally font 14 is used. We will look

	seek their guidance on how to communicate more effectively with tenants whose sight or hearing (or both) is impaired.	at the guidelines again to ensure we make all communications as accessible as we can. We are working with the RNIB and Action on Hearing Loss in a number of different ways, including supporting our Digital Participation rollout. Panel members will be kept up-to-date.
1.7	Trust should explore providing more language training for staff and tenants to meet tenants' communication needs (for example BSL; Gaelic; Polish; Urdu).	This will be explored further. Staff will also be reminded to use Happy to Translate and Language Line to communicate with tenants, applicants and others, as required.
1.8	The website should have an auto-translate function to allow translation into different community languages and BSL signed information (by video) on it.	Browsealoud already provides a translation service and reads out the text for anyone who is visually impaired. We will do more to promote this functionality so that people know it is there to use.
1.9	It would be useful if tenants were more aware of activities taking place in developments / communities that are nearby. Trust should consider finding a way of creating local "information exchanges" or newsletters to give tenants the broadest possible selection of local activities etc. This should extend to include any General Needs or Amenity tenants living in that locality.	Some developments have local Facebook pages and we will work with tenants to encourage these to be shared with neighbouring developments / General Needs / Amenity tenants. Service Managers will be asked to work with their coordinators to see how information could be shared locally in other ways.
1.10	An article should go in Trust Talk and staff should support tenants to stop junk mail – the Mail Preference Service. This would mean that communications from Trust would be less likely to get "lost" and its importance would be more appreciated.	Agreed

1.11	Trust should do more to help tenants to understand how their services are funded and who makes decisions on service levels (for example at the Tenants' Conference).	Agreed. A high level article will be created for Trust Talk. However, local authorities' practice varies and this information can be more meaningfully shared at a local level. Some useful, easily understandable information will be developed with tenants.
1.12	More information should be available to tenants on how Trust is delivering value-for-money when spending tenants' rents.	We are keen to explore better consultation and information in relation to rents, affordability and value-for-money. A Sustainable Cost Reduction project is about to start, which will also focus on these issues. Panel members will be kept up-to-date.
1.13	Wifi should be rolled out to all developments as quickly as possible to allow (as a minimum) communal access to the information on Trust's website.	The Board has agreed at 4-year rollout of flood-fill wifi in all staffed developments. Criteria for determining the Programme are being worked up and will be shared with Panel members.
1.14	Amenity tenants find that it is hard for their Local Reps to access information that they need, and each time there is a delay of at least a week before there can be any update – could there be a way of making this speedier?	A review of the working practices of Local Reps is planned, and this will be taken into account.
1.15	It would be good to be able to have Skype surgeries with Service Managers / Property Officers, rather than them having to come to the development in person every time.	Agreed – as the Digital Participation project rolls out, staff will be encouraged to take this approach where appropriate.
1.16	It should be made clear that "Complaints" can include "Comments" – tenants don't always want to "complain" but may want to make a "comment" that is noted and results in changes.	This will be explored further and the Panel will be kept up-to-date.
2	Noticeboards in developments	
2.1	Noticeboards are generally too cluttered and information gets	

	<p>“lost”.</p> <p>An easy way for highlighting key current issues to tenants in developments should be rolled out. Whiteboards work very well in some developments, with coordinators constantly refreshing the information so that it is always “live”. This can save lots of “notes through doors” for tenants who are able to receive reminders by way of a communal daily update.</p>	Agreed.
2.2	Guidance on what needs to be on Noticeboards should be developed so that key information is easy to find, and the content of noticeboards is more standardised.	Agreed. This is being developed through the Design Guide project.
3	Panel communication	
3.1	A Panel member website portal should be developed to allow all documents to be uploaded to be easily accessible for all Panel Members with internet access.	This will be explored further as something like Yammer or a similar social media platform, rather than an actual portal, might be sufficient and offer better value-for-money. This will also be considered through the roll out of the Digital Strategy.
3.2	A WhatsApp group should be established for easy communication between Panel members	Agreed
3.3	At next year’s Tenants’ Conference, Panel members would be keen to communicate with more tenants in a more effective way – speed dating type session? One Panel member per table/bigger/better stall? Speaker on the agenda?	Agreed – the exact input from the Panel will be agreed as part of the creating the Conference agenda (which is also subject to wider tenant consultation).
4	Press and other coverage	
4.1	Every effort should be made to promote any local press coverage - local coordinators or office staff should share any knowledge that they have of any coverage so that nearby developments can also be alerted. This would allow tenants to share with family and friends to maximise the impact of any press coverage generated.	Agreed. There are a growing number of development Facebook pages to encourage sharing of events and press coverage.

4.2	Every effort should be made to promote Trust locally and ensure that local people realise that everyone can apply for a Trust house, and that historical requirements no longer apply (for example to be a member of the Church). There should also be greater effort to ensure that “Kirk Care” is not used.	We are working on a ‘brand champion’ pack that can be used by staff and tenants to promote Trust. The role of local tenants and staff is critical.
5	Telephone calls	
5.1	An article should go in Trust Talk to explain that all calls are routed through Head Office, and the very good reasons for this practice, as tenants find this “unexpected” when they have phoned a Glasgow or Arran number.	Agreed
5.2	Staff should offer a written reminder of a telephone conversation, or should pace their responses to allow tenants to take notes to remind them of phone conversations.	Agreed
6	Department specific issues	
6.1	Works Orders should be consistently supplied, especially to General Needs and Amenity tenants. These should make it clear that tenants can choose to contact the Repairs Team directly to follow up on any issues (if necessary), rather than waiting for the next Local Rep visit.	Agreed
6.2	Tenants should always be kept updated on an ongoing basis where repairs are delayed.	Agreed
6.3	The sign-up process should highlight the most critical information, especially fire procedures. Critical information like this can get “lost” in the amount of information that is provided at the beginning of a tenancy.	Agreed. The sign up process is under review and this will be taken into account. The Fire Assembly Point could be added to the Essential Information Sheet that is being developed for new tenants.
6.4	With the information on each development on the website, there should be a link to the latest Care Inspectorate report that covers the development.	Agreed. This is being explored and Panel members will be kept up-to-date.
7	Tenant to tenant communication	

7.1	Trust should explore how to make it easier for tenants across Scotland to communicate with one another (for example through Facebook)	Agreed. We will explore setting up a closed tenant Facebook group.
7.2	Trust should use the Tenants' Conference to encourage greater discussion and exchange of information and ideas between tenants from different parts of Scotland, rather than tenants possibly spending the whole day with someone from their own development.	Agreed – the exact format of the Conference will be agreed as part of the creating the Conference agenda (which is also subject to wider tenant consultation).
8	General Needs and Amenity (including Arran tenants)	
8.1	Trust should consider ways of improving communication with General Needs and Amenity tenants in a targeted way.	Agreed.
8.2	Trust should explore how to work with General Needs (especially Arran) tenants to help make them feel more “included”. This could possibly involve making videos of tenants and staff to share their experiences.	Agreed.
8.3	Trust should explore how to meet more regularly with tenants in Amenity and General Needs properties – for example by hiring a local venue annually.	This will be explored further. This also links with the Panel's earlier work on regular contact between staff and tenants to help ensure that properties are maintained close to the Trust Lettable Standard throughout each tenancy.
9	Surveys and other feedback mechanisms	
9.1	Trust should look at streamlining surveys as they are currently happening at organisational, department and local level and there are too many surveys and they are too complex.	Agreed. This is underway.
9.2	Trust should do more to show tenants what is different or what changes because of survey feedback or complaints.	Agreed. It is intended that survey feedback will be captured in Development Improvement Plans.
9.3	Surveys should be in easy-to-understand language.	Agreed.