



INSIGHT - Customer Scrutiny Group

Scrutiny Review Summary Report

Scheme & Neighbourhood Management

Communal Spaces

Thursday 2 May 2024

Purpose & Background of Review

Our latest review scrutinised management of schemes and neighbourhoods with a focus on communal spaces. The review examined the way neighbourhoods and the facilities management team operate to deliver service to meet objectives of the policy - we also noted influence of other services.

We looked at feedback from customers to inform of their point of view and explore how services operate jointly to manage communal spaces in neighbourhoods and at schemes. We trusted our examination would recognise service strengths, blockages, or gaps, to identify improvements to enhance customers' service experience. We have summarised our findings, plus what we would like to happen next.

We aimed to review from a customer point of view - we agreed to:

- Understand Great Places approach to manage communal spaces at schemes and neighbourhoods.
- Explore customer satisfaction and other relevant feedback data.
- Consider experiences of customers and research good practice in the sector.

We collected detail as follows:

- Reviewed policy, performance, and customer feedback data.
- A Head of Neighbourhood (HON) and an Area Services Manager (ASM) summarised service and role of Service Excellence Group (SEG).
- We met Facilities & Estates (F&E) Managers.
- We shadowed inspections in neighbourhoods and followed this with a focus group.

Service Background

The policy sets out that a proactive approach is taken to manage communal spaces at our schemes and neighbourhoods and a patch-based model ensures visible presence in local communities. Neighbourhood Teams conduct inspections checking to ensure spaces are maintained, report any problems and check services delivered by our in-house teams and contractors. The frequency of inspections is agreed and reviewed regularly by NSMs based on need. A mobile digital platform (First Touch) is used to complete checklists on mobile phones and report issues via forms.

Communal spaces owned by Great Places are managed by the Facilities Management (FM) Team, and the window cleaning service is delivered by external contractors, F&E managers manage the service, which has recently been reprocured. In neighbourhoods, where Great Places own significant properties along with other social housing or private owners, teams will collaborate closely with partners to ensure issues are addressed quickly and appropriately.



We have summarised key findings of our review below:

- The policy comprehensively sets out Great Places' approach to management of schemes and neighbourhoods, including key responsibilities of service delivery. The policy is on HOME, whilst customers can access it on the website.
- Mechanisms are in place to measure, monitor and report performance of each area of service, which contributes to the management of schemes and neighbourhoods.
- Regional ASMs regularly join teams to inspect the coal face of service and meet to discuss operational issues, sharing learning and to conduct walkabouts across each of the four regions.
- Each neighbourhood patch has differing demands, including relationships with Local Authorities, and partner-agencies, we were assured this is reviewed regularly to ensure appropriate support and resource. Inspections are often rearranged due to unexpected demands, we did note some enquiries, which if managed differently may reduce demand on NSMs.
- It was clear teams are driven, wishing to provide good service, taking ownership to manage issues to meet customer needs, which we felt is a huge strength and asset to Great Places.
- Information in policies and guidance notes outline processes to assist NSMs underpinning service delivery. Inspection data is recorded on First Touch accessed via mobile devices, which are relied on greatly to record, retrieve and access scheme and customer data. Using First Touch was recognised as an improvement to support inspection. However, NSMs said, it doesn't feel intuitive that forms are restrictive, and repetitive, identification of blocks can be challenging plus clicking through screens to find data is time consuming.
- A SEG reviews issues to determine service improvement; a mix of colleagues from key services provide representation of all four regions. Comments noted during our focus group suggest inconsistencies updating neighbourhood teams after meetings.
- The FM team comprises of an in-house caretaker and grounds maintenance service. We heard services have been revised to apply robust processes, and training to up-skill teams. The team do not use First Touch, work is underway and all forms needed were designed with team input, who will be able to log fly-tipping and repairs. We heard of joint working of the neighbourhood and FM teams to manage schemes, NSMs spoke positively of support from FM supervisors and regular meetings onsite.
- Great Places website informs about grounds maintenance and in-house caretaker services, with provision for customers to report issues. Other landlord sites viewed grouped detail under a heading of environmental services, which includes detail of neighbourhoods and service responsibilities. We found a servicing booklet with images to show customers what standard to expect, and how to feedback on issues.



- We saw a few schemes that looked tired and in need of remedial or decorative work. An earlier scrutiny identified customers see communal spaces as extensions of their homes and have expectations of standards. We were told teams feedback to the asset team, but, felt there is a need for knowledge of planned or cyclical work, that generally they are not informed of forthcoming work. Policy states each scheme has an asset management programme to ensure the maintenance and replacement of components within appropriate timescales - a £2m budget is allocated for fencing and painting in this year's programme.

What customers said:

Customer feedback helps inform of what matters most to customers – this data is used to scrutinise, if services meet customers' needs and priorities to inform if expectations are being managed.

We collected data from several sources including:

- Responses to relevant Tenant Satisfaction Measure questions – Q2 / 3.
- Complaints data for period April 2023 to January 2024.
- Themes of customer cons. in anchor neighbourhoods, plus face-to-face and survey data.

Tenant Satisfaction Measure headline data for low-cost rental acc. LCRA

- Great Places provides a safe home, TP05.

1668 customers from 2054 responses were satisfied 81%
12% were dissatisfied, and 7% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

1016 customers, 49% of responses confirmed living in a building with communal space Great Places is responsible to maintain.

- Great Places keeps communal areas clean, and well maintained, TP10.

723 customers from 1016 responses were satisfied 71%
24% were dissatisfied, and 5% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

- Great Places makes a positive contribution to your neighbourhood, TP11.

1092 customer from 2037 responses were satisfied 54%
15% were dissatisfied, and 31% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

In response to TP11 more customers were 'neither dissatisfied or satisfied' or answered, 'not applicable or don't know' compared to TP05 or TP10. This may suggest customers don't feel or aren't aware, if Great Places make a positive contribution, so can't comment. Likewise, it may mean the definition of neighbourhood is unclear to some customers, we would suggest defining to give clarity and context.

We noted an increase in dissatisfaction responses to TP10 communal spaces are kept clean and well maintained, compared with TP05 and TP11. TSM questions do not ask for comment for TP05, TP10 or TP11, we have, however, listed relevant comments given to TP01, which asks about satisfaction with service overall, n.b. data relates to July to December prior to launch of the in-house caretaker service. The customer profile data did not show any meaningful insight for specific customer groups.



Customer response to TP01 overall service that relate to scheme and neighbourhood management

It is a beautiful place to live, and it is a beautiful community.	I think the services have become quicker in regard to gardening and, maintenance.	The cleaners do a good job of the hallway and even clean the external door frame.
I am very dissatisfied with service provided by Great Places, because they don't keep the place clean and don't clean the windows.	Great Places come clean the windows and mow the lawn. I feel very safe in my property.	The grounds are always clean, and windows are done as well. I am very happy.
The caretaker has been very helpful.	Send out regular letters to remind residents to keep the communal bin areas maintained.	A few ongoing issues with fly tipping although Great Places are working with the police to improve the neighbourhood.

Overall Summary:

Our review showed evidence to give assurance of a good service and practices across the group, which customer feedback overall supports. We were impressed with the dedication and responsibility shown by teams to deliver the best service possible to customers taking ownership to resolve issues.

We have summarised key findings below:

- Management of communal spaces at schemes and in neighbourhoods is important to customers, who view these spaces as extensions of their homes.
- Great Places has comprehensive mechanisms, measures, and processes in place to monitor service delivery to manage and inform about schemes and neighbourhoods.
- We observed management of communal spaces relies on a robust collaborative approach, including customers. We saw neighbourhood and facilities management teams are key functions, and that First Touch has introduced greater capacity and efficiency to support this function. We noted issues in our report, which appear from a colleague perspective to impact delivery of service to customers. We used our findings and customer feedback to propose four recommendations, which focus on First Touch, NSM capacity, joined up working and communication, which we believe will help support improved service, see action plan for full detail.

We would like to give thanks to the Head of Neighbourhood and Area Service Manager for North / South regions, accordingly, F&E managers who provided support to enable our review of this service area.