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| Review Topic: | Great Places' response to Covid19 – learnings |
| Start / End Date: | September - November 2020 |
| Board: | Thursday 10 th December 2020 |
| Judgement: | Good |

1. Background & update

Insight is a volunteer group of customers keen to help improve services delivered to Great Places customers. Our group carries out scrutiny reviews using feedback from the wider customer base, colleagues and performance information offered by Great Places to identify potential areas for improvement. Our collective role is to act as a critical friend to objectively scrutinise service areas; reporting findings and recommendations from a customer perspective to Great Places Board.

A key objective to increase membership remains ensuring the group best reflects Great Places' diverse customer groups. We're continuing to explore ways customers could contribute digitally enabling contribution without the need to attend meetings. Recruitment campaigns were run to coincide with the Tenant Participatory & Advisory Services', (TPAS) national scrutiny week in August and the National Customer Service Week in October. We received several expressions of interest by customers who were keen to find out more detail of the function of scrutiny reviews and these are being followed up. While we acknowledge that we may not be completely reflective at the moment, we ensure that we capture the views, through our survey and other work of as wide a sample of customers as possible, and we firmly believe that some people who may be reluctant to reply to Great Places respond to us as a group of fellow customers. We acknowledge the positive potential that integration of Insight and the Equity region scrutiny group has helped to support this aim and we have worked as one single group during this current review.

As a result of restrictions and Government guidance we've had to continue to hold our sessions digitally via Star Leaf. The experience has given us the opportunity to explore how digital methods might be offered as a more flexible way for customers' to contribute to scrutiny reviews. So far, we've found virtual meetings have offered an effective alternative to face-to-face meetings, in some cases reducing travel and offering greater efficiencies in regards to time. We'd like to propose that virtual meetings should be a viable, long term option to offer greater flexibility for participation and to attract new members. A recent meeting with the head of the IT operations team set out the functional requirements of virtual customer scrutiny to establish whether this option would be a feasible to offer to customers. We're sure this will enable us to work more effectively, easing email traffic, which has added to our workload.

We'd like to remind Board still that although virtual working has enabled us to continue with reviews this method can be tiring and intense and has slowed the process down, therefore we have only been able to complete two rather than three pieces of work during 2020. We plan to review this in early 2021 taking account of the situation relating to the pandemic and Government advice at that time. At the same time, we'd like to highlight that continued restrictions and a subsequence of virtual working, there has been an overall impact, so we are suggesting as a group to pause and draw breath during January.

We plan to use this time to revise the groups working practices including virtual ways of working and its impact. We'd like to review the integration of the 2 scrutiny groups and consider in more detail a succession plan and recruitment to strengthen the customer voice.

In October we carried out a couple of training sessions with TPAS, Tenant Participatory & Advisory Service, which provided us greater insight of the scrutiny function, gave comparisons of other scrutiny groups and the impact of changes occurring in the wider housing sector. We'd like to thank Jenny, Chris and Carole for joining us; it was a great opportunity to build our relationship and we hope to work together again in the near future. Learning gained from TPAS training will serve us well when reviewing our goals for customer scrutiny at Great Places. We will provide greater detail of outcomes in our Annual Summary report, which we will submit early in the New Year.

In addition we hope taking time to pause during January will enable us to work with Great Places' senior management and the business intelligence team to identify relevant service areas and timescales for review next year, as well as providing opportunity for us to familiarise ourselves with both the Social Housing White Paper and current Great Places corporate planning. It's our intention to share these future review areas with other customers, to attempt to attract greater interest to contribute to our scrutiny work. We plan to enlist the support of the Communications team to assist us with this piece of work.

2. Review Service Area

For this review, it was agreed to look at Great Places' response to the coronavirus pandemic that allowed services to be delivered safely and consistently, whilst supporting customers, finding out how they were kept informed during this time of uncertainty. We were keen to hear customers' experiences to capture learning from a customer perspective.

3. Aim and Scope of our review

We agreed our aim would be to explore how Great Places response had landed with customers to capture their views of services delivered during this period of time to identify learnings from a customer point of view. We set a clear scope to gather data to help achieve our aim as follows;

- to research how the response to the pandemic was co-ordinated, agreed and implemented,
- explore how customers were supported and kept up to date, and
- review customers' experience of service delivery.

4. Our Approach

We sought information from Great Places colleagues to inform our review, listed below;

Executive response - we invited members of the executive team to present the organisations' position in relation to the coronavirus pandemic, summarising the business priorities in regards to customers and Great Places colleagues.

Great Places response – to learn how Great Places' agreed the business and service response, we asked a Head of Neighbourhood to outline how this was co-ordinated, managed and implemented whilst keeping frontline colleagues briefed of changes.

Adapting service delivery – we learnt that Great Places had taken the decision to continue to rehouse customers whose need had worsened or had changed as a result of the pandemic. We heard a summary from the Head of Neighbourhood leading on this service area about the businesses' justification to continue to rehouse and the change that took place to enable this process to be carried out safely.

Delivery of the services – we met with Great Places colleagues in the service areas such as The Hub, Neighbourhoods, I&W, Facilities Management – Caretaker Service, the Repairs Service and Distribution Centre to find out about their experiences delivering frontline services as well as their interactions with customers.

Keeping customer informed – we heard from the Communications Team about methods used to keep customer informed, providing essential information about change to services.

Desktop Review - we completed a desktop review of customer views and comments collected via a survey, detail given in presentations, and comments from the teams across Great Places services

5. Review of good practice and findings

We've summarised areas of good practice and findings collected during our review in this section.

Executive response

Great Places' business' response was to work to Government guidelines, prioritising the safety and wellbeing of customers balanced with that of colleagues. It was clarified the organisation's business continuity plan had been reviewed to outline contingency for the inability to use office space and the reliance on technology, working from home to help deliver this function. We were reassured to hear of the organisation's financial strength to support resilience, enabling the business to respond effectively, which has been strengthened by the merger with Equity Housing.

In January, we understand planning commenced in relation to supplies of materials required for the eventuality of coronavirus striking in the UK. What was found that couldn't have been foreseen was the fast pace of change that occurred and the challenge this presented to provide relevant and timely communication in turn with the release of Government messages.

Consequently, daily meetings were held during the early stages after the announcement of lockdown to monitor performance, manage necessary change and agree strategies; we were informed that at times it felt hectic since there was so much happening, although in hindsight it was managed well with the ability to see and plan beyond the initial panic. A listening approach was taken by the organisation, communicating regularly with customers and colleagues to make sure revision could be identified and applied as required.

Observations and Achievements

- There's a great sense of pride for the resilience demonstrated by Great Places colleagues, and their ability to adapt to change and continue to deliver frontline services.
- I&W teams worked throughout dealing successfully with some very challenging behaviour and circumstances.
- Continued to rehouse people in extreme need using an adapted contactless / digital process
- The merger with Equity went well: credit has to go to the good work of all on the project team
- Apprentices were initially furloughed with pay made up by Great Places; all apprentices were back at work at the time we met with the executive team.
- Induction for new staff continued during lockdown.

Great Places response to Covid19

To find out how Great Places agreed a business and frontline service response, we invited 2 x Heads of Neighbourhoods to share ways this was co-ordinated and implemented keeping frontline colleagues briefed of changes. We were keen to hear about the new adapted lettings process, which enabled people in need to be rehoused.

Areas of good practice – maintaining service delivery

When lockdown was announced a command crisis structure was confirmed comprising Gold Command (executive team and specific directors to make quick decisions) and Silver Command (directors and a number of heads of service to consider impact on service delivery and agree change required). This chain of command enabled strategic decision making and operational decisions to be agreed, which could be communicated group wide. We heard there had been 2 phases of Covid19; i) crisis management lockdown temporarily stopping some services delivering beyond essential services, and ii) a transition to the 'new norm.'

Great Places' continuity plan like many prior to lockdown hadn't contained provision for a global pandemic and a subsequent closure of all office space; this was quickly reviewed by the executive and continuity team. A decision was made to offer emergency repairs (defined as a threat to Health & Safety or building safety); therefore it was necessary to agree how to deal safely with these situations. For set circumstances, it was agreed offering rehousing was an essential service so again a safe process was worked out to facilitate getting homes ready to let to accommodate moves, which would protect the NHS.

Scheme inspections took place each week to check for health and safety and any urgent repairs, fly tipping or concerns customers may have had at the time, whilst showing a presence to customers. It was a busy time adapting services and reviewing policies to pass onto frontline colleagues by means of a specially created area on SharePoint, to post updates to avoid any confusion, which may have occurred if emails were sent. Policies provided guidance for frontline teams of the way services were to be delivered whilst outlining an approach to dealing with customer enquiries to ensure consistency.

A process was devised for referrals of customers who may have been in crisis without money to enable funding to be accessed quickly and arrangements were made to have food parcels delivered. Great Places made financial donations to charitable organisations to support continued help to provide life saving services within communities.

Summary of findings

A total of 4000 calls were made to customers who were identified using data on AXIS, as being 70+ or known as being potentially vulnerable as a result of Covid19, 98% of the customers contacted were perfectly okay with support in place. The decision to contact this group of customers was an ethical approach to reach out to customers who it was felt may have been more adversely impacted by Covid19.

GP helped to support Local Authorities, and their efforts to prevent an economic lockdown by sending customers new guidance such as changes to restrictions in the Oldham area where Great Places has a concentrated number of housing stocks. We also heard that neighbourhood teams had watched a YouTube briefing that challenged myths equipping colleagues with information, which could be passed onto customers when out and about in neighbourhoods.

Communication with customers throughout lockdown was primarily via digital sources, which lent itself to the fast pace of change in guidance allowing for messages to be clear and concise, which was supported with notices on communal noticeboards at some schemes and reinforced by NSMs and other frontline teams whilst in-touch with customers.

The response to Covid19 has provided substantial background to enable crisis management planning in case of future waves of the virus. The use of digital methods of contact have been accelerated throughout this period, with an increase use of webchat and email; it was felt this behaviour change offered an opportunity which could be maximised so a blended approach can be offered to enable more balanced, efficient service delivery. A learning log is being kept at a senior level, this is an unprecedented situation, Great Places is still learning, further extreme measures may be required.

Areas of good practice - adapting service delivery

We heard that Government's initial position was to stop lettings, which were not essential. Great Places in contrast to other social landlords agreed that this was felt to be an essential service which would help protect the NHS by easing overcrowding, badly housed people and anyone forced to quarantine with others inappropriately.

Great Places reshaped the lettings process seeking legal advice about accepting tenancies by email, developing detailed guidelines for teams, which were continually reviewed in regards to changes, teams were given a key worker letter, distributing PPE, coordinating contactless viewings and sourcing removal companies who were still offering their services.

The rationale was shared with LAs defining the organisation's approach to rehousing as an essential service, influencing other providers who started to re-let, subsequently cementing partnerships. Learning taken from this experience was to be bold; and on reflection this happened with the support of an established and close-knit team. Great Places wish to evaluate the outcomes of the reshaped lettings approach to agree whether it is can be adopted or adapted long term.

Summary of findings

Re-let times increased, which was influenced by various factors such as lone working of trades on an empty property, specialist contractors initially stopped working, and lead in times for viewing. However, to add context turnover totals were much lower as far fewer tenancies were ending and prior to lockdown average re-let times had been 12 days in GM South region rising to 21 days, which was still inside the overall target of 21 days.

New build properties continued to be handed over from developers, at which point responsibility for the security and safety of the sites and properties lay with Great Places. It was therefore in the organisations interest to let the new properties to protect the asset, which in turn would prevent and relieve situations of overcrowding where there was a clear need to move.

Lessons learnt as a consequence of the pandemic have been;

- improved co-ordination of enquiries using one key contact for each Local Authority for all service areas reducing email trails,
- Great Places has been clear to define its own direction which included the role of key worker, if the service were to stop, which would have had an adverse impact on the NHS, and
- scheme visits continued and Great Places were supportive of decisions taken to continue delivery of services that avoided teams becoming overwhelmed, which some providers reported
- the importance of managed stocks of PPE sourced by the Distribution Centre and distributed so colleagues were able to continue delivering services safely
- the importance of a presence on schemes by Great Places, the HON lead by example visiting a scheme to ensure it was coping well, illustrating a willingness to act as a team, whilst building confidence in the organisation's decisions. It was a useful exercise that enabled urgent repairs, trip hazards to be reported and acted upon, whilst customers could ask questions, if needs be.
- A 'WhatsApp' group was created and photos were posted within the team that brought with it practical benefits but also kept moral up energising colleagues spirits and sense of camaraderie.

Delivery of the services

We invited Great Places colleagues who work in The Hub, neighbourhoods, I&W, facilities management - caretaker and repairs service and the distribution centre to outline their experiences of delivering frontline services during the pandemic, including change, which had to be made to ensure safety. We were also keen to hear about their interactions with customers.

Summary of findings

The Hub - when lockdown was announced a functioning telephony system quickly had to be established, to allow The Hub to work from home. Equity region's Customer Solutions team had an agile working policy in place therefore equipped for home working in contrast to The Hub. In April an alternative telephony app. solution was deployed to allow The Hub to take calls whilst working from home.

Customers experienced longer than normal call time's one reason being extra time was needed to ask screening questions to evaluate risk, welfare and safety of customers and colleagues. Remote working had an adverse impact on the number of 'first time resolution.' We were told one factor that influenced this change was that on-hand support of colleagues and service specialists wasn't as readily accessible as when working more closely together as a team in The Hub. It was found initially that customers understood, were patient and realistic about the situation and satisfaction was reported as 7.73 and the customer effort 3.57 to reach a resolution to an enquiry, where 1 is easy.

Recruitment, induction and training of new team members to vacant posts presented significant challenge for management as well as existing team members, to manage demand and minimise disruption to service delivery. At one stage in August there were 5 vacant posts as a result of internal movement, which on one hand is a success however also, created greater pressure on the team already working in a challenging environment. We heard there was an impact for some on wellbeing resulting in sickness.

Areas of challenge were as follows;

- performance management,
- multiple systems – speed
- pace and change relating to communication
- recruitment and training
- query resolution and escalation
- team morale and motivation
- returning to the office in a Covid19 environment

Neighbourhoods - calls were made to customers who it was felt may be vulnerable as a result of restrictions and the pandemic to enquire about support needs, to offer practical assistance or financial advice, identify if a referral for food parcels was required, sign post to support in the community, advise about the Hardship Fund and offer a befriending service in the form of a regular stay in touch call.

Agile working arrangements and equipment already in place eased the adaptation for teams to work remotely. Neighbourhood Service Managers were provided with a high Vis jacket with 'stay 2m distanced' printed on the back to reinforce importance of social distancing. Great Places colleagues were all provided with PPE and items to ensure safety, a keyworker letter, which gave individuals confidence, policies were revised and posted onto a shared platform to limit email traffic. Team meetings continued using Star Leaf, which was good for morale, sharing experiences and relieving any feelings of isolation from working remotely.

The adaptation of the lettings process enabled viewings for people in housing need, as well as the handover of new properties ready for sign-up of new customers awaiting rehousing. The viewing of properties adhered to social distance rules and sign-ups were conducted online.

Regular weekly visits were carried out to neighbourhoods, which served as an opportunity to report urgent repairs, issues of health and safety and show a presence giving reassurance to customers.

Customers were extremely grateful for the help and support of the Hardship Fund, which offered much needed breathing space. Neighbourhood teams were watchful of changes in customer behaviour, prepared to offer advice to access support, such as what to do or where to get help.

I&W - actions taken during pandemic were as follows:

- Daily reactive changes following new advice, procedures
- Front-line staff affirmed as 'essential worker' with GP letters
- Reduced staffing for in-house work
- Closed crèches, laundries and lounges
- Increased cleaning
- PPE was supplied by the distribution centre stock
- Started befriending service for older customers was successful and continues offering support
- Deployed under-used/displaced staff to non-customer contact roles, which was seen to be good for their development
- Reactions to changing events by GP were speedy.
- Some staff in the 'shielding' group for 12 weeks, successfully worked from home.

Communications was maintained via emails to GP colleagues and customers, letters, face-to-face contact, intranet Covid19 section for GP colleagues, daily check-in calls where needed, and signage at schemes. Colleague reactions and experiences – there was some anxiety and stress with much self-isolating however this was easing at the time of the presentation since testing was available. Innovative solutions were developed out of need such as acting as a food bank sub-branch so customers did not have to go out into the community.

Experience of customers – there was confusion initially, an increase of anti-social behaviour and domestic violence, arrears worsened, and mental health problems were more apparent, it was decided to close lounge areas, which had the biggest negative impact on customers.

On the whole most customers complied with restrictions and expressed gratitude for the efforts of GP colleagues for continuing to work to provide services.

Befriending Calls to Independent Living & Extra Care Customers – this customer group receives permanent support and included calls to just short of 400 households who are 70+ including couple households. Extra care customers would have continued to receive the daily call from the scheme Independent Living Co-ordinator. We heard resources were gathered using a 'Capacity Planner' Resources, which comprised of over 40 volunteers from across the business were identified to support this work.

Work started on 18 March 2020 prior to full lockdown and an all-purpose plan was developed to befriend, support welfare, and refer customers to other agencies or signpost. A total of 844 were recorded that were made however in reality this could well have been more like 1000+ to this group of customers.

Benefits gained from this piece of work were reduction of isolation for customers and GP colleagues who mainly were at this point working from home and an initial upward trend in customer satisfaction. We have been told that befriending calls have resumed as a result of the 2nd lockdown restrictions.

Facilities Management, caretaking service - we were informed the caretaker service felt the team galvanised positively to continue deliver services to customers ensuring the communal areas are kept clean and safe in this difficult period. Challenges were to take a business as usual approach, ensure the team felt supported keeping morale high, reassure customers who we understood had concerns around the pandemic, adapting to the new way of working in a safe environment and maintain a compliant service.

Following Public England guidance we approached the challenge positively pulling together as a team taking time to consider safety implications, working with customers and GP colleagues to maintain regular service delivery as well as be a source of reassurance for customers. As a team it was evident there was pride of the achievements such as group-wide installation of hand sanitiser kits fitted and regularly replenished, all schemes visited, cleaned and maintained each cycle throughout the pandemic, additional weekend cleaning and maintained a positive approach to delivering the caretaking service. In the early days there was a fear fuelled by media reports, so reassurance was provided with regular catch-ups and cake and working as a team that became a powerful antidote.

Repair service - initially the service was scaled back significantly delivering essential services only, in line with Government guidelines. It was vital to continue to support customers in need of essential assistance of repairs and estate services, which included completing work to empty properties to support the need to provide homes for vulnerable customers and reduce the pressure on health and support services. Operatives were able to go into homes to carry out essential services so long as screening safety questions had been asked, they adhered to the 2 meter social distance rule and wore safety PPE. Some tasks were carried out outside of the normal role as service requirement evolved to support customers' health and wellbeing providing other work experience opportunities.

It was agreed all repair colleagues were to be available on their mobile to keep in daily contact between set working hours. A number of operatives unable to work were redeployed to other areas of the business. All colleagues moved to video calling daily and received weekly briefings via email from the director of the service.

Work on plans to remobilise the service began in May following easing of restrictions. A working group was established comprising of key stakeholders such as operatives, members of The Hub, health and safety and the communications team. A clear framework of delivery was agreed, that included weekly messages for customer and risk assessments were revised. A two-stage communication plan was developed for repair colleagues that would give guidance of concerns raised by the working group; a live virtual briefing session was provided to the full repair team of 56.

A remobilised repairs service went live at the start of June with a 2000+ backlog of repair jobs to action. Analyse of data showed there was a 67% increase in calls, end to end repair times increased as a result of working to safety guidelines, and customer expectations had changed.

Challenges faced by the service included confusing government guidance, the pace of change that had to be communicated to 90+ team, the rate of COVID related sickness, poor mental health associated with anxiety, recruitment to vacant posts and training of 20 staff in August. Learning outcomes recognised from challenges are to be used to improve the future service such as upskilling officers booking appointments to assist repair diagnosis to give greater understanding and accuracy potentially increasing first time resolution and customer satisfaction.

Successes include the sustainment of quality of work despite challenges, an increase use of technology, greater understanding of and better communication within the team, new skills and learning and increased capacity of the team (20+ colleagues inducted) due to the need to complete repair backlog and greater understanding of customer expectations by taking a look through the customer lens.

Distribution Centre – supply of PPE items and hand sanitiser - service delivery from the distribution centre continued throughout pandemic utilising a rota for warehouse staff, drivers as well as the business and warehouse managers - risk assessment documentation was revised. Large stocks of hand sanitiser and anti-bacterial wipes were procured as part of early planning that meant teams could continue to work with increased safety measures in place.

The Distribution Centre throughout the pandemic didn't run out of stock of PPE or materials, which was as a result of the experience and determination of the team and good relationships with suppliers. PPE was supplied to over 3000 staff across 7 housing groups and partnership contractors, data is set out in the table below;

| | | | |
|-------|-------------------------------|--------|---|
| 17000 | face masks | 3m | millilitres of hand sanitiser |
| 19500 | disposable gloves | 18,000 | orders processed |
| 5500 | tubes of anti-bacterial wipes | 60,000 | homes serviced with materials in Northwest, Yorkshire, Northeast and Midlands |
| 500 | 2m high Vis vests | | |

It was confirmed there is a large stock of supplies, which if not needed would suit business as usual supply needs and in this scenario, stocks would reduce to usual levels in 12 months. We have a range of local and national suppliers so are not over-reliant on one source alone. The distribution team and operatives safely facilitated a supply of PPE and essential items to GP colleagues and customers across the group enabling services to continue with minimal disruption.

Keeping customer informed - social media channels were kept up-to-date with information and news articles relevant to customers and stakeholders and in some cases, these are uploaded to the Great Places website. Important time critical updates were sent to customers through targeted e-newsletters containing tailored information relating to where customers live. Over 12000 customer e-newsletters were sent out outlining Great Places approach to COVID-19 and services, containing latest advice and guidance and major updates were replicated on the website. It was agreed not to send letters to customers due to ever-changing advice and restriction from the Government which dated quickly but to create posters for communal areas to reach customer not digitally active.

The website has been dedicated to help and support in relation to COVID-19, including frequently asked questions, changes in circumstances and paying their rent during this challenging time. The Community Investment team have been working with a range of partners to provide information about organisations who can help in areas such as employment, food and fuel support and befriending services in all of the areas we operate in. It was important to ensure customers felt updated of Great Places approach to COVID-19 throughout, regardless of their method of contact therefore as a result, we updated our phone line IVR messaging in The Hub to update customers on our service delivery.

Colleagues were kept informed of any changes using several different methods so these messages could be reinforced during contact with customers. Updates sent directly to customers were shared with our frontline colleagues to ensure that any customer queries could be answered promptly and effectively.

The visual roadmap below was created with the idea of keeping customers informed in a simple and easy-to-understand format. It was published on the website, shared digitally via our newsletter and social media channels. We posted the roadmap on noticeboards for communal blocks and schemes to ensure that non-digitally active customers were kept informed of progress.



Listening to feedback – it was understood early on that it would be hard to reach customers who aren't digitally enabled therefore we created a support offer magazine that was shared digitally and in print format. The voice of our Independent Living / Older Peoples Services customers who mainly aren't digitally active helped shape the way customers are kept informed about changes across Great Places. Digital TV screens at our schemes display important messages to keep customers up-to-date and posters were created outlining the new Government guidance.

The team engaged with LA partners continuing to update customers on the local restrictions and offering advice, guidance and support, which extended to translating important Coronavirus prevention information in five languages to help communicate with non-English speaking customers.

Desktop Review - gathering feedback from customers

As with each review we find customer feedback invaluable highlighting areas for improvement enabling determination of recommendations.

Surveys were sent to 1200 customers by email and post (to non-digitally active customer group), inviting calls, if support was needed to complete the form. The sample comprised of a mix of customers living across Great Places stock including Equity region general needs and I&W tenure. A link to the survey was included in a customer communication e-newsletter following the initial wave of surveys to capture a greater response of customer voice.

We outlined we are a volunteer customer group exploring Great Places response to the pandemic and we are looking to gather feedback to inform our review of a customer perspective. The aim of the survey was to gather feedback relating to the different service areas who had presented information to gain an understanding of service delivery from a customer perspective. We received 145 returns representing a 12% response rate, reassuring compared to the industry standard response rate of 8-10% particularly in the present environment.

To add some context to feedback we asked customers to outline their main struggles experienced during the pandemic, top 3 areas of concern were isolation, feeling safe and struggling financially. Customers told us they'd go to family and friends or the internet to get advice demonstrating (as in our review of Universal Credit) independence and / or that customers don't instinctively identify Great Places as a 'go to' for support; an area maybe for further exploration.

What the data told us;

When asked how customers had kept up to date with Great Places news during the pandemic, 59 customers said the e-newsletter, 42 via Great Places website and 35 said they'd not kept up to date. Of 114 customers who responded when asked if they'd had contact from Great Places in the past 6 months, a majority of 51 customers had had contact via a request for a repair, 31 via an e-newsletter and 24 customers had received a call from Great Places. The table below shows customer satisfaction with a number of methods they'd had contact with Great Places.

| | No. Resp. | Ave | % 7-10 | % 3-1 |
|--|-----------|-----|--------|-------|
| Satisfaction with advice and support given on the phone call | 24 | 8.2 | 83 | 13 |
| Satisfaction with information in the e-newsletter | 31 | 7.6 | 74 | 6 |
| Satisfaction with interaction in neighbourhood – face to face | 9 | 9.4 | 100 | 0 |
| Satisfaction operative acted safely within guidelines wearing PPE and keeping a 2m distance whilst in my home | 51 | 8.5 | 86 | 7.8 |
| Satisfaction caretaker acted safely within guidelines wearing PPE and keeping a 2m distance whilst cleaning communal areas | 52 | 7.4 | 73 | 13 |

We asked customers if they'd felt reassured following contact with Great Places 74% of 100 respondents said yes that they had felt reassured.

Below are a number of customer comments;

- I received a very quick response to arrange access regarding internet. An appointment was arranged to suit me, which was so helpful. I used 'web chat' in The Hub, so simple, excellent.
- Helpful and understanding about my situation and helped me through it all.
- I got a text the day before, on the day and the engineer called before he attended and did the job, he was professional and friendly
- Always updated with latest information, which stops you feeling forgotten and communication is always open
- Emails too long, not simple to understand - not really consumer friendly
- I didn't receive a phone call to ask if anyone was isolating (my daughter was so I refused entry)

Of 104 customers who responded to confirming they had contacted Great Places a majority of 50 said they had called The Hub, 26 emailed The Hub, 17 used webchat, the remainder called or emailed their NSM, or used self-service.

| | No. Resp. | Ave | % 7-10 | % 3-1 |
|--|-----------|-----|--------|-------|
| Satisfaction with services provided by GP during lockdown? | 119 | 7.6 | 71 | 11 |
| Satisfaction with information provided by GP during lockdown? | 121 | 7.5 | 71 | 14 |
| Satisfaction with experience of contacting GP during lockdown? | 117 | 7.6 | 74 | 13 |
| Satisfaction with info. about Covid19 and support on website? | 109 | 8.1 | 79 | 6 |

Below are a number of customer comments;

- All communication has been precise and well administered
- Excellent service, quite beyond expected
- It shows that they want the best for their customers
- Very difficult to get in touch had to wait a long time for a reply
- Difficult to get appointments and to get through to the contact centre

- Posters on our doors / notice boards filled with writing so small and lengthy most people didn't read then more graphic ones came recently - our doors and notice boards are full.

Customers who viewed a potential new home and signed-up a tenancy during the pandemic, who experienced the adapted contactless lettings process were included in the customer survey sample. We received responses from 10% of the 70 customers surveyed, which was extremely positive.

| New tenancies | Resp. | Ave. | % 10-7 |
|---|-------|------|--------|
| Satisfaction with the viewing and tenancy sign-up stage | 16 | 9.25 | 100 |
| Importance of the move-in stage of the process to you | 16 | 9.8 | 100 |

Below are a number of customer comments;

- It was really important for client to get settled, she is very happy in her new home. Good customer service felt Nick went above and beyond
- Great Places were great, the officer couldn't do enough
- I am super happy with Jack and the house viewing went great. He explained everything very well and gave great answers to all my questions, which I asked
- I was satisfied with the viewing, but would have preferred not to have had to view alone
- Had excellent support, move was made easy in a very stressful time

We asked customers to score how valued they felt reflecting on their experience as a customer of GP since the pandemic, and satisfaction with GP as a landlord, which are shown in the table below.

| | No. Resp. | Ave | % 7-10 | % 3-1 |
|--|-----------|------|--------|-------|
| How valued do you feel as a customer of GP reflecting on your experience of the last 6 months? | 144 | 6.65 | 59 | 22 |

Below are a number of customer comments;

- All queries have been dealt with efficiently and professionally
- Great customer service
- I have lived in my house over 20 years, I'm very happy here it's my safe place
- They cherish their customers
- I think more interaction with our ILC (who worked from home) to personally check on people
- Could of given more information about living in flats – Plum Life
- In the beginning I felt differently, but recently I'd give a score of 1, no contact – Equity region
- Where I live is a Cat1 scheme, but I haven't had any contact at all - Equity region

We also asked customers to rate satisfaction with Great Places as a landlord taking account of service delivery over the last 6 months then if this had increased, remained the same or decreased since before the pandemic.

| | No. Resp. | Ave | % 7-10 | % 3-1 |
|---|-----------|------|--------|-------|
| Satisfaction with GP as a landlord taking account of service delivery over the last 6 months? | 142 | 7.18 | 65 | 15 |

| | No. of Resp. | Inc. | Same | Dec. |
|--|--------------|------|------|------|
| Has satisfaction increased, remained the same or decreased within the last 6 months? | 144 | 16 | 103 | 25 |

Below are a number of customer comments;

- I've had lots of contact face to face
- Nothing has changed during the pandemic they have given a great service throughout
- GP have risen to the challenge and performed very well
- Great customer service now and in normal times
- Poor interaction
- I am not happy that the table and chairs from reception have been moved

Insight - Review Summary

In this next section, we'd like to summarise themes we noted during our review. Insight has been encouraged throughout the review by the joined up and co-ordinated approach of Great Places response to the coronavirus pandemic. All Great Places colleagues we spoke with have demonstrated an 'enthusiastic can do' attitude and shown determination to continue to deliver services to customers to the best of their abilities. Great Places decision to prioritise the safety and wellbeing of customers and colleagues has been evident from the actions undertaken to sustain business as usual services. The compassion and empathy displayed through interactions with customers to inform and provide support has been admirable. We observed examples of the great effort shown to adapt processes to maintain services, whilst providing provision to teams in the form of clear and comprehensive guidance of changes to working practices.

At the offset of our review we heard from the executive team who spoke collectively, defining a clear vision of Great Places response to the coronavirus pandemic; prioritising the safety and wellbeing of customers and colleagues. This mind-set and co-ordinated approach was confirmed by senior management who outlined the operational processes carried out to practically deliver the vision.

We'd like to highlight the enthusiasm of GP colleagues and highlight a few stand-out areas;

- What appeared to work well internally for Great Places was strong, ordered leadership, which communicated clear messages and gave clarity and a sense of confidence to teams,
- Preparation and early planning to put the business on the front foot; observed in several areas,
- The energy to deliver a telephony system for customers and the camaraderie shown by teams
- Securing and delivery of PPE and safety items across the group to GP colleagues to enable safety
- Remobilising the repair service, increasing capacity to enable a backlog of jobs to be cleared
- Listening to GP colleagues, learning from experiences and making necessary change whilst offering support to teams in relation to physical and mental wellbeing
- Initiatives such as the befriending calls, the Resilience Fund and collaborative working with LAs
- An awareness of the importance of reflection and learning, to act and implement change

We are confident that if Great Places continue to work with the customer focus observed during the pandemic, openly engage and listen to customers then effectively communicate change back this will go some way to delivering services that meet customer needs. A percentage of dissatisfied customer feedback in the survey illustrates that service delivery isn't always consistent, therefore it remains that there is still work to be undertaken to processes and with GP colleagues and customers to strive to reliably deliver consistency. We would like to see evidence the customer voice has had an influence on shaping services created from a mutually respectful and meaningful 2 way dialogue.

Recommendations

Based on the review findings, we'd like to propose the following learning recommendations to contribute and help support delivery of quality customer service, which meets customers' needs.

1. Build on Great Places' customer communication offer ensuring outbound messages deliver consistent, timely, reader-friendly and relevant tailored information, (for example the visual roadmap) and invite customers to engage giving feedback about the published information, which will help capture insight of how the communication has landed with customers.

2. Take a proactive approach to engage with customers to consult and explore non-digital ways to communicate that will enhance the service offer, to ensure all customers have fair access to information.
3. Continually review organisational culture to drive the right behaviours to ensure a high standard of customer service, that provides fairness and shows respect, whilst customer managing expectations, keeps customers informed and delivers on promises, including performance of 3rd party contractors delivering services on behalf of GP.
4. Evaluate and apply learning gained during the pandemic to support continual improvement of processes and review procedures such as the lettings process and the hand-over of new properties, which were adapted to be contactless and offered benefits to both customers and Great Places. The befriending calls and hardship fund were great initiatives, which demonstrated GP had listened and responded to customers' needs.
5. We heard recruitment, induction and training of new Hub team members presented significant challenge for management and existing team members, impacting service delivery and staff well being. We observed a similar issue when reviewing Customers Contacting GP, following a restructure. It's an important matter for customers, when they experience issues and can't easily get in contact with GP.
Establish measures to enable effective short-term provision to support The Hub and teams group-wide to be fully resourced during periods of high workloads as well as be able to respond to internal movement whether this is sourced internally within GP or externally using recruitment agencies.
6. We were impressed by an approach taken by Heads of Neighbourhoods who nominated a named individual to respond to LAs enquiries irrespective of the nature of the enquiry. This helped co-ordinate communication offering a consistent response and providing clarity to HONs who needs to reply and provide information.
GP to establish a clear co-ordinated approach to manage the demand of inbound communication and promote with customers, the reasons this supports good service delivery to influence behaviour.
7. Develop and improve GP's digital service offer to build customer confidence demonstrating digital functionality can offer reliable customer service, equivalent in standard and response to traditional mechanisms.
8. Ensure customers know who is responsible for action in relation to anti-social behaviour and who can support and assist if faced with incidents of ASB.

8. Overall Judgement

To determine an overall judgement we considered the review evidence and customer feedback to give scores of 'poor, fair, good or excellent' to our review 3 objectives as follows;

| Overall Judgement | |
|---|-----------|
| co-ordination and implementation of a response | Excellent |
| how customers were supported and kept up to date | Good |
| explore customers' experience of service delivery | Fair |

Using the collective of the 3 scored criteria after consideration our overall judgement for the review of the consultation process would be 'Good.' We are very keen and look forward to receiving an update of progress development, as a result of our recommendations for improvement.

We would like to recognise the contribution and thank colleagues who have contributed to this review.