

OUTSIDE BODY – ANNUAL UPDATE

Outside Body:

Network Housing Area Panel

Purpose:

Network Homes Panel, which meets quarterly, is the central resident body that brings together views from all Local Panels. It is the link between our residents and Network Homes Customer Services Committee, which holds Network Homes accountable for its performance. The Network Homes Panel is part of our governance structure. The role of the Network Homes Panel is to:

- Monitor the performance of Network Homes services, strategies and policies against the consumer standards, and oversee delivery of service improvement plans
- Review proposed customer strategies, reports and audits
- Make recommendations to the Customer Services Committee
- Commission organisation wide scrutiny and co-ordinate local scrutiny

East Herts Council Representative(s):

Cllrs Carolyn Redfern, Cllr Stephen Reed

Update:

We have both attended at least three of the four meetings held this year. I additionally attended a reception at Network Homes H.O to meet local panel members in person and panel members from the London region. Stephen has also attended some training events at weekends.

Network Homes is striving very hard to fulfil its own targets in 5 areas, which are Residential Services, Financial Resilience, Increasing the number of homes for people in Housing Need, Residents Trust and Becoming an efficient organisation.

Over the last year they have endeavoured to overcome the challenges presented by changes in Building Safety Rules after the Grenfell Tower tragedy, rapidly changing government announcements and the actual organisation of replacement and repair works. These have and will continue to drain resources. As we all know, there have also been supply chain problems, increasing costs in building materials and labour shortages caused by Brexit and then by Covid. New financial challenges are represented by the restriction in income streams as tenant's rent increase and extra costs arise from new demands created by new building regulation to incorporate the much-needed sustainability measures.

Network Homes are trying to become more efficient by transforming their communications with residents to a digital platform. At the moment most residents prefer to communicate by telephone or letter although at least half of them do have access to digital means. The housing organisation is planning to help residents move to the new arrangements but are, at the same time, aware that a sizeable proportion of their residents may be unable use this system.

Following on from the upheaval over the last two years, Network has suffered a slight reduction in Customer Trust measures. These seem to be largely the result of poor performance in repairs by outside contractors. This is in turn because of the problems listed above, ie labour shortages, supply chain problems, and rising costs in materials.

This is being taken extremely seriously by the Network Homes and every effort is being made to provide a better service.

One of the main causes of complaints is around damp and mould issues, particularly in smaller homes, and older blocks of flats. Stephen has provided some very clear advice on combatting mould, from his experience as a site manager for 9 years for Barratt Homes. A new strategy has been put in place to deal these problems which

involves giving very clear and tailored advice to tenants. The strategy is being careful not to blame the tenant's lifestyle as the cause of these problems. Network Homes are aware that fuel poverty causes residents to keep the heating at a minimum and refrain from 'letting the warmth out' by keeping windows closed.

Many of the very difficult cases are in older buildings which are more subject to leaks and breakdown in the fabric of the building. Network Homes is now committed to working proactively with residents on managing ventilation and heating and is concentrating on detecting leaks and faults with the buildings.

Update provided by: Cllr Carolyn Redfern

Date: 2nd April 2022