

Report:



Residents Services Panel

Annual Report 2020/21

Panel Information

CHAIR

George

VICE CHAIR

Gordon

SENIOR PARADIGM EXECUTIVES

Matthew Bailes

Tracey Gray

BOARD CHAMPION

Julian Ashby

Eva Cullen

PANEL MEMBERS

Carl

Carol

Helen

Kathrine

Michele

Shughfata

Judi

(term ended June 2020)

PARADIGM STAFF

Claire Wise

Alexa Lamond

Rachel Whitrod

Morgan Allsworth

Chair's Introduction:

Our last report covered April 2019 to April 2020. This Report aims to highlight our achievements as Residents Services Panel for the 2020/21 year at Paradigm. This year the Panel in collaboration with the Customer Insight and Experience (CIE) team, identified areas for challenge and scrutiny with a view to driving improvement in service delivery to tenants.

We focused on three key areas as follows:

1. To scrutinise how customers' request for repairs are booked in and prioritised.
2. To scrutinise how customers' complaints are received and handled or rejected in the process.
3. To scrutinise Repair standards and policies and in particular, to ensure that customers with a need or vulnerability are handled with congruence.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions have disrupted normal service, we have made progress in the areas of repairs booking, improved communication with customers regarding backlog of repairs, to ensure expectations are well managed.

We believe our achievements this year include the following:

1. Overall improvement in communication with all customers. This is reflected in the improved key performance indicator (KPI) under "Paradigm keeps me

informed about things which may affect me as a resident” which has risen from 72% in 2019/20 to 79% in 2020/21.

2. We have identified our key areas to focus on, in order to investigate long standing issues underlying customers’ dissatisfaction with repairs and complaints.

Although COVID-19 restrictions have limited our meetings to Microsoft Teams, we have made good strides in carrying through our objectives for the year. After overcoming a few technical glitches, we are all now accustomed to Teams meetings. We thank Paradigm for providing individual panel members with headphones and tablets to help them to communicate effectively during virtual meetings.

The Panel and CIE team agreed to hold workshop style meetings, and these have helped to engage, and tackle issues better than structured meetings can deliver.

We are glad to have a new Panel member on board, Carol Burford, who joined us in December 2020 to fill the gap left by Judi Yapp.

Summary/ Overview of the year:

- ★ **COVID-19 Pandemic:** Throughout this past year Paradigm have taken a swift and vigorous approach to communications and all areas of service delivery, by merging both the physical and remote ways of reaching out to all its customers.

In keeping with the Social Housing White Paper, having recognised the importance of contacting the most vulnerable and lonely as a priority, Paradigm staff made welfare calls and assisted customers via third parties in accessing essentials such as food and medicine deliveries.

By use of this blended method to communicate they were able to update customers alongside heightening their presence on social media.

The Panel were kept up to date with how Paradigm were dealing with COVID-19 and the changes to the services, due to Government restrictions. We were then able to monitor the delivery of service and the plans for coming out of lockdown. We had the opportunity to debate with the Director of Property Services on how the backlog of repairs would be managed, whilst discussing to set the expectations for customers who were either awaiting an appointment or were needing to book a new repair.

Paradigm reformed policies and made additional changes to the way communications, repairs and lettings were handled:

- The lettings continued in a COVID-19 safe and secure way, with the use of technology.
- The repairs standard was amended for operations during COVID-19 allowing for urgent only repairs to be conducted.

- ★ **Meeting Format:** The changes to how our Panel meetings are held and conducted have been considerable, this new format has been both challenging and rewarding in equal measure. It has been a real learning curve in both skills and communications for us all. This has included all our meetings becoming virtual and how we send and receive paperwork is now all done digitally. The use of headsets and tablets has become the new normal.

The implementation of additional meetings and panel members only meetings, along with the introduction of sub-groups and committees hosted by Paradigm. This has proven to be of essential benefit in keeping us updated with this current climate and allowed for us as a Panel to continue our support and input towards influencing business priorities and improving services and their delivery.

- ★ **Recruitment:** Membership levels have remained the same, as although one member Judi, had to step down due to the stock swap with The Guinness Partnership. We were able to recruit a new resident, Carol shares her experience of joining:
“I was recruited to the Panel in December 2020. I was invited to attend a virtual meeting to observe, to see if it was something that I would like to join. I had attended other meetings on zoom before but this was different. I was sent the paperwork beforehand, so I could try and follow the agenda.

I had been on another Paradigm panel and was pleased that others had seen potential in me and thought I could bring support to this Panel with a voice. I have found it very useful joining sub-groups, growing in confidence, and working alongside other members of the Panel, and also working and being able to contact Morgan and Rachel for support. It could have been very overwhelming for me, joining in the middle of COVID-19, seeing all the new faces in front of me on the screen, but I was made to feel very welcome and being supported by the others has really helped.”

- ★ **Observations of 2020 Priorities: Repairs/ Voids/ Complaints Performance Monitoring:** Before the November 2019 meeting, the Panel was asked to select KPIs to be reviewed as priorities. Panel members proposed that 3 KPIs were treated as priorities for scrutiny. These were:
- Complaint resolution time
 - Letting times
 - Repair times and priorities

Subsequently, with the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic the Panel agreed that because some KPIs had changed or could not be met, for example within repairs, then it would not be possible or be appropriate to scrutinise this performance data. Instead we monitored how services were coping with the changes and challenged on backlogs of repairs and ensuring customer welfare was considered.

- ★ **Together with Tenants:** The Panel has agreed to monitor Paradigm’s commitment to the Charter, quarterly. By receiving the information within the Customer Experience Reports. Paradigm is in the process of ensuring the Charter is adopted across the business and once ownership and responsibilities have been decided upon, the Panel looks forward to monitoring progress.

Achievements to date:

- ★ **Sub-group in support of Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Process:** Paradigm developed a revised complaints procedure to incorporate guidance issued by the Housing Ombudsman. As part of the development, a 3-person resident sub-group was established. The group met twice using the Microsoft Teams facility and commented on the draft revised policy and with The Readership (Panel) on the draft leaflet to customers.

The revised Complaints Policy was implemented from January 2021.

- ★ **Project Purple:** 'Project Purple' was a name given by Paradigm for their plan to stock swap with another Housing Association. The aim was for both Paradigm and The Guinness Partnership to create an exchange of properties more local to each other's main portfolio and operations.

News of this created an understandably challenging time for some customers, who experienced concern with regard to a potential change to their landlord. FAQ's and literature were made available to customers to allay such concerns.

The Panel also noted that all those potentially affected by the stock swap were given the opportunity to raise any concerns and ask any questions. In order to do this, Paradigm had planned face-to-face roadshow events, as well as three online events. Due to the Pandemic, unfortunately the face-to-face roadshows had to be cancelled. In place of these, webinars as well as individual phone calls with both a Paradigm and Guinness representative were offered.

The consultation was set over a six-week period. During this time, feedback was captured from those who responded. There was an option to complete a designed survey online, over the phone, or through the post. For some residents who were not able to do this, special consideration was given to enable feedback through care provider support in specialised schemes. This seemed to create an inclusive approach for those who prefer one means of communication over another.

The resident consultation was conducted by both The Guinness Partnership and Paradigm in parallel, which was a requirement of the contract. According to the regulator's Tenant Engagement and Empowerment Standard, Housing Associations are required to set out any potential short-term and long-term advantages as well as disadvantages to tenants.

Governance Director, Ewan, attended our Panel meeting and explained the outcomes of the consultation report.

It appeared that the vast majority who replied were aware of why Paradigm was undertaking the swap and most expressed either a positive or neutral view that Paradigm had taken into account what was important to them.

A small proportion of Homeowners expressed concern regarding a difference in home purchasing schemes. This was the most prominent of all concerns raised.

A handful of other customers expressed concern over differences in repair standards, Guinness reputation which was perceived as poor due to online comments, and potential future change in rent.

The consultation report concluded that statutory requirements for the consultation were met and taking into consideration all feedback, there should be no material reason at a specific scale which would prevent the stock swap from proceeding.

Paradigm assured that the Panel were provided with the same level of detail as the Board. It was also shared with the Panel that Paradigm intended to create a 'Welcome Pack' for onboarding customers, bespoke to Tenants and Homeowners. As although bound by the same statutory regulations, Housing Associations can differ slightly in their KPI's and organisational policy etc. Therefore, having information freely accessible and available helped onboarding customers to get better acquainted with their new landlord. The Panel were advised of the potential 'Welcome Pack' literature and viewed what the pack might look like.

★ **Selection of 2021 Priority/ Challenge:** The priorities for challenge in 2020 were decided at the November 2020 Panel meeting. Members had previously identified 4 areas, namely:

- Non-urgent repairs
- Complaint handling
- Non-digital access to services and information
- Satisfaction levels both for general needs tenants and shared owners.

Many members had expressed concerns that Paradigm appeared to make too much use of standardised processes and algorithms, when delivering services without consideration or concern for the customers individual needs.

After discussion the Panel agreed to select Non-Urgent repairs as the first topic for scrutiny. As this affects most customers to some degree and undoubtedly requires flexibility insight into the needs of individuals. This topic was also influenced by the use of digital communications and is reflected in resident satisfaction levels.

The Panel agreed unanimously that the 2021 challenge will be to investigate; **"how do Paradigm consider reasonable adjustments when booking repairs."**

The challenge process has started with a presentation on the booking of repairs and will continue with several interviews of Customer Services Advisors (CSAs) and Managers carried out by some Panel members.

The Panel will use the scheduled meetings for the foreseeable future to gather more evidence and test processes. We look forward to meeting staff and fact finding and then seeing what improvements will be made because of our challenge. We will share our findings with staff and customers and monitor any changes made.

Consultation and Communications Plans: The Panel was provided with the Consultation and Communications Plan for the proposal to change the provision of 5 Year Fixed Term Tenancies and for combining Starter Tenancy into an Assured Tenancy as a probation period. The Panel requested the consultation was promoted further through post, email and via the website, with that caveat the plan was approved.

The Panel was provided with an update on the outcome of the previous projects in 2019 and 2020 and the progress made since consultation was completed and plans implemented.

Personal Development: Paradigm and the Panel are members of 'The Tenant Participation Advisory Service' (TPAS). TPAS provide us with a ream of information on current social housing affairs and support through publications and webinars. This aids the Panel in further understanding tenant involvement and scrutiny.

Helen describes her experience of attending one such webinar:

"Last year I attended a TPAS webinar entitled "Tenants Together" which is the first ever Charter for social housing from the National Housing Federation. Its purpose is to enable tenants to work collaboratively with their Landlords, under a specific framework. Paradigm have signed up to this Charter which illustrates their commitment to tenant participation.

The aim of the Charter is to create meaningful change between both parties on their relationship, voice, influence, accountability, quality and what happens when things go wrong. This will give tenants the authority to work in partnership with their Landlord in delivering excellent customer facing services and a system to use for service failure. The Grenfell Tragedy was a stark reminder that there can be a huge divide between tenants' voices being heard and social landlords listening and acting accordingly. This Charter was created as a result of that tragedy.

There are many groups of tenants who are "hidden" from tenant participation, they may not engage because of age, ill health, no digital access, cultural or religious beliefs, etc. It is our job as a Panel to find a way to engage all of our customers as every voice matters in shaping the right service delivery to a good standard.

The ideal golden thread is to have tenant participation running through every section of a Housing Association to ensure the service delivery has been influenced by customers. 'Hackathons' were suggested from an Orbit Housing Association tenant, who described how involved tenants will deep dive into one specific issue with the key members of staff. The first session would be used to discuss the issues and the second to discuss solutions, making it a short and concise exercise that results in positive change. The Orbit tenant stated a 'Hackathon' is key to work in a qualitative way so we can understand all the factors influencing a service. Then we can discuss what changes need to happen from a tenants' perspective, delivered in partnership with the Landlord.

This Charter is seeking a change in culture where the customers are part of all the decision-making processes on customer facing services and are an integral part of the governance within the Housing Association".

Plan for year ahead 2021/22: As the year progresses, the Panel will continue their investigation into the 2021 challenge. Once resolution has been found and recommendations have been made, these will be monitored by the Panel.

In addition, the Panel will be in support and adherence of the new Customer Strategy, which is currently under way. This will shape the requirements of focus for 2022 and beyond.

The value the Panel brings to Paradigm: The Panel remain consistent in being Paradigm's critical friend, from providing guidance during the stock swap consultation to providing assurance of our efforts in communicating with customers during the multiple lockdowns.

Despite the differences and difficulties of home working, the Panel have been proactive in adapting to virtual meetings and continue to monitor performance levels through receiving the KPIs and customer satisfaction data.

The Panel has taken on a new area of challenge for 2021 in their investigation into how Paradigm consider making reasonable adjustments for customers when booking repairs. The conversations between the Panel and our Customer Services department have already begun to highlight where further clarity and improvements could be made, therefore when the final report on the findings is produced we are confident the Panel will have identified some tangible recommendations for improvement.

Chair and Vice Chair's synopsis:

The constraints of having to work remotely with the CIE team via Microsoft Teams have limited our ability as a Panel to scrutinise effectively. Nevertheless, we are learning to make effective use of our time on Teams to hold discussions as a Panel and have been able to deliver useful plans to the CIE Team. For example, the Panel identified the main areas of customers' dissatisfaction in delivery of services and are working collaboratively with the CIE team to review these in order to drive improvement, customer satisfaction and value for money.

It is our hope that we can all resume normal face-to-face meetings when the Pandemic restrictions are finally lifted. This will enable us to tackle issues which have been put on hold and also work towards achieving new targets for 2022 and beyond.

Finally, the Panel wishes to thank the CIE team for their continued cooperation in our work, and the Senior Management and the Board Champions for their support. We hope, together, we can achieve more improvements in service delivery, tenant satisfaction and enhance the standing of Paradigm as a housing provider.