

Resident Scrutiny Panel Report Caretaking Service Review

LB Redbridge

March 2019

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1 Scrutiny Scoping

Scrutiny Area	Caretaking Service
Scrutiny Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To investigate if published standards are being met and whether these standards meet tenant expectations. To compare LB Redbridge standards with that of other housing providers (including Swan Housing Association).
Independent Mentor Chairperson	Denise Barnes, Why Not Consultancy Services Ltd. Carol Ellison
LB Redbridge Lead Officers	Carmel Grant, Resident Engagement Officer Taj Uddin, Resident Engagement Officer
Funding Source	HRA

Milestone	Date
Scoping & Request for Information	February 2018
Desktop Review	March 2018
Start on site (Reality Checking)	April/May 2018
Finish on site	August 2018
Evidence Collation	August 2018
Draft report issued (Interim to RHP)	September 2018
Clarification Meeting	October 2018/April 2019
Management responses provided	
Final report issued	March /May 2019
Board meeting	

2 Scrutiny Findings: One Page Summary

Assurance on effectiveness of service

The RSP are assured that the Caretaking service is generally delivered to a reasonable standard, although there are concerns about the impact of current staffing and vehicle resources on delivering a consistent high standard across the borough.

Priority	Number of recommendations
HIGH	6
MEDIUM	17
LOW	3
TOTAL	26

A further 3 recommendations have been made in addition to those reported within the detailed findings of this review.

Risk management

The RSP have made **four** recommendations for potential improvement in staff and resident health & safety risk management.

The RSP have made **fourteen** recommendations for improvements to partnership working and communications, which could impact on reputational risk management, though these are outweighed by strengths.

Value for money

No specific value for money benchmarking was undertaken as part of this review.

The RSP feel that VFM is compromised by the cover of duties from within the existing team, when staff are on annual leave or sickness absences; as well as by the number of vehicles available to them.

3 Summary of Recommendations

Recommendations
1. Staff should be commended for their commitment to the service, often in difficult circumstances. (No grading)
2. Provide better quality uniform items e.g. boots, Hi-Vis vests. (Medium)
3. Explore any further training requirements/gaps in training, e.g. new systems, I.T, using email and Smartphone use for reporting repairs/fly tipping. Develop individual and team learning & development plans. (Medium)
4. The Resident Engagement team arrange to meet with the new Neighbourhood Engagement and Education Officers, to explore how they can work with estate services and residents to promote keeping estates clean, reduce littering and encourage residents to have pride in their estates. Promote Civic Pride. (Medium)
5. The RHP should request a sub-group is set up to identify the real cost, in hours (and what this is equivalent to in terms of staff time e.g. a part-time/full-time post) of using the existing caretaking team to cover holiday and sickness absences. It should also take into account the time taken to travel between sites and calculate this time cost. (HIGH)
6. The Resident Engagement team and Area Housing Manager should support the Environmental Services Manager and Team Leader with this work. (HIGH)
7. Use this opportunity to 'Pilot' a small programme of estate/block inspections. The Resident Engagement team, Area Housing and Environmental Services Manager should contact the residents that expressed an interest to develop this scheme. (HIGH)
8. Use the pilot scheme to review schedules, introduce a sign-off sheet visible in blocks, consider coach tours to estates and review the 'Ratings Standard'. (Medium)
9. Publicise outcomes of pilot scheme to promote and encourage further resident involvement in developing schedules and standards. (Medium)
10. Consider incentives - A league of flats competition was suggested. (Medium)
11. Consider ways to get resident feedback. (Medium)
12. Use the pilot estate inspections to publicise and promote the role of residents in monitoring standards. (Medium)
13. An intense clean / Jet clean of bins and bin areas should be built in to the service standards. (Low)
14. Additional bins should be provided in areas where there is a problem (space permitting). (Low)
15. A regular feature in Housing eNews should promote pride in estates, where rubbish should go, and how to dispose of rubbish correctly. (High)

Recommendations
16. Ian Jardine to investigate and pursue more joint working with the Enforcement team and the Council's refuse contractor and identify areas that may need more bins. (Medium)
17. Continue to publicise successful enforcement action and encourage residents to report culprits and hotspot areas. (High)
18. Engage the RHP in considering the actual service costs (Ian Jardine's budget) and monitoring the impact of enforcement action on reducing costs. (Medium)
19. Explore the use of mobile CCTV cameras in areas identified by the team as hot-spots. (Medium)
20. Promote and encourage residents to use the Council's free collection service, at every opportunity. (High)
21. Publicise the Council's online App to promote the service and report rubbish and provide more web-based information. (Medium)
22. Revamp and update these sections and ensure information is available in both sections. (Medium)
23. Use these sections of the Website to inform residents of Cleaning Schedules, when their Caretaker is due on site and what they can expect, how they can get involved with inspections and monitoring standards, and to reiterate rubbish disposal, littering and enforcement messages. How to, when is etc.? (Medium)
24. Work with residents to develop a 'Keep Your Estate Tidy' campaign to inform and educate residents on the roles of the Caretaking team and what residents themselves can do to improve their environment. (Medium)
25. Produce a special edition of 'Housing News' to promote the service review and its findings. Articles to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of the caretakers; Key tasks and standards; Residents disposal of rubbish; Promotion of the Council reporting App; Successful Fly-Tipping prosecution and enforcement message; Free bulk refuse collection service; Bin Collection schedules (Medium)
26. Provision and use of notice boards should be reviewed and removed where no longer fit for purpose. (Medium)
27. Consider cost and practicality of Digital notice boards. (Low)

4 Methodology

4.1 Background

Resident-led scrutiny is a key aspect of modern co-regulation of the national housing standards framework consumer standards (the services that residents receive). Benefits include:

- Continuous monitoring and scrutiny of performance, allowing residents and LB Redbridge to improve the services residents receive.
- Residents being empowered to play an active role in assessing the quality and effectiveness of landlord performance, challenging to improve and holding to account if they fail to do so.
- Residents offering a valuable perspective on their actual customer experience, and landlords using this insight to help shape and improve services.

This is the fourth review undertaken by the Resident Scrutiny Panel.

The team for this review were:

Carol Ellison, Chairperson,
Shantip Shah, Keith Barrett, Paul Smith, Glaston Alexander,
Syed Haque.

The Team is supported by an independent mentor, Denise Barnes (Why Not Consultancy Services Limited), with Carmel Grant and Taj Uddin providing internal liaison and supporting the team to achieve its' aims.

Independent Resident-Led Scrutiny at LB Redbridge aims to:

- Scrutinise the performance of the Council's housing services working as a resident-led group under the national regulatory framework.

Its role is to:

- Be the body by which elected tenant and leaseholder representatives of groups within the wider structure can communicate their opinions and make recommendations to the Resident Housing Panel on policy and service delivery improvement based upon scrutiny of housing information.
- Determine which areas of service are to be scrutinised and identify an annual work plan.
- Receive the views of the Resident Housing Panel regarding areas of scrutiny and incorporate these into the annual work plan.

The RSP considered a range of information including:

- Performance information including some local performance indicators
- Housemark benchmarking report
- Suggestions from senior management

From which a 'long list' of potential topics for review were developed.

Panel members then undertook a 3-2-1 priorities setting exercise, which determined a consensus as follows:

- Caretaking: 5 Points
- Fire safety: 5 Points
- Estate improvement scheme: 4 Points
- Complaints: 4 Points
- Satisfaction with major works: 4 points
- ASB: 2 points

The RSP felt that the service was possibly already under a significant degree of scrutiny in respect of fire safety and therefore concluded that the topic for the next review should be Caretaking.

Methodology

Throughout the review, the Panel were very much aware of the unique opportunity to achieve a shared vision of cooperation and were keen to ensure they were seen to be transparent and accountable whilst maintaining independence in conducting a rigorous and challenging review.

Having established what fell within and outside of the scope of the review, a request for information was made to enable the panel to undertake a desk top review to inform its key lines of questioning.

On receipt of requested information, members undertook a desktop review which highlighted some initial findings which were tested during the reality checking phase of the review, along with a number of key lines of questioning. These initial considerations resulted in the development of a series of key questions to be answered through the review. These included:

- Are the Service Standards maintained across all estates?
- Is the standard right?
- Are the numbers right?
- Are the cleaning schedules realistic to achieve given the time allocated to tasks and the number of staff?
- How are standards monitored?
- How are tasks allocated/given priority?
- Are sufficient resources in place?

Once the key questions and tests were developed, the Panel agreed the methodology which would provide the most efficient means of gathering the required evidence, in order to highlight areas that are working well and to inform recommendations for improvement.

The methods used by the Resident Scrutiny Committee in conducting this review were:

Staff interviews and Focus groups:

These were conducted with:

- The Caretaking Team (attendees)
- Ian Jardine, Environmental Services Manager
- Environmental Services Team Leaders
- Customer Services staff

Attendance at Meetings:

- The Residents' Housing Panel (RHP)
- The Leaseholders' Forum
- Little Gearies TRA
- Ray Lodge TMO
- Empress Avenue TRA

Visits to estates in Redbridge:

The group took half a day to visit Hermitage, Mount Pleasant and Buttsbury estates to get a feel for different areas/blocks in the borough. An impromptu visit to Ray Lodge TMO was also undertaken.

Visit to another borough:

The group visited an estate in Havering to talk with staff there and see an estate in a neighbouring borough.

Web-Based Research:

Was undertaken to look at published service standards of Swan Housing.

The RSP undertook an intense programme of review and found the staff to be open and honest during the review process.

4. Detailed Findings & Recommendations

Recommendation Priority	Definition
HIGH	High Priority recommendations represent significant weaknesses, which expose LB Redbridge residents to particularly poor service and/or value for money and require immediate action.
MEDIUM	Medium Priority recommendations represent weaknesses which expose LB Redbridge residents to a moderate degree of unnecessarily reduced quality of service and/or value for money and require actions to improve within 3-6 months of submission of this report.
LOW	Low Priority recommendations show areas where we have highlighted good practise and/or opportunities to implement better practice, to improve efficiency or further improve services to residents. Actions to be implemented as resources allow.

4.1 Strengths

Findings	Recommendation/Priority	Management Response	Timescale / responsibility
<p>Residents' expectations of the service are high.</p> <p>The Caretakers work hard in a difficult and often underappreciated job. The overall standards were generally acceptable, though varied in some areas with higher standards than others. Resident feedback during visits and attendance at meetings provided mixed views, although all acknowledged that the Caretakers work hard. The RSP felt that the service could aim higher and it was acknowledged during the review that the aspiration is to get back to the three star rated service it previously was (the only service within housing to achieve this rating).</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Staff should be commended for their commitment to the service, often in difficult circumstances. 		

Findings	Recommendation/Priority	Management Response	Timescale / responsibility
<p>Communication is good within the team and the relationship with the Caretaking team and their managers is highly valued by staff. Staff morale is high. The team fully understand their roles, although are increasingly being asked to undertake additional tasks. Requests for better quality uniform provision and some further training were made during the interviews.</p>	<p>2. Provide better quality uniform items e.g. boots, Hi-Vis vests. (Medium)</p> <p>3. Explore any further training requirements/gaps in training, e.g. new systems, I.T, using email and Smartphone use for reporting repairs/fly tipping. Develop individual and team learning & development plans. (Medium)</p>		
<p>New Neighbourhood Engagement and Education officers have been employed. While not part of the Housing Service, we felt this constituted a positive development for local areas.</p>	<p>4. The Resident Engagement team arrange to meet with the new Neighbourhood Engagement and Education Officers, to explore how they can work with estate services and residents to promote keeping estates clean, reduce littering and encourage residents to have pride in their estates. Promote Civic Pride. (Medium)</p>		

4.2 Areas for Improvement

Findings	Recommendation/Priority	Management Response	Timescale / responsibility
<p>There is a full permanent staff team. The review identified that the mobile team is not an additional service/resource to cover annual and sickness leave or emergency responses. This means that caretakers, while responsible for their own sites within their patch, also have to cover other areas as required; leading to a limited service in their own areas and those that they have to cover.</p>	<p>5. The RHP should request a sub-group is set up to identify the real cost, in hours (and what this is equivalent to in terms of staff time e.g. a part-time/full-time post) of using the existing caretaking team to cover holiday and sickness absences. It should also take into account the time taken to travel between sites and calculate this time cost. (HIGH)</p>		

Findings	Recommendation/Priority	Management Response	Timescale / responsibility
<p>One of the key questions for the group was 'are the cleaning schedules realistic, given the time allocated to tasks and the number of tasks to be completed?'</p> <p>Due to the size of the borough, the dispersed nature of the housing, number of individual blocks to be cleaned (close to 600), as well as the outside areas; the deployment of teams and allocation of tasks is no easy job. There was consistency during the staff interviews about the limitations and issues with providing a consistently high level of service and the areas of concern e.g. Bulk refuse, fly-tipping, travelling to estates, increased work demand, reduced resources.</p> <p>The RSP recognise that this is not solely the responsibility of the Environmental Services Manager and he will need to work with and the support of other teams and services to allocate and undertake actions to address the recommendations within this review.</p>	<p>6. The Resident Engagement team and Area Housing Manager should support the Environmental Services Manager and Team Leader with this work. (HIGH)</p>		

Findings	Recommendation/Priority	Management Response	Timescale / responsibility
<p>Service standards could be improved. Estate Inspections are conducted, as part of performance management and a 'Ratings System' is used. There is little participation of residents and the system of inspections needs to be more transparent.</p> <p>This review has identified residents interested in becoming involved with estate inspections where they live.</p> <p>While the service standards state that estates are inspected three times a year the review identified that this is not always possible and is inconsistent across estates.</p> <p>The review of the information provided showed some recording of inspections, yet actions remained outstanding or not followed up and some of the paperwork was old, yet inspections had taken place.</p>	<p>7. Use this opportunity to 'Pilot' a small programme of estate/block inspections. The Resident Engagement team, Area Housing and Environmental Services Manager should contact the residents that expressed an interest to develop this scheme. (HIGH)</p> <p>8. Use the pilot scheme to review schedules, introduce a sign-off sheet visible in blocks, consider coach tours to estates and review the 'Ratings Standard'. (Medium)</p> <p>9. Publicise outcomes of pilot scheme to promote and encourage further resident involvement in developing schedules and standards. (Medium)</p>		

Findings	Recommendation/Priority	Management Response	Timescale / responsibility
<p>The bin areas, on visits, were often overflowing with rubbish. There was evidence that residents contributed to the problem through littering and failure to dispose of household refuse correctly e.g. leaving bin bags by the bins rather than putting them in.</p> <p>There are issues with the Council's Refuse collection contractor and it is acknowledged by the RSP that this is not all the responsibility of the Caretakers.</p>	<p>10. Consider incentives - A league of flats competition was suggested. (Medium)</p> <p>11. Consider ways to get resident feedback. (Medium)</p> <p>12. Use the pilot estate inspections to publicise and promote the role of residents in monitoring standards. (Medium)</p> <p>13. An intense clean / Jet clean of bins and bin areas should be built in to the service standards. (Low)</p> <p>14. Additional bins should be provided in areas where there is a problem (space permitting). (Low)</p> <p>15. A regular feature in Housing eNews should promote pride in estates, where rubbish should go, and how to dispose of rubbish correctly. (High)</p>		

Findings	Recommendation/Priority	Management Response	Timescale / responsibility
<p>One of the biggest issues found during this review was bulk refuse. Fly-tipping and was highlighted as an ongoing and costly problem for the service. This was evidenced both during interviews and by the group during their visit to estates. While work with the enforcement team, to identify, fine and even prosecute culprits is progressing, this is an area that requires further development. The RSP fully support efforts to identify culprits and enforcement action should be a high priority.</p> <p>Enforcement was seen as key to addressing the problem and the use of fines as sending clear message to fly-tippers that action will be taken.</p> <p>Where action had been taken an improvement has been seen.</p>	<p>16. Ian Jardine to investigate and pursue more joint working with the Enforcement team and the Council's refuse contractor and identify areas that may need more bins. (Medium)</p> <p>17. Continue to publicise successful enforcement action and encourage residents to report culprits and hotspot areas. (High)</p>		

Findings	Recommendation/Priority	Management Response	Timescale / responsibility
<p>In 2018/19 £100k was budgeted for waste disposal and enforcement, the actual cost for that financial year (and the previous and current years for comparison) should be reported to the RHP and monitored to see if the enforcement is working to reduce costs.</p> <p>Ray Lodge TMO pay a £300-£400 charge each time to have bulk refuse collected.</p> <p>The RSP acknowledge that where bulk refuse is left it tends to grow and fully supports the service's efforts to stem the problem (there was some feeling that the Council does not come down hard enough).</p> <p>The enforcement message needs to be continually reiterated especially in light of the recent successful prosecution and fine of an offending fly-tipper.</p>	<p>18. Engage the RHP in considering the actual service costs (Ian Jardine's budget) and monitoring the impact of enforcement action on reducing costs. (Medium)</p> <p>This could form part of the work of the Sub-group looking at the costs of Caretaking.</p> <p>19. Explore the use of mobile CCTV cameras in areas identified by the team as hot-spots. (Medium)</p> <p>20. Promote and encourage residents to use the Council's free collection service, at every opportunity. (High)</p> <p>21. Publicise the Council's online App to promote the service and report rubbish and provide more web-based information. (Medium)</p>		

Findings	Recommendation/Priority	Management Response	Timescale / responsibility
<p>There is disparity of information available on the LBR website for Leaseholders and Tenants.</p>	<p>22. Revamp and update these sections and ensure information is available in both sections. (Medium)</p> <p>23. Use these sections of the Website to inform residents of Cleaning Schedules, when their Caretaker is due on site and what they can expect, how they can get involved with inspections and monitoring standards, and to reiterate rubbish disposal, littering and enforcement messages. How to, when is etc.? (Medium)</p>		

Findings	Recommendation/Priority	Management Response	Timescale / responsibility
<p>Residents also need to take some ownership of the issues around rubbish, littering and helping to keep their estates clean and pleasant places to live.</p> <p>The Council has an effective App to report rubbish, bulk refuse and fly-tipping. The Chairperson of RSP personally recommended its use as quick, easy and efficient.</p>	<p>24. Work with residents to develop a 'Keep Your Estate Tidy' campaign to inform and educate residents on the roles of the Caretaking team and what residents themselves can do to improve their environment. (Medium)</p> <p>25. Produce a special edition of 'Housing News' to promote the service review and its findings. Articles to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of the caretakers • Key tasks and standards • Residents disposal of rubbish • Promotion of the Council reporting App • Successful Fly-Tipping prosecution and enforcement message • Free bulk refuse collection service • Bin Collection schedules (Medium) 		

Findings	Recommendation/Priority	Management Response	Timescale / responsibility
While the standards state that schedules are in every block this is not the case, partly due to the lack of or condition of notice boards.	26. Provision and use of notice boards should be reviewed and removed where no longer fit for purpose. (Medium) 27. Consider cost and practicality of Digital notice boards. (Low)		

In addition to the detailed findings and recommendations above, the RSP has concerns regarding the level of staffing and transport resources available to provide the Caretaking service to a consistently high standard. While we were pleased to learn that there were only two vacancies (Grounds Maintenance), at the time of interviews, and all of the staff are permanently employed, the travel time for teams, the reduction in staffing levels and loss of two vehicles, coupled with the high expectations of residents and staff mean that the service is often not fully delivered.

We therefore additionally recommend that:

- A full review of staffing levels and requirements, following the cost and impact analysis of the hours taken out of the service to cover staff annual leave and sickness, should be undertaken by the Environmental Services Manager. We acknowledge that this is a big task and he may need support. This exercise will demonstrate the reduction in service due to this cover currently provided from within the existing team and will highlight the 'hidden cost' involved of this approach. **(Medium)**
- The RHP work with staff to consider the actual cost and implications of an additional vehicle for the Caretaking Team. **(Medium)**
- The RHP request further information about the Environmental Improvement Fund and its current status and use with a particular emphasis on considering whether this fund be used to enhance local areas, e.g. planting projects, small improvements, additional bins etc. **(High)**

5. Next Steps & Lessons Learnt

5.1 Next Steps

The RSP are happy to have a meeting with senior staff to clarify our findings and recommendations and discuss their formal response.

The RSP anticipate that this response will include a clear plan of action detailing:

- What actions will be taken
- When the actions should be completed
- Who has responsibility for each action

Ongoing monitoring will be through quarterly updates of progress to the RHP.

The RSP are keen to see the outputs and outcomes of this review shared with those involved and the wider resident population. We request that a full copy of the report and plan of action be placed on the LB Redbridge website (and is emailed to those involved in the review). Production of a Housing News Special edition or supplement for circulation to all residents.

5.2 Lessons Learnt

RSP members for this review have learnt a lot about the caretaking service and have worked well together as a team, and with staff, to deliver a robust and challenging review.

We have an increased understanding about the work that the caretakers have to do, the managers role in juggling resources and role that residents can play in enhancing the places in which we live.

We appreciate the commitment and knowledge demonstrated by the caretaking staff and acknowledge that their job is often undervalued and underappreciated. They are criticised often and praised little.

We have a new awareness and appreciation of the difficulties faced by staff and the diminishing resources available. We believe that LB Redbridge has an opportunity to not only manage its reputational risk but to enhance its reputation by supporting resident-led scrutiny to deliver further reviews, and we are committed to improving our approaches to deliver outcome focussed reviews which make a real difference to residents and LB Redbridge.

We hope that we have contributed to increasing organisational awareness of Resident-Led Scrutiny and that we have demonstrated effective partnership working and enhanced our reputation as a critical friend to LB Redbridge.

We have engaged new residents during the review and four new residents attended the final clarification meeting. We would like to continue this momentum and to involve these residents in the follow-up work from this review. We hope they will be able to participate in any future service reviews.

Acknowledgements

Throughout the review process the group have appreciated the encouragement and support and of the Resident Engagement officers in organising meeting times, rooms, visits and transport.

The group would like to thank the Environmental Services Team for speaking openly and really engaging with the review process. We felt that the staff saw the review as a positive way of being involved and were all very interested in more involvement of residents. They saw it as a way of helping them to do their job and building understanding.

The Caretaking Service is of great importance to residents as it is the front face of the borough's housing and greatly affects residents' perceptions and enjoyment of where they live.

We also wish to acknowledge the time and effort given by the residents of the group.