

Briefing Note

Title: **Wolverhampton Homes**
 – Customer contact and access

Date: 07 March 2024

Prepared by: **Julie Haydon**

Job Title: **Director Corporate Services**

Scrutiny Panel: **Climate Change Panel**

Recommendation(s) for action or decision

The Scrutiny Board/Panel is recommended to note the:

- update in relation to Wolverhampton Homes Customer Contact and Access arrangements, supporting data and performance – following the September 2023 scrutiny briefing. See Appendix 1.
- improvements to customer communication, how we have promoted awareness, and how we continue to use different methods of engagement.
- the Wolverhampton Homes Communication strategy.
- existing arrangements for how Wolverhampton Homes Customer Contact and Access activity is reported to and scrutinised by its shareholder the City of Wolverhampton Council.

Questions for Scrutiny to consider

1. In relation to the identified areas of particular concern or challenge – is the improvement plan working and is it proportionate to the challenge?
2. What have been the improvements and results so far?
3. How do we ensure customers know how to contact us?

Purpose

To update members in relation to the Wolverhampton Homes Customer Contact and Access arrangements which includes Tenants, Leaseholders and those residents of the city / non-residents who access our services including:

- Contact and access arrangements including face to face, telephony and digital
- Contact centre call waiting times / abandonment rates
- Methods of contact
- Learning from complaints
- Customer engagement including the Customer Involvement Panel
- Housing advice to customers based on new regulation (Fire Safety / Damp, Mould, and Condensation)

Background

Wolverhampton Homes manages over 21,000 on behalf of the City of Wolverhampton Council, as an Arms Length Organisation, who undertake the additional delivery of a number of other services on behalf of the City of Wolverhampton Council including Homeless, Anti-Social Behaviour, Out of Hours contact, Home Improvement Agency, and Telecare.

The governance arrangements in place for Wolverhampton Homes reporting arrangements, forms part of the City of Wolverhampton Council governance framework. The framework arrangements are currently under review as part of the City Housing Improvement Programme.

Regulation and Legislation - from a housing perspective, both the council and Wolverhampton Homes are governed by the Housing Regulator with the continued requirement to comply with the Consumer Standards which sit alongside the Social Housing Regulation Act. A review of the standards is underway with the new requirements in place from April 2024.

The standards require landlords to:

- Be open with their tenants and residents
- Treat them with fairness and respect so that they can access services, raise complaints, when necessary
- To be able to influence decision-making and hold their landlords to account.

Progress, options, discussion etc.

Contact and access arrangements including face to face, telephony, and digital touchpoints - Wolverhampton Homes continue to offer a number of contact and access arrangements including face to face, telephony and digital touchpoints. With the launch of the customer App in November 2023, this has seen significant engagement and activity from customers.

With performance under continual review, increases to resources have made to meet demand and the company has shown significant improvements in reducing the call waiting times. Stringent monitoring is undertaken of call waiting times and abandonment rates.

Methods of contact – the company offers a range of contact arrangements including:

- Telephony is provided 24hrs a day / 365 days a year
- App – 24hr access with live chat throughout business hours
- Chatbot – via the website
- In person – both outreach in the community and via Civic Centre 10am to 3pm
- In writing or via contact form on the website

Learning from complaints - themes of contact including those gained from customer complaints are regularly reviewed to inform process and service improvements as these can often be indicators of areas of need / where there are issues arising. Regular review and activity takes place with service leads to ensure the improvement requirements are met.

See Appendix 1 – Customer contact activity and performance

Customer engagement – has seen the establishment of the Customer Involvement Panel, who have been inducted into the business over the last 6 months, with the first meeting taking place in January 2024. Additionally, there has been a redesign of the Community Development team to further bolster the community offer to provide additional opportunity for positive engagement

outcomes for our customers. The team will provide patch based services and are linking in with existing provision to ensure customers are aware

Housing advice – the customer communications plan includes regular updates to customers based on new regulation and factors in season trends (Fire Safety / Damp, Mould, and Condensation).

Next steps:

Future planning in relation to WH leading the change in staff culture and those measures being used to improve the effectiveness of the service:

- Relocation of the contact centre providing additional staff and subject matter expert capacity – completed February 2024
- Customer Experience project linked to wider business activity is underway
- Housing Advice offer - continued joint approach with CWC which may include the use of libraries and community centres to provide local venues.
- Omni-channel implementation – seamless contact and access platform for telephony, digital and online contact across all channels including face to face, mobile and online.
- Tenant and Resident Associations (TRAs) and Leaseholder forum – establishing new and supporting the existing TRAs to increase customer engagement and satisfaction.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Wolverhampton Homes Customer Contact activity and performance (include app activity).

Appendix 2 – Wolverhampton Homes Customer Complaints activity, performance and implementing learnings

Appendix 3 – Customer Engagement plans

Appendix 4 – Communications strategy