



INSIGHT - Customer Scrutiny Group

Scrutiny Review Summary Report

Lettings & Empty Properties

Thursday 26 September 2024

Outline

This report summarises our findings of the lettings process (pre and post let), the lettable standard scrutiny, and review of customer satisfaction. We were keen to check the customer commitment outlined in the Service Delivery Framework which says Great Places 'Starts with the Home' and more recently Corporate Plan promises to 'work with customers to define a standard to expect from a new home.' Insight agree customers' initial impression of their new landlord can lie in this transaction, we were interested to explore from a customer perspective.

Our three takeaways from this scrutiny are the importance of creating significant customer interactions to empower and enable customers from tenancy offset. We imagine achieving this through good relationships, provision of accurate and meaningful information to provide continued support for customers to succeed. We discussed Great Places sharing the lettable standard on the website with detail of the lettings process. We also suggested further examination of repair data to confirm properties consistently meet standard when let and arrangements are agreed with customers.

Objectives:

- Understand the approach to management of general need letting and empty properties.
- Explore customer satisfaction and any other relevant feedback / performance data.
- Consider the experience and perspective of new customers pre / post let.

We collected detail as follows:

- Agreed a scope with Heads of Neighbourhood and Property Services, in the Central region.
- Reviewed service data, including general need customer experience feedback from all regions.
- Visited 3 empty properties in Central region.
- Met colleagues who manage lets and empty properties and observed 2 x void meetings.

Service Background

The Void policy sets out a clear process that commences on receipt of notice to terminate a tenancy. The process involves interactions between different housing management and repair functions operating at once. It comprises three inter-linked processes of Property, Tenancy and Customer requiring effective communication between these functions. We focussed our scrutiny on the following policy requirements:

- Deliver value for money when repairing empty properties to achieve agreed standards to relet.
- Maximises satisfaction with the standard of their new home consistent with our vision and values of knowing, respecting and caring for customers and their new homes.
- Ensure colleagues are clear, well-trained and supported to implement policy requirements.



Service Background

The chart represents the interactions of the different services within the overall V&A process



We summarised key findings of our scrutiny:

- Policy outlines an approach to empty property management, it includes a lettable standard. A New Home survey is emailed to customers, we reviewed feedback collected from January to April.
- Policy states any unsatisfactory work will be rectified prior to a relet, when a Property Services Manager (PSM) post inspects and updates QL to indicate a property is Ready to Let (RTL). Any delays in timescales are communicated at local weekly void meetings - I&W service has local agreements. Performance is routinely reported throughout the business, as outlined in policy, we noted the Balance Scorecard reports void relet times.
- Great Places operates across 34 Local Authorities (LAs) to support councils to fulfill their duty to rehome, who mainly use a web-based, choice-based lettings system. Each region has a range of aspects influencing demand on service - South region has 6110 GN tenancies (38% of all stock) including 219 blocks of flats. North has greatest geographical stock spread, Central region has low tenancy turnover and the East region partners eight LAs, a high proportion of older stock, and a healthy development programme.
- Customers' lettings experience starts when a NSM contacts an applicant to verify information and carry out an affordability assessment. We felt it was useful customers are given a copy of a tenancy agreement to read and digest prior to a sign-up appointment, and an EPC.
- We visited 3 properties during our guided tour of the Central region. One of the properties was ready to be sold as a disposal because there is no other stock within the locality and the second property had been allocated as a management move following a complex tenancy, which had negatively impacted the local neighbourhood. We met repair and neighbourhood colleagues and discussed issues relating to tenancy, repairs / lettable standard, and replenishment of van stock.

Neighbourhood & Repair colleague experiences

We collected feedback to find out about service delivery, we've listed main themes referred to:

- Great Places Lettable Standard.
- Ready to Let timescales.
- Customer expectations - needs, support requirements and priorities.
- Experience of new build versus relet properties.
- Decoration, window and floor coverings.



What customers said:

Feedback supports scrutiny to check whether service consistently meets customers' needs, it also informs what matters most to customers. We reviewed 62 New Home responses of 431 surveys emailed to new lets between January to April - a return rate of 14%. Analysis of feedback data did not show any meaningful findings specific to a region or particular customer group. We recommended to continue collect feedback to monitor service experiences using a range of methods to encourage engagement ensuring easy access for customers. We have summarised headlines to show % satisfaction scores and importance that customers gave for aspects of service; using scores greater than six results showed:

Customers' highest satisfaction relates to:

- Knowing how to pay rent, 95%.
- Great Places completed safety checks to ensure home is safe, 94%.
- Overall satisfaction with the lettings process, 93%

Customers' lowest satisfaction relates to:

- Repairs agreed to be completed post-let were carried out in a timely manner, 83%.
- You had all the information needed to set up your new home, 87%.
- Great Places made good any damage caused by previous tenancy, 87%.

We analysed customers' satisfaction scores to importance ratings, and data showed the top three priority aspects to focus on to improve satisfaction when customers move into a new home are:

- Customers can move in when expected.
- Customers have all information needed to set up their new home.
- Repairs agreed to be completed post-let are dealt with in a timely manner.

Customer comments support quantitative data providing greater insight of service experiences.

The place needed rooms painting and flooring in living room / bedroom, so I was unable to move in till I had done all that. I was given a 'paint package' which I was very grateful for. I was told the flooring in the bathroom would be replaced but have no idea when that will be but it is not a matter of urgency.

I was kept in the loop as to when the property would be complete and of any push backs, helped out with paperwork and was on hand to answer any questions.

Excellent customer service, extremely professional and an all-round lovely person.

Great Places did everything they could to make sure the property was in a good standard before I could view and move in - also helped me with some other things and still continue to help and support me if ever possible

The apartment was painted but this only covered the nicotine stains and smell, it wasn't sealed so after paying out for a darker colour paint, the stains are coming through, this means more paint whilst the oils in the stains come to the surface.

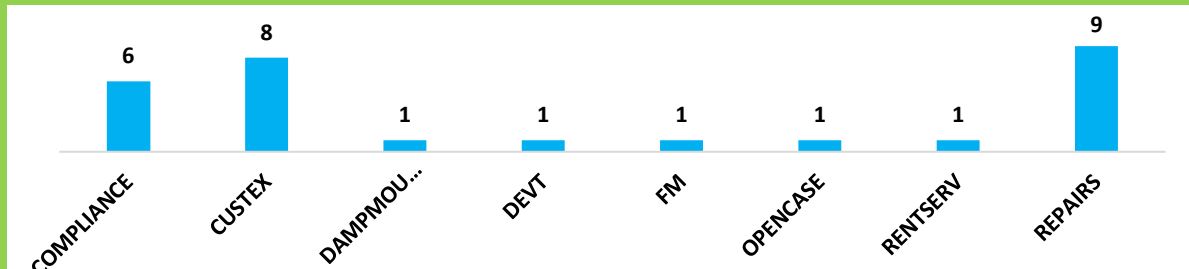
It was explained that all info. is on the portal, I haven't used the service as yet but I trust I shall.

The house is lovely but wish the house was in a better condition before I moved in.



New let complaints data

Of 431 new tenancies analysed 30 complaints were logged, two customers, who returned a survey named repairs as the reason for complaint, the remaining 28 complaints relate to services shown on the chart.



New let repair data - analysis showed 35% of new let tenancies (179 of 515) had a repair completed post-let, half had multiple repairs logged, which were mainly in-house repairs. We went on to request detail to examine repairs which are listed on the lettable standard. We understand this exercise cannot confirm if repairs occurred pre or post let, our intention was to highlight repairs that potentially may have been resolved prior to let. The Business Intelligence Team analysed data of 75 new lets selected at random across regions, the team manually viewed repair detail cross referencing with the [Lettable Standard](#).

Of data analysed 52 tenancies (70%) had repairs completed in the first three-months, data showed South region had a greater proportion of tenancies within this sample. Furthermore of these properties, a total of 78 repairs were logged within the first month (59%), bathroom and electrical jobs were most commonly identified as repairs, which may potentially have been completed prior to move in.

Overall Summary

Following our scrutiny we feel this is a good service striving to meet policy objectives – we have summarised findings, which helped inform our recommendations to Great Places.

Strengths

- Providing homes for customers, and supporting LAs to meet statutory duty.
- Policy, guidance notes and standard, performance monitored regularly.
- Void meetings - clear and efficient meetings that work well – dedicated teams.

Weaknesses

- Number of repairs reported post-let.
- Resource and capacity to meet standard.
- Consistency across regions - equality of service delivery.
- Delays to meet timescales of Ready to Let.

Opportunities

- Checklists to be used jointly with customers to inform consistently.
- Accurate insight of service - a range of formats to collect customer / colleague feedback.
- First Impressions count - customer service, information and condition of home are notable features for new customers.

Threats

- Disconnect between customer needs / neighbourhoods and repair service (deliverables)
- Follow-up on dissatisfaction and vulnerability - sample check to manage risk give assurance
- Customer experience / satisfaction with lettings offer impacts customer / landlord relationship