

emh homes Scrutiny Panel

Annual Report

2015-2016

 emh homes

emh Scrutiny Panel 2015-2016

Brian Carpenter Chair

Gill Leverton-Taylor Vice Chair

Amanda Boulter

Terry Farrelly

Terry Silverwood

Paul Naylor

Jim Humphreys



emh homes Resident Scrutiny Panel

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General Statement of Intent and Expectations

It is with precedence that we believe:

Scrutiny must be:

- Independent (Fair/Honest/Without Bias)
- Vigorous
- Challenging
- Rewarding

We must positively:

- Support Scrutiny Processes
- Ensure that the purpose of our investigations are clear and precise

We will:

- Involve all Residents/Tenants
- Demonstrate Value for Money
- Be creative when monitoring services and performance
- Bring conclusions in full to the attention of Senior Management and the Board
- Follow up on agreed action plans until their conclusion
- Have a comprehensive programme for Panel development and future investigations

emh Scrutiny Panel

Annual report Summary 2015-2016

This is our first Annual Report and includes detail of our training period as well as our work during the past twelve months.

This report is intended to provide the reader with a summary of the activities and achievements of the Scrutiny Panel during the period.

The first 6 months in the life of the Panel were largely taken up with training and consolidating our membership down to a manageable level. Our training continued until the completion of our first investigation when we looked into voids. This proved to be a long and arduous process, not least due to the fact that we were, in my opinion, too large a group to operate effectively.

Our first report outlines our purpose and modus operandi as well as the activities and achievements of the panel during the past year. They include an in depth look into the Voids situation with a view to discovering the reasons for, what in our opinion is undue delay in preparing properties for re-let. The action plan for this investigation is ongoing and, subject to the fulfilment of the action plan, we expect to be in a position to sign it off at the end of May 2016.

Our second investigation, our first without our Critical Friend and instructor, Jon Warnock, was on the Complaints handling procedure. This has been concluded and an action plan devised in conjunction with senior management. This is therefore ongoing and will remain so until the action plan is signed off in approximately 12 months' time. Unaided completion of this exercise has enabled us to develop new skills in relation to the Scrutiny Process.

We have found the work to be both interesting and absorbing. Much of the satisfaction gained from completing a task is in the knowledge that in doing so, we have left no stone unturned in order to arrive at a complete understanding of the process that we are investigating by accumulating and analysing as much soundly based evidence as possible. This of course takes time, but we feel it is necessary in order that we can present our recommendations with confidence and the evidence to back them up.

Our first year has not been without its problems; several panel members have left and our number are now down to 7 from an initial 17. There have been various

contributory factors including work commitments, health and the scrutiny work being too time consuming and complicated. We are looking to add to our membership by possibly two or three new members but we feel that we need to be selective in so far as we need people who have the time, can play a part in a team and bring commitment to the task. Ideally, we would like to have a membership of 10/12 persons.

The current membership of the panel is as follows:

Brian Carpenter	Chair	Corby, Northamptonshire
Gill Leverton-Taylor	vice Chair	Stony Stanton
Amanda Boulter		Chesterfield, Derbyshire
Jim Humphreys		Whetstone
Terence Farrelly		New Brinsley, Nottinghamshire
Terry Silverwood		Ashby
Paul Naylor		Croft

We hope to develop a plan for going forward to include a schedule of work and develop a better system of communication between members. Because of the wide spread of members i.e. Corby in the south to Chesterfield in the north, it is not possible for members to meet outside of our formal meetings. This often proves to be a problem and we feel the need to embrace the modern technology that exists to a much greater extent.

Our task has been exacerbated by the current development of the orchard system and more recently, the disruption to staffing levels at emh. No doubt, all of this will settle down in the near future.

Brian Carpenter
Chair Residents Scrutiny Panel.

MAIN REPORT

Investigations and Outcomes

Void Properties

The Panel's first investigation, taken on as part of the first year of an intensive training period, was on Void Properties, and specifically on the time scales in relation to properties that were left vacant and the progress of work to be completed on those properties during that period to prepare them for re-letting.

Following the completion of our investigations, an Action Plan on the findings and recommendations was completed in conjunction with Senior Management and the Report was presented to the Board in February 2015.

The Action Plan is due to be signed off' by the end of May 2016 with the Director of Housing, and this will officially complete our first Scrutiny Report to Senior Management and the Board of emh Homes.

Challenges

The challenges in carrying out this investigation were:

- The presentation format of the report was for most of the Panel, a difficult and confusing exercise that took some time to understand and become comfortable with.
- The Panel also had to develop an understanding of the '10 Step Plan' that was later to become the 'Bible' of the manner in which we structure and complete our investigative work.
- The volume of paperwork involved was considerable, and required an extended period of assistance from emh Homes affiliated staff in order to complete it.
- The wide-ranging geographical locations of the Panel Members involved in the investigation made it difficult to inter-act personally with each other or emh staff, other than at scheduled meetings.
- Not all Panel Members were confident with the use of digital technology or were in possession of the appropriate equipment and computer skills.

Positive Areas of this Investigation

- The willingness of the Panel to learn new skills.
- Researching the information required for the investigation.
- The willingness of frontline staff and Senior Management to answer questions and provide timely information that assisted us with our investigation.
- A positive outcome in drawing up an Action Plan based on the recommendations of the findings.

Activities

- Presentation by Housing Director and Senior Managers.
 - Questioning of frontline staff, Supervisors, and Managers.
 - Inspection of void properties.
 - Presentation on void properties to Managers (using Power Point)
 - Review of policies and the Dashboard
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The Panel looks forward to receiving the analysis and final outcome of our Investigation into void properties and to being able to sign off the Action Plan and ultimately the Investigation findings in May 2016.

emh homes

Complaints

The Panel's second investigation looked at the Complaints Policy and Procedures, and specifically the informal stage of the Complaints Process.

The investigation started with a presentation from the Customer Experience Manager in which the comparison between results of last year and this year were demonstrated, showing a decline in complaints and an indication that progress appeared to be going in the right direction.

The Scrutiny Panel discussed the presentation further and on the basis of the information given to us, it was apparent that the initial contact called the 'Informal Stage' needed further investigation, as the Panel had not received enough information regarding this particular area.

Aim

The aim was to review the 'Informal Complaint' procedure further and to reduce the number of 'Stage One' complaints and to make recommendations to reduce the number of 'Informal Complaints'.

Challenges

- The development of the new 'Orchard' system which is due to 'go live' in July 2016 and it's potential effect on the timing of some of the recommendations.
- Deciding on a format in which to present the report as the Panel thought that something simpler than the previous report should be used. The Panel had many discussions around this subject and eventually found a format that was acceptable to all of them.
- The volume of paperwork was again a matter of some concern.

This was the Panels first Investigation achieved on their own and without the support of a 'Critical Friend'.

Positive areas of the investigation

- The Panel were encouraged by the willingness of frontline staff, Managers and Senior Managers in responding to the Panel's request for information for the investigation.
- There were a number of areas of good practice found within the investigation.
- The Panel commissioned Quality Standards Inspectors to research areas on the understanding of the complaints process, responses to communication when making complaints, and outcomes. This was achieved by telephoning residents using a bespoke questionnaire.
- The Panel consider that they are beginning to build good relationships with staff and Management of emh Homes.
- The findings of the investigation demonstrated that the initial contact with the Customer Service Centre Team was actually the 'Informal Stage' of a complaint, and was in reality a 'Service Failure'. Some of the 'Service Failures' could not be solved at the point of contact because of varying reasons that are identified in the full report.
- The presentation of the Report to Board by the Panel was considered to be of such a high standard that it was acknowledged as such by The Board, and the Panel will continue to use this format in the future.

Activities

- Presentation on the complaints processes and statistics.
- Observation of Learning Reviews.
- Observation of local office procedures for handling complaints.
- Shadowing of CSE and CET.
- Meeting with QSI.
- Development of questions to residents.
- Development of questions to frontline staff and Managers.
- Meetings with Senior Management to plan activities with reference to findings.

On completion of the investigation an Action Plan was created in conjunction with Senior Managers that reflected the findings of our investigation together with a proposed timetable to implement our recommendations. The Report was presented to the Board in March 2016 which also set out targets and dates for action and monitoring purposes to the point of completion. The Board accepted the Report stating that they thought that it was a thorough and good report.

The Panel would like to thank the QSI's (Quality Standards Inspectors) for their part in helping with this investigation.

Membership of the Scrutiny Panel

The Panel started with 17 members but unfortunately we have since lost members for different reasons i.e. health problems, family and work related issues.

At the time of this report we are currently 7 members which includes a recent addition, and we are looking to increase our numbers to a maximum of 12 as soon as is practicable. Recruitment is difficult in respect of identifying suitable people with the right skills and background whilst remaining aware of the diversity of people. However, the absence of a full complement has had little effect on the functions and achievements of the Panel. The Panel have recently reviewed and amended the 'Terms of Reference' and have reviewed the 'Code of Conduct' without needing to initiate any changes. The Panel are finding their work interesting and challenging but nonetheless enjoyable, notwithstanding the fact that they have spent many hours away from their homes attending meetings, researching, and gathering information.

The Panel feel that they are always learning through the investigations. However, due to Action Plans currently in progress the difference they are making is not quantifiable at this present time.

We will endeavour to build into our twelve month plan, future training that will update and enhance the skills and knowledge that we already have as well as learn new ones.

Support from emh Staff

The Panel appreciate and acknowledge the support given to them by the emh Homes staff listed below:-

Sarah Dickens	Christine Ashton
John Warnock	Dave Morris
Katherine Stonehouse	Mari Hughes
Nina Fowler	emh Board
Jon Warnock (Critical Friend)	
Ben Clark-Betts	
Nikki Chawda	

Thank you to you all, the advice and support you have all given has been invaluable.

Relationships

The Panel consider that they have developed a good relationship with the staff of emh Homes and are pleased that the Board have received both of our reports with a strong level of interest and in a spirit of mutual concern that the subject matter required serious consideration and necessary action.

The Panel feel that this is a positive, supportive relationship that they value. It is also thought that along with Directors, Senior Management and Managers, the Board fully embrace the work of the Scrutiny Panel and what this means to the organisation.

Value for Money

It is difficult at the time of this report to determine what the Value for Money situation actually is in relation to the cost of the Panel and their work. We hope that this will become clearer in our next Annual Report when the Panel's recommendations have been concluded for both of the investigations. We would

emphasise that there are many hours worked on these investigations that are unlikely to be included in any quantifying process because it is impossible to put a value on them.

There are some potential savings that could possibly be made. The use of paper could be reduced with greater use of technology. Also, more simple meals may be more appropriate. These are issues that could be discussed with emh Homes staff during the coming months.

Plans for the future

The Panel are looking to increase the number of investigations during the next twelve months, and plans are in place to carry out a relatively short enquiry followed by a more extensive one, and both to be completed within a shorter time-scale than has been the case hitherto. It is however extremely important that all investigations are given the time they deserve for results to be:-

- Clear
- Robust
- Accurate
- Improve services to Residents
- Improve quality of life for all Residents
- Enable emh to be the best Housing Association in provision of services to Residents
- Value for money
- Not discriminative

In the coming year we hope to:

- Raise our own profile
- Measure our success
- Support emh to be the best Housing Association

Conclusion

Whilst the Scrutiny Panel's recommendations for both investigations remain in progress, the Board, Directors, and Senior Managers can be confident that the Scrutiny Panel will meet with Directors and Senior Management as planned, in order to monitor the progress of mutually agreed actions resulting from these recommendations.

Recommendation

That emh Board, Directors and Senior Managers, note and acknowledge the Panel's achievements and challenges within the period covered by this report.

Other Activities

During the last twelve months the Panel have attended two Co-Regulation meetings, and two meetings relating to the development of the Orchard system and information that will be applied to it.

Author

Scrutiny Panel May 2016

