

HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HOUSING COMMUNICATIONS REVIEW 2017/18
DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

Quality of Communications

1. The council should agree a Code of Communications among the council's Housing services, Partners for Improvement in Islington, and contractors. This should set out agreed principles for effective communication, and should seek to ensure consistent quality in communication with residents. The Code should cover issues such as responsiveness, accessibility, tone of voice, joined up working and record keeping. Tenant Management Organisations and Housing Associations should be encouraged to adopt a similar code, if they have not done so already.
2. Processes for Housing management to review the quality of staff communications, complaint responses and customer journeys should be enhanced. Communications and complaints should be reviewed on a regular basis, with clear procedures for how quality will be monitored, how these can be escalated for management review, and how this will inform officer training and development and internal processes.
3. All front-facing housing staff should have an objective in their appraisal related to providing high quality customer services and communication. Progress against this objective should be regularly reviewed in one-to-one meetings with management.

Communicating the right information to residents

4. Digital notice boards on estates should be developed further to include more localised content. It is suggested that residents' associations and other groups be consulted on the information these notice boards should display.
5. A 'Frequently Asked Questions' section should be added to the Housing section of the council's website. This would help to signpost residents and officers to relevant information and answer the most common queries. It is thought that this would free-up staff time for other issues.
6. Housing services should seek to provide better feedback to residents on issues they report, including estate environmental issues and communal repairs. This could include more direct communication with residents, or "you said, we did" style communications.
7. Housing services should keep residents informed of progress with delayed and complex repairs, and explain any relevant processes and the reasons for delays. The Repairs service should schedule reminders on case files for officers to provide regular updates to residents with unresolved repairs.
8. Housing services should consider the feasibility of allocating named case officers to deal with complex issues. This would ensure consistency in communication and reassure residents that their issue is being dealt with. These officers should be empowered to liaise with other services to secure the best outcome for residents.
9. It is recommended that a booklet is produced after each capital works scheme detailing the works carried out with before and after images and the cost of the scheme. This booklet should be provided to both tenants and leaseholders, and should be available in a range of formats.

10. The mechanism for officers to report out of date information on the council's website should be promoted further in internal communications.

Supporting staff and joined up working

11. The council should use internal communications to raise awareness of communications guidance and relevant training courses. Service managers should encourage their staff to make use of the guidance and training available.
12. The Housing Service Ambassadors should have a key role in encouraging joined up working. It is recommended that the Service Ambassadors scheme be extended to include representatives of all Housing services, and other key services that work in partnership with Housing, such as Adult Social Care.
13. To encourage joined-up working and improve services for residents, staff workshops should be held which focus on how best to resolve specific and complex issues. These workshops should include representation from all relevant housing services and partners, and should consider how internal processes and working arrangements can be improved to ensure the best possible outcome for residents. This would assist in particularly complex matters such as damp and condensation, the repairs access procedure, anti-social behaviour, and other matters that require a coordinated response.
14. Housing services should review their use of CRM, the council's customer record management system. Wider use of the system would assist officers in communicating with residents and assist officers in providing joined up services. It is suggested that interaction with other key systems, such as the repairs management system, would be beneficial.
15. Caretakers and other front line staff should be empowered to report and follow up issues on behalf of residents.

Developing online services

16. The online repairs reporting system should be promoted further to encourage greater usage. It is suggested that the system could be developed further by incorporating the reporting of communal repairs.

Other service developments

17. The Committee welcomes that the Housing Operations service has been redesigned as a Homes and Communities service. The Committee requests that an update be submitted to the Committee in 12 months' time on progress in transforming the service.
18. Better use should be made of mailings to residents, such as the annual rent statement. For example, the reverse side of letters could include information and advice on property maintenance, tenancy management, or promotion of early intervention services. The council should also review the key contact information circulated with the rent statement, as residents commented that they were unsure which teams to contact about different issues.

19. The council should produce a structure chart for housing services detailing key officers and the responsibilities of different teams. This would assist officers and councillors in directing their queries.