



Tenants' Voice Scrutiny Panel

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Scrutiny of Responsive Repairs

July 2015

1. Introduction

The TVSP is an independent group of residents who carry out resident-led scrutiny of North Star Housing Group. As part of the current scrutiny, it was decided to focus on Responsive Repairs. TVSP recognises that repairs are a significant service area with many diverse elements and services. It was not the intention of this review to scrutinise all areas which the NSHG maintenance service offers. However, the focus will be on:

- Tenants point of view on responsive repairs
- Communication between North Star staff, contractors and the tenants
- Whether the service is Value for Money
- Whether the service is Equal and Inclusive

2. How we chose Responsive Repairs

The TVSP did an exercise to select topics and looked at key documents and written policies.

We also looked at key performance data and complaints.

Based on this research the topics selected were put through the group's scoring guideline (matrix); see appendices 1, 'TVSP - Choosing a service to scrutinise'.

This process assisted the group in making a final selection of Responsive Repairs.

3. How we carried out the scrutiny

The TVSP is an independent group of residents who carry out resident-led scrutiny of North Star Housing Group. We have access to the information we needed to carry out the scrutiny (except certain confidential and legally protected information) and to all the relevant North Star staff.

We met regularly to discuss the project and we used the following methods to carry out this scrutiny exercise:

A presentation by the Assistant Director of Technical Services.

- Interviews with:
 - Assistant Director of Technical Services (Conan McKinley)
 - Maintenance Officer (Denise Manning)
 - Group ICT Manager (Keith Saunders)

- Customer Service Team Officer (Elaine Harrow)
 - Customer Service Team Manager (Jan Welsh)
 - Information and Data Officer (Katherine Allen)
 - Esh and Burrige representatives (Contractors)
- Analysis of performance information.
 - Analysis of formal and informal complaints.
 - Read the contract for both Esh Property Service Ltd and PF Burrige Ltd and pulled out any relevant information.
 - Studied the relevant annual report with the contractors.
 - Reading List – **see Appendix 2.**
 - Researched how other Housing Associations deal with Responsive Repairs; Coast and Country handbook (see reading list, **Appendix 2.**)
 - Shadowed a meeting between Conan McKinley and Burrige contractors on Missed Appointments.
 - Checked the leaflets and information that has gone out to tenants at sign up.
 - Reviewed the relevant sections of the North Star website.
 - Tested the online repair reporting system (Homes Online).
 - Focus groups with:
 - Parkfield Hall tenants (younger people’s opinions).
 - Investors in People and Culture (BME community).
 - 4 U tomorrow tenant group.
 - Door-knocking (Cockerton, Darlington and Norton Grange) by staff and TVSP to get a greater tenant point of view.
 - A customer telephone survey carried out by the Customer Services Team on the TVSP’s behalf (There is no report due to minimal surveys conducted because of staff shortage).

4. How to read this report

- This report is designed to be read by tenants, staff, board members and anyone who is interested in North Star Housing Group.
- We begin the report with a summary in which we have highlighted our key findings.
- The summary is followed by a set of recommendations, which are set out in tables, numbered and in bold; there are 9 in total.
- Below each recommendation, we have provided some background so the reader can understand the policies, systems, arrangements and staff we are talking about.
- Underneath the background we have described the scrutiny methods we used to help us reach our recommendations.
- The final box contains the response from North Star’s Group Senior Management Team to each of our recommendations. If the team disagree with any of our recommendations they explain why in this box. The Board may then decide to call the TVSP and the Group Senior Management Team together for further discussions on a way forward.
- We think it is sensible and efficient to let the managers prepare a response before our report goes to the North Star Board. This approach saves time and may sometimes speed up the recommendations. We are completely independent of the Group Senior Management Team and our main relationship is with the Board. The managers have had no influence over our recommendations.

- At the back of the report there is an Action Plan, which clearly shows how the Management Team will respond to our recommendations; who is responsible, and the timescales.
- We will use the Action Plan as a tool to track improvements and to make sure that North Star carries out its commitments. We will meet with managers for progress reports and we will use our webpage and the tenant newsletters to keep everyone informed of developments.

5. Findings

Performance Information and Complaints/Comments

- Esh Property Services and PF Burridge are the main contractors for Responsive Repair works. Both companies use sub-contractors.
- From April – June 2015, 93% of tenants were satisfied with the responsive repairs, (Esh target is 85%).
- The average cost for a repair is £101 per job (Esh).
- From April – June 2015, 92% of tenants were satisfied with the responsive repairs, Burridge (target is 85%).
- The average cost for a repair is £108 per job (Burridge).
- In 2014/2015 there was a total of 147 complaints; this is an increase of 51.5% from 2013/2014.
- 110 of these complaints were against Property Services (74.8% of all complaints).
- The main complaints were around ‘Communication’, ‘Length of Time to Complete a Job’ and ‘Other’ (see reading list, **appendix 2**)
- 32 complaints were lodged against Burridge, and 17 against Esh
- There were 236 informal complaints made due to missed appointments and 55 due to communication issues.
- Some tenants are complaining about the service they receive from Burridge. Tenants have voiced their concerns with:
 - Repairs not being taken seriously
 - Contractors not communication well with the tenants (if further work is needed, they are not calling to say what date they will return)
 - Occasionally contractors are turning up before or after their appointment time.
(evidence in Norton Grange and Evenwood through door-knocking)

Communication

- North Star included an article in the winter 2013 newsletter to inform tenants that the new contractors and Customer Service team were starting in April 2014.
- In the summer 2014 newsletter there was an article to inform the tenants that the contractors are now in place and the tenant satisfaction at the time was 94.4%.
- It is difficult to navigate the Endeavour and Teesdale websites – see points below.
- The important information should be at the top of the webpage (not having to scroll down to find information).
- There is a lack of information on the website about reporting repairs online and what type of repairs you can report. For example, emergencies cannot be reported online but this is not clear enough on the website.
- There are no links to what are Emergency, Routine and Urgent repairs on the relevant web-page. For example, it says you cannot report an emergency repair online. However, it does not tell you where an emergency repair could be on this web page.
- The Customer Service Team have not seen the relevant parts of the contract between North Star and Esh/Burridge
- North Star are paying for their Web design and have little control over the content/layout (Homes Online).
- The contractors and Customer Service Team both agreed that there is an issue with the tenant's contact details. Sometimes the contractors are given the wrong telephone numbers; this is due to tenants changing their number without informing North Star.
- All Customer Service staff should be asking the tenants **'What is your preferred method of contact?'**
- Burridge said that coming to the tenants' conference was useful and would be interested in coming to other events.
- Currently the telephone system does not have all the tenants' information available. This is being updated internally (October 2015).
- Through consultation, tenants have said that an App would be useful when reporting a repair via a Mobile Phone.
- It is not easy for tenants to find their reference number, which they need to register on 'Homes Online'.

Value for Money (VFM)

- North Star is working with the contractors, along with Two Castles Housing Association and Four Housing Group, to improve the Repair Service and to help reduce costs.
- Having an App to report repairs is better Value for Money. Reporting repairs online costs approximately 12p, as against £12 over the telephone due to administration costs (Group ICT Manager Interview).
- TVSP have found that the contractor costs are good Value for Money as there has been a decrease in cost from previous contractors. However, when set against the increase in complaints, and decrease in tenant satisfaction (TVSP door-knocking exercise/Customer Service Interview), then we question whether the quality of the repairs may not be good Value for Money.

Equality and Diversity

- Other Housing Associations have morning, afternoon and school run appointments. When interviewing Esh and Burrridge they said they will accommodate the tenant needs.
- Other organisations have voice over, logos and video's to help all tenants understand important information more easily.
- Burrridge use a brochure, which has statements in 20 languages. The tenant can point to their own language. This enables Burrridge staff then to contact language line if needed.
- The Customer Service Team has never had training on how to communicate with a tenant with mental health issues, learning difficulties or dementia.
- Please see **Appendix 4** – Tenant feedback (Investors in People and Culture).

6. Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Improve the way a repair is reported online (6 recommendations):

- Website isn't east to navigate – would be easy to navigate if the important information is at the top of the page. Either a site map or having an alphabet at the top of the webpage (if you were searching for 'repairs' you would click on the 'R'), would be extremely helpful
- Promote the website for reporting repairs, this is better VfM as it costs North Star less if tenants are reporting repairs online - Homes Online
- The Register/Log In process needs simplifying. The tenancy reference number is not easy to obtain and then does not work with the reference number on tenants rent statements.
- All letters going out to tenants should include their reference number.
- There should be a link to explain what an urgent / routine / emergency repair is.
- It needs to be clear that you cannot report emergency/urgent repairs online – this is in very small print on the website, and could easily be missed.

Background

- TVSP tested the Homes Online; this did not work using the tenancy reference number. The process to report a repair online isn't easy to find on the website.
- The overall cost to the organisation is 12p to report a repair online, £12 to report a repair over the telephone (Keith Saunders).
- Differences in kinds of repair are very difficult to find on the websites.

Method

- Desktop review of website
- Interview with Keith Saunders
- Example website produced by Tenant (TVSP), see **appendix 3**.
- Mystery shop on Endeavour/Teesdale websites.

Senior Management Team response: Agreed

GSMT/TVSP discussions –

Agreed

Recommendation 2

- **Introduce a Responsive Repair Handbook**

Background

- Coast and Country and Gentoo have online handbooks (see reading list, **Appendix 2**) which are very user-friendly, explaining how to report a repair, the different types of repairs, timescales etc.

Method

- Desktop review

Senior Management Team response: Agreed

GSMT/TVSP discussions –
Agreed

Recommendation 3

- **Explain the expectations of what tenant and contractor should do by promoting the code of practise. For example; all operatives must show an ID badge. This could be on magnetic paper to put on fridge doors.**

Background

- Tenants do not know what to expect from contractors and what is expected of them.

Method

- The feedback from tenant door knocking and visiting various groups.

Senior Management Team response:
Agreed, we did this at the beginning of the contract in April 2013 through a newsletter article and contractors produced a flyer which was sent to every tenant. However a reminder would be useful for tenants and explore alternative methods of sharing information.

GSMT/TVSP discussions -
Agreed

Recommendation 4

- **Create an App for tenants to report repairs and advertise the App through social media, newsletters, websites or leaflet drop.**

Background

- Since interviewing Keith Saunders, TVSP was informed that an App is scheduled to go live September/October 2015.

Method

- Tenant consultation; for example, door knocking, Parkfield Hall tenants, Cockerton, Darlington and Norton Grange.

Senior Management Team response: Agreed

GSMT/TVSP discussions –
Agreed

<p>Recommendation 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Customer Service Team should be offered the opportunity for training in dealing with tenants with mental health issues, learning difficulties and dementia.
<p>Background</p> <p>The Customer Service Team feel they would benefit from this training</p>
<p>Method</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interview with the Customer Service Team
<p>Senior Management Team response: Agreed</p>
<p>GSMT/TVSP discussions –</p> <p>Agreed</p>

<p>Recommendation 6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Allocate time to allow Customer Service staff to undertake essential training
<p>Background</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Customer Service Team are not allocated the time or resources to go on team training days
<p>Method</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Customer Service Team Interview
<p>Senior Management Team response: Training for the CSA team has already been identified and planned, however if more is required we will provide protected time. The team have one hour per week and monthly team meetings which can also be used for training.</p>
<p>GSMT/TVSP discussions –</p> <p>GSMT advised that the Customer Service Team were trained at the beginning of the contracts. The team are also allocated a 1 hour session every Thursday afternoon, off the phones to discuss any relevant issues, as well as their monthly team meetings. TVSP clarified their recommendation was to allocate time for training days, on bespoke issues. GSMT agreed that if training needs are identified, the Customer Service team will be allocated the time to access this training.</p>

<p>Recommendation 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Customer Service Team should have access to the parts of the contracts with Esh and Burridge that are relevant to their work.
<p>Background</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Customer Service team do not know exactly what has been agreed between North Star and Esh/Burridge

Method
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interview with Customer Service Team
Senior Management Team response:
We will explore with the CS team what information they require. A full induction to the new contracts with extensive training was delivered with the CSA team before the contracts commenced.
GSMT/TV discussions –
TVSP explained the background to this recommendation. GSMT agreed that they will do a re-fresher training session on the relevant parts of the contract, if the team feels this is necessary.

Recommendation 8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Esh/Burridge to meet with the tenant groups on a regular basis and attend tenant events.
Background
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phil Burridge suggested this at his interview with TVSP
Method
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Contractor Interview
Senior Management Team response: Agreed
GSMT/TVSP discussions –
Agreed

Recommendation 9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ North Star to have a contractual agreement that the contractors have school run appointments
Background
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contractors told us they will accommodate tenants who have young children going to and from school. However as this is not a contractual agreement, different contractors may vary in flexibility. • TVSP feel this should be written into contracts.
Method
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Contractor Interview ▪ Desktop Review of other Housing Association's
Senior Management Team response:
School run appointments are already offered to tenant's for repairs. Although not written into the contract it was agreed during the implementation period. These appointments slots could be written into future contracts.
GSMT/TVSP discussions –
Agreed



TVSP - Choosing a service to scrutinise 2014-2015

Key Objectives:

- To develop and publish an Annual Programme of scrutiny activities based on the working assumption that it is possible to scrutinise three topics over a 12 month period.
- To include in the Annual Programme a range of topics that reflects the aspirations of customers and the needs of North Star Housing Group.
- To include topics which appear to be experiencing 'serious, persistent or systematic' failure or deterioration.

Selecting Subjects for Scrutiny

The Tenants Voice Scrutiny Panel's (TVSP) approach to selecting its scrutiny activities will take account of its needs to reflect the importance of the wider customer body and achieve self regulation and business improvement of North Star. The TVSP will use this scoring matrix to help decide which subjects to scrutinise. To this end:

- The TVSP identifies, through a range of intelligence gathering methods, those services that impact most on customers and prioritises them for scrutiny.

The TVSP supplements its programme by:

- Considering requests from the board/senior management team to include specific topics/services.
- 'Fast tracking' services/topics which display evidence of weakness or failure or those subject to a customer 'Call for Action'.

Using the triggers provided and the most up to date performance reports and any other performance information including satisfaction data, surveys etc, the TVSP will use the following scale and scoring matrix to help decide subjects for scrutiny:

Scale of 0 – 50+

0 -10 – being the lowest impact on customers and NSHG

50+ – Being the highest impact on customers and NSHG

The scores will then be added to give a final score

Scale

Low 0	10	11	20	21	30	31	40	41	50	51 + High
Score	1	2	3	4	5	6				

Topic Selection Criteria for Resident-led Scrutiny of Landlord Services	Would the subject benefit all customers?	Do national housing standards apply?	Do policies, performance & customer feedback indicate need for scrutiny?	Has the subject been raised by tenants?	Is financial information available?	Would particular groups of customers benefit? (Diversity impact)	Can the subject be compared with other similar landlords?	Has an internal audit been carried out recently?	Total Score
Service Charges	1	6	1	6	6	3	6	6	35
Right First Time on Responsive Repairs	6	1	4	1	6	1	6	6	31
Welfare Reform preparation	4	1	6	1	6	3	1	6	28
Total									

Chair	Carol Pearson
Date of Selection Activity	4th April 2014
Decision of TVSP	1. Welfare Reform – due to being a request from Board 2. Service Charges 3. Right First Time in Responsive Repairs
Signed (Chair)	

Appendix 2 – Reading List

- The contract between North Star Housing Group and Esh/Burridge contractors
- North Star Housing Group Value for Money Statement 2015
- Home Magazine, Winter 2013 and Summer 2014
- Language Identification leaflet (Burridge)
- Responsive Repairs Service presentation (Conan McKinley)
- Endeavour Tenant Profiling (March, 2015)
- Teesdale Tenant Profiling (March, 2015)
- Complainant Profiling 2014-15 April – March
- Complaint Data analysis (North Star Housing Group, 2015)
- List of customer, complaint, Contractor response and action (Document has no name)
- Endeavour and Teesdale Website - <http://www.endeavourha.co.uk/report-a-repair.php>, 20.05.15
- Coast and Country Responsive Repairs Handbook - <http://issuu.com/coastandcountry/docs/repairs-handbook>, 20.05.15
- Gentoo Policy Statement - <https://www.genttogroup.com/media/48104/Responsive-Repairs-Policy-Statement.pdf>, 20.05.15
- Kier Housing Association website, App
- Caledonia Housing Association website, App
- North Star Housing Group's developing App
- Customer Service Team Responsive Repairs survey
- Contractor Performance Information 2014/2015
- Tenant sign up information

Appendix 3 – Alf’s Example Website (print screen version)

ENDEAVOUR HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Home Tenants Services Our Housing About Us News Careers Contact Us

PAGES IN THIS SECTION:

- Welfare Reform
- Under Occupation
- Universal Credit
- Guide to Taking in a Lodger
- Guide to Bank Accounts
- Useful Guides, Leaflets and Tools

Our Twitter Feed

Tweets Follow

North Star Housing @NorthStarHG
Tenants in Teesdale to benefit from sessions to help them get online
northstarhg.co.uk/news-date/#universalcridt
Expand

National Housing Fed @natfednews
Lots of interesting tweets
Tweet to @NorthStarHG

OUR GROUP SITES

TEESDALE HOUSING ASSOCIATION

NORTH STAR HOUSING GROUP

REPORTING A REPAIR

EMERGENCY REPAIRS	URGENT REPAIRS
ROUTINE REPAIRS	IF YOU SMELL GAS
OUTSIDE OFFICE HOURS	HOMES ON LINE
OTHER INFORMATION	CONTRACTORS CODE OF CONDUCT

We are committed to providing an excellent repairs service for our tenants and we will always deal with any requests for repairs as soon as we possibly can. We have recently reviewed the repairs and maintenance service and are in the process of implementing a raft of changes, one of which is implementing a formal appointments system. We routinely alter our response times for people who have support needs. You can report a repair at our offices, in person, in writing or over the telephone on 03000 11 00 11 (if you are calling outside normal office hours, your call will be transferred to an emergency repairs service.) When reporting a repair provide us with as much information ABOUT THE PROBLEM as possible to help us deal with your request quickly.

When you call you need to tell us:

- Your name, address and contact telephone number
- As detailed a description of the problem as you can
- Access arrangements to allow the repair to be attended at a convenient time for you.

Other Types of Repairs
We believe that a good quick repairs service is important and we prioritise repairs into emergency, urgent and routine.

** Please see Beth Danby to see this example website in action

Appendix 4 – Tenant Feedback

Investors in People and Culture focus group / questionnaires (BME Gresham community):

- ‘Having a timely and quality repairs system.’
- ‘Having a diverse workforce. This way tenants can connect with the staff culturally and be more understanding in certain situations. Different cultures have different ways of living, different celebrations, priorities, religions. This would help as the diverse members of staff could explain different things to the organisation.’
- ‘Having leaflets in different languages – this make the organisation more accessible to tenants whose first language is not English. This does not have to be every piece of information the landlord has, but at least have copies ready of the general information, and then a contact number if the tenants wants further information in their language.’
- ‘Some tenants may not like telephoning the organisation if there was a language barrier, or may have anxiety with the telephone.’

Parkfield Hall Focus Group (young people):

- Tenant advised she does not like being on the phone – she prefers her support worker to make any calls. Tenant also agreed, when she first came to Parkfield she would not use the phone; however she is now more confident and will use the phone if needed. If there was text facilities to get in touch to report a repair this would be better.
- The young women also discussed the possibility of an App – they all agreed this would be a great idea and would like to use this.
- They all agreed they always have their mobile on them and are constantly on Facebook, this could be a possible way to report repairs.
- Tenant has reported a repair previously and she was given an appointment. However, she did not receive a call/text until 1 hour before the contractor came.
- Some of the girls have children and suggested that when they leave Parkfield and get their own tenancy, an appointment around school runs would be beneficial to young mums.

Cockerton Door Knock:

- ‘Repairs – sticking to appointments’.
- Being able to contact Endeavour via App / text facility’.

Norton Grange Door Knock:

- Issues with Burr ridge across the estate.
- Tenants would find it useful if they could report a repair via an App.

Telephone Survey:

- Unfortunately no results were due to staff shortages

Responsive Repairs Action Plan

Recommendation		Action	Lead Officer	Target Date	Completion Date
<p>1. Improve the process to report a repair online (6 recommendations)</p>	<p>Website – easy to navigate with important info at the top. Either a site map or having an alphabet at the top of the webpage (if you were searching for ‘repairs’ you would click on the ‘R’), could be extremely helpful</p>	<p>To be incorporated into upcoming branding work and launch of new website</p>	<p>Keith Saunders</p>	<p>April 2016</p>	
	<p>Promote the website for reporting repairs, this is better VFM - Homes Online</p>				
	<p>The Register/Log In process needs simplifying. The tenancy reference number isn’t easy to get hold of, and then doesn’t work with the reference number on tenants rent statements</p>				
	<p>All letters going out to tenants should include their reference number</p>				
	<p>There should be a link to say what an urgent / routine / emergency repair is</p>				
	<p>It needs to be clear that you can’t report emergency/urgent repairs online – this is in very small print on the website, and could easily be missed</p>				
<p>2. Introduce a Responsive Repair</p>		<p>Produce an on-line repairs handbook to be launched with</p>	<p>Simon Davis</p>	<p>December 2015</p>	

handbook		<p>new website. As part of this exercise we will review our code of conduct for contractors.</p> <p>January 2016 Update: Draft Repairs handbook to TVSP for comment. This will not be complete and published until April 2016, in time with the new brand and website. TVSP agree with the new target date.</p>		April 2016	
3. Magnetised paper, for tenants, to explain the expectations of what the contractor should do (code of practise),for example, show ID badge		<p>We will explore a number of options and produce a product which is easily accessible and succinct for our tenants.</p> <p>We will also use other media to describe what tenants should expect when ordering a repair.</p> <p>Update January 2016: Simon Davis clarified with TVSP what to include on the magnetised paper. This will be produced with the new branding in April 2016</p>	Simon Davis	December 2015	April 2016
4. To create an App for tenants to report repairs and advertise the App; through social media, newsletters,		Currently in progress	Keith Saunders	October 2015	Complete October 2015

websites or leaflet drop					
5. The Customer Service Team should be offered the opportunity for training in dealing with tenants with mental health issues, learning difficulties and dementia.		To be arranged and booked.	Jan Welsh	To take place by December 2015	
6. Sufficient time needs to be allocated to allow Customer Service staff for essential training		Already sufficient time	Jan Welsh	Complete	
7. The Customer Service Team should have access to the parts of the contract relevant to their team		Refresher sessions to be provided to CST in relation to contractor arrangements. CSA team to clarify requirements	Conan McKinley	November 2015	
8. Esh/Burridge meet with the tenant groups on a regular basis and attend tenant events		Customer Involvement team to produce a schedule of events and invite contractors.	Sally Thomas	December 2015	Complete January 2016

		<p>January 2016 Update: The schedule of events for tenants to meet contractors regularly will include contractors attending Estate Inspections in priority neighbourhoods, Tenant Advisors attending Esh and Burridge's Operational meetings and contractors attending North Star events.</p>			
9. North Star to have a contractual agreement that the contractors have school run appointments		To be confirmed in writing with existing contractors and built into the tender document for future contracts	Conan McKinley	October 2015	

Acknowledgements

The Tenants Voice Tenants Scrutiny Panel would like to thank:

Conan McKinley
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Elaine Harrow
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Esh contractors
Burrige contractors

Tenants Voice Tenant Scrutiny Panel:

Carol Pearson (Chair)
Eric Redfearn (Vice Chair)
Eileen Bell
Barbara Hagan
Alf Hannaford

Ann-Marie Basnett-Roberts (Observed part of the review)

Independent Mentor to the Tenants Voice: Kevin Farrell, TPAS