

Performance Advisory Group (PAG)

Monday 19 January 2015, Committee room 2, 1st Floor, Barnet House

Main Meeting 6:30pm until 8:30pm

Present:

John Davies	(JD)	Chair Person
Colette Gallagher	(CG)	Deputy Chair Person
Aruna Bhatt	(AB)	Member
Maxwell Doku	(MD)	Member
Norah Fallon	(NF)	Member
Hazel Mensah	(HM)	Member
Kimberley Wadham	(KW)	Customer Engagement Coordinator
David Thomas	(DT)	Welfare Reform Task Force Manager
Dave Dawson	(DD)	Performance and Data Manager
Kojo Frimpong-Mansoh	(KFM)	Project Coordinator Benefit Cap Task Force

Item	Title	Action
1	Apologies and welcome Apologies received from Chris Delaney, Adanna Oji, Lauren Donegan, Carly Williamson and Anne-Marie Isaacs Introduction of KF	
2	Minutes of last meeting All agreed the minutes were a true reflection.	Kimberley to publicise
3.	Complaints Report Q3 DT presented the Q3 Complaints report in CWs absence. DT noted that Stage one complaints have doubled since the last quarter. General repairs complaints decreased, Housing Options increased slightly and gas complaints increased significantly. JD added the reasons for the Robert Heath complaints are still the same as the last meeting; taking too long to resolve issues, missing appointments, poor communication, turning up unannounced and not arranging follow on works. He added that the Senior Repairs Contract Manager was on the case and identified the issues. The Quality Inspector is only one day per week and should be full time. There are also issues with the number of engineers and how they are paid. Some are salaried and some are paid by job, so the more jobs booked, the more money they will receive. There is, however, a new contract manager at Robert Heath, who has only been in the role for four weeks but is keen to come to PAG and to improve the service. Van stock has	

	<p>also been an issue, and there has been a lack of resourcing parts locally. This means the parts need to be ordered from Head Office and takes much longer to complete the job. JD suggested going to local suppliers to save time and all agreed. MD added that it should be possible for Robert Heath to source local suppliers and quality/price check the product against their Head Office prices. All agreed they would like the new contract manager to attend the next PAG meeting to update them re improvements. MD suggested that to avoid the large amounts of gas complaints in the Winter months, Barnet Homes should send out correspondence to residents through AtHome or another medium at the end of the Summer to remind them to check their boilers and radiators.</p> <p>KW observed that the complaints had reduced by over half from the comparative quarter last year. DT responded that Q3 figures may be incorrect due to problems with the QL system. PAG asked for CW to reply to this enquiry.</p> <p>DT told the group the VIPs were high at the moment due to the upcoming General Election and we expect it to continue to rise. MD added that Cllrs were currently knocking on doors and asking if there were any issues with the occupants' housing situation. He said he felt this was inviting more VIPs and complaints.</p>	<p>RHH contract manager to attend PAG meeting</p> <p>CW to respond re complaints numbers</p>
4.	<p>Performance Report Q3</p> <p>DD presented the Q3 Performance report to PAG. He commented that 80% of the KPIs were green, which is the best he has ever seen it in his time with Barnet Homes. In Q2 it was 64% and Q1 was 71%.</p> <p>The two red indicators are HRD arrears and TA arrears and gas servicing is green amber.</p> <p>Gas servicing is still not green as there is the on-going one access issue still to blame. We now have an injunction to complete the gas service although this is a complex case which will continue to take time to resolve. This is one service out of 8900 that has not been completed. Robert Heath have done an excellent job with gas servicing.</p> <p>HRD - current arrears as % debit 3.74% against a target of 2.83%</p> <p>In AMIs absence, DD presented the reasons for the red arrears indicators. There are continuing issues with the QL system speed, although Aereon and Capita are working together to resolve this. Speed has impacted on the turnaround of each officer's caseload, now taking 3 - 4 weeks instead of 1 – 2 weeks.</p> <p>The number of cases in arrears is not increasing but the average arrears are increasing, this tells us that those already in arrears are escalating. MD asked why this was. DD responded that there had been delays in court dates and eviction dates. The team are focusing on arrears over £2500 and the delay in eviction dates has meant that the Rents team are not being given the primary best time to engage with tenants. The majority of evictions do not go ahead, we have only had one since we started focusing on this but it is a time when tenants in severe arrears finally engage and we can help them. We are working with HB Law, Barnet Homes lawyer partner, to resolve this issue with Barnet County Court. DT and MD commented that in this current climate there would be</p>	

<p>more repossessions and therefore a larger work load for the courts. HM asked if eviction stage was the best for engagement as it costs Barnet Homes to go to court. DD answered that lots of tenants in arrears do not engage with Barnet Homes before this stage for various reasons, this is the last time for them to engage before they lose their home and so most people do. DT asked where are these people in high arrears and would it be worth doing some work to drill down like BME project? CG commented that the BME has helped a lot of people and needs to continue as it is helping Barnet Homes financially. She asked for information about continued funding.</p> <p>The reduction in Housing Benefit equates to £725,000 as of Q3 compared to same time last year. Data has been requested from Capita to confirm the reasons for the decline but as yet there has been no reply.</p> <p>DD told the group that we had been looking into National Statistics and we were surprised to find we were completely different to everyone else. Barnet is giving out more Housing Benefit and more people are on Housing Benefit than we thought. The statistics published were completely different from what we thought was happening. We will be following this up formally to Capita. MD reinforced that Barnet Homes need more explanation as to why Housing Benefit is so different to other boroughs. He asked which boroughs had been looked at. DD answered Haringey and Islington but we were also going to look at Enfield.</p> <p>TA - current arrears as % debit 7.90% against a target of 4.60%</p> <p>There are on-going issues such as a backlog of Housing Benefit assessments (140 cases) due to technical issues and delays in opening rent accounts. MD asked how this process works and that it should be immediate. DD responded that Housing Benefit require a lot of paperwork and if there is any issue with the information it will cause a delay. MD added why didn't the Housing Options team set up the account with the tenant and the Rents team collect the rent? DD explained that this used to be the case but was changed to the current process.</p> <p>DD confirmed AMI had reported Rents and Housing Options will review the process in T.A arrears collection and the opening and closing of accounts in the new financial year to ensure a smoother and consistent approach by all. DD continued when a Housing Benefit query was bounced back, we should be identifying trends to help improve. HM asked where was Housing Benefit now. DD answered on the 2nd floor of Barnet House and in Blackburn at the Capita centre. HM asked if the computer systems were interlinking. DD answered that we used to have access to the Housing Benefit system but due to data protection we don't anymore. DT commented that the Welfare Reform Task Force have access but are not allowed to share the data. HM asked what if the tenant does not tell Barnet Homes about a change of Housing Benefit. DD answered that we would see when their Housing Benefit was paid to us and there was a discrepancy.</p> <p>DD noted that the backlog should be complete by 23 January and that we have put resource into helping Capita resolve this backlog.</p> <p>DT added that the reason the Task Force works is that all partners are in</p>	<p>PAG to be made aware and involved in process review</p>
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	<p>the same office. Joined up multi-agency approach stops the silo working.</p> <p>DD continued that priority has been given to accounts being opened within 48hrs, this is now 72 hours to allow quality checks.</p> <p>Priority will now be given to collection of arrears. All accounts over £500 arrears are banded and divided between the T.A collection team. Two officers working on higher level arrears, supported by three Housing assistants working on the lower level. One housing assistant focussing on opening of accounts, cancellations and administration work.</p> <p>DD said that AMI felt Q4 would be better and meeting target in both areas will be a challenge but we will be focussing on moving in the right direction and getting as close to target as possible.</p>	
5.	<p>Introduction to the Task Force</p> <p>DT presented information about the Welfare Reform Benefit Task Force. He spoke about the key aims of the force was to work with those affected by the Benefit cap, assist people into work, prevent homelessness and move people off of capped benefits.</p> <p>The Task Force consists of Barnet Homes Housing options and Welfare Benefits Advisors, Capita/LBB Revenues and Benefits, JCP and Future Path.</p> <p>They maintain contact with the tenants, undertake employment and training exercises, benefits and budgeting advice including discretionary housing payments and wider support referrals.</p> <p>They work with any Barnet resident that is affected by the Benefit Cap and referred from DWP. The breakdown is 70% in the Private Rented sector, 21% in Council TA, 5% RSL tenants and 4% council tenants. This is a total of 1600 residents and the caseload is 440 currently live. They are mainly larger households.</p> <p>DT then explained eligibility and checks for Discretionary Housing Payments, the Crisis Fund and the work of Future Path.</p> <p>He also continued to talk about the partners they work with, for example Age UK, Carers Trust and Outreach Barnet.</p> <p>The outcomes so far are that 33% have gone into work, 116 homeless preventions and 326 DHP awards made.</p> <p>DT finished the presentation by showing the group two case studies of recently helped tenants.</p> <p>DT asked for PAG to follow them on twitter @BarnetTaskForce</p> <p>MD asked if it was practical to tell people how to save money, the example being, to cut their phone bill down if they had entered into a long contract? KFM responded by saying that the team would look elsewhere for cuts if that was the case. He gave an example of a lady spending £800 pcm on food shopping as would only shop in M&S.</p> <p>JD asked how it was working with Capita. DT responded that so far the relationship had been very good and no difference was noted. KFM agreed.</p>	<p>KW to email PAG re twitter handle</p>

<p>CG asked when Universal Credit was coming to Barnet. DT replied on the 2 March 2015 but would only be for single new job claimants to start off with.</p> <p>DT presented information about Universal Credit. The idea is to roll six benefits into one and you will be paid once a month into your bank account. The individual is then responsible for their own money and how they budget and allot it to each of their bills. So far 23,000 are on Universal Credit. Only 18-60 year olds will get Universal Credit.</p> <p>The tapering system activated when you go back into work is more generous than the current system. MD asked how the tapering works.</p> <p>DT asked PAG members if they would like to attend a presentation on Universal Credit on 21 January in Barnet House. No one was available at that time but would come to the next presentation.</p> <p>DT continued to say that to apply for Universal Credit, you have to apply online and have a bank account. AB asked what if the tenant is not online. DT answered the Jobcentres will helping. The prediction is that 95% of applications will be made online. The application takes 40-50 minutes to complete. If it is identified that the claimant is in rent arrears at that stage, the Housing Benefit will be paid directly to the landlord. MD asked for clarification. DT continued to explain that under normal circumstances, Housing Benefit will be paid to the claimant along with any other benefits they are receiving as Universal Credit. If it is identified that the claimant is in rent arrears it will be paid directly to the landlord instead. There is also a trigger that if a claimant is in arrears for two months at any point, the Housing Benefit will be paid directly to the landlord.</p> <p>MD asked if the application has to be completed in one go or could be continued. JD asked if there was online help available or a phone line. DT answered that there will be help available online, by phone and at the Jobcentre.</p> <p>AB asked if Universal Credit was means tested or contribution based. KFM answered that Universal Credit is made up of a standard allowance and several other elements, as appropriate, since any award is based on a claimant's personal circumstances. The elements are Child element/disabled child additions, Childcare element, Carer element, Limited capability for work element, Work related activity element and Housing element.</p> <p>In view of the above, there are elements of UC that are means tested and others that are not. All the different elements are calculated differently and the total sum is the UC monthly payment that will be received by the claimant.</p> <p>DT mentioned that it would take 37 days after the completion of the application to the first payment.</p> <p>NF asked if the Barnet Task Force would need more staff from March 2015 to cope with the additional work. DT answered that it had not been</p>	<p>Tapering to be explained in more detail to PAG</p> <p>PAG to be emailed details of next UC meeting</p> <p>DT/KFM to find out whether the application can be 'saved for later'</p> <p>JD to confirm PAG members for</p>
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	<p>decided yet. It will depend on funding and whether DWP will help to fund this.</p> <p>CG mentioned that the publicity for the pilot in the north of the country has not been successful. People were unable to pay their own bills and were spending the money on other things. DT replied that it is a testing and learning process. The ideology is that people will learn to take responsibility for their money and learn to budget.</p> <p>DT told the group that Barnet Homes would like to set up a Project team for Universal Credit and they would like members of PAG to take part. JD will think about representation.</p> <p>KFM added that under Universal Credit it will be more incentivised for people to go back into work rather than the current system. People currently benefit more financially from staying at home.</p> <p>PAG were very interested in keeping informed re the work Barnet Task Force and Barnet Homes are doing with Universal Credit.</p>	<p>the group</p> <p>PAG to be sent presentation from DT</p>
7.	<p>PAG Members Update</p> <p>HM mentioned that the Rental Income review was almost completed. Should be finished by the end of January. They are just waiting for some more information to come from benchmarking with other RSLs.</p> <p>JD talked about the updates with the gas contractor, that had already been mentioned in the earlier part of the meeting. CG added that the experiences of residents had generally been poor with Robert Heath for the same reasons highlighted in the complaints section of the meeting. PAG were keen to get the new contract manager to attend a meeting.</p> <p>JD updated for Jan Andersson, Service Champion for Mears. She had reported very poor call handling from the out of hours service. KW added that this issue had been chased with the senior repairs staff and it was under investigation. Updates to come to PAG as we know.</p> <p>KW reported to the group AO had recently been involved with the major voids inspections for the procurement of the new contractor. She found it very interesting but felt more training was needed before the inspections, so that she was more aware of what to look for.</p> <p>JD updated the group on the Robert Heath First Time Access Fund. He is waiting for Deborah Beckford to come back to him to set up a meeting date. They will then go through some paperwork and set up a project team. CG asked what had been decided for the money to go towards. JD answered local charities, community groups, Your Choice and possibly more. An advert will be put in the AtHome and hopefully they will get applications for the money.</p> <p>JD told the group the Barnet Homes annual report had been completed and he and Jan had written a piece each. The group commented that the Annual Report section in the AtHome was clear, to the point and exactly what they wanted to see. KW expanded that if they wanted to see the full report, it would be available on the website soon.</p>	<p>HM, CG and AB to finish Rent review end of Jan</p> <p>Update to come to PAG re out of hours</p> <p>KW to feedback to procurement team</p> <p>DB to contact JD re meeting</p> <p>KW to email link to PAG</p>

8.	Any other business KW talked to PAG about the upcoming quality checking exercises. She will email information to them in the following week.	KW to email information
	Date of Next Meeting Monday 2 March 2015 6.30pm – 8.30pm in 9th floor boardroom, Barnet House	