

emh Homes Scrutiny Panel

Annual Report

2016-2017



Emh Scrutiny Panel 2016-2017

Brian Carpenter Chair

Terry Silverwood

Gill Leverton-Taylor Vice Chair

Terry Farrelly

Amanda Boulter

Jim Humphreys

EMH HOMES RESIDENT SCRUTINY PANEL ANNUAL REPORT 2016-2017

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 Residents/Tenants
- Demonstrate Value for Money
- Be creative when monitoring services and performance
- Bring our 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 2016-2017

This, our second Annual Report is intended to provide the reader with a summary of the activities and achievements of the Scrutiny Panel during the past twelve months.

As reported in our last Annual Report the investigations into Voids and Complaints were completed by that time, but remained "open" awaiting completion of the action plans. These are now signed off, but remain in our vision for monitoring the predicted signs of improvement. This long term overview of past investigations will be the norm in order to ensure continued progress as a result of our investigations.

During 2016/2017 we have undertaken no less than three investigations namely: Gas Servicing, The Website and Internal Cleaning.

Our attention was drawn to **Gas Servicing** as a result of the KPI at the time showing a less than 100% (98.8%) success rate of services carried out. The 1.2% of properties not serviced amounted to just 2 properties within 'emh Homes'. Nevertheless, we regarded this as most unsatisfactory. We needed to know why this was the case, and investigated with a view to finding out.

Following a request from the Board, coupled with the experience of Scrutiny Panel members that had attempted to use the site, the Panel decided to undertake an investigation of the **Homes Website**.

With this in mind, each member of the Panel were asked to look at two specific aspects of the site, and recommend areas for improvement. This investigation is now complete and an Action Plan agreed. It has been presented to, and accepted by the Board.

Our third and final investigation of the year was **Internal Cleaning**. As a result of complaints from other residents we decided to examine the procedures and effectiveness of this function. We began the process with a comprehensive presentation on the subject from Laura Morgan. We anticipated that this would be our main investigation of the year, and the most time consuming. This certainly proved to be the case. However, it is now complete and an Action Plan agreed, and we look forward to presenting the report to the Board in September of this year.

We have been thorough in our investigations, and in doing so, have gained satisfaction in the knowledge that our reports are based upon the accumulation and analysis of soundly based evidence, and a thorough understanding of the process we investigate, in order to arrive at our recommendations. This is a time consuming

process but, in our view, a necessary one, in order to give us the confidence that we can present our recommendations, having the evidence to back them up.

Panel Development

We have developed a plan for going forward and a system of recording upcoming events. We use the digital means of communication much more than previously and would like to see this increased. We consider this to be essential due to the fact that other than formal meetings, it is not possible for us to meet as a group due to the distance between our homes. It is therefore essential that we make the most of the time we do meet. This has not always been possible due to some staff being unable to attend prearranged interviews. We hope to have resolved this issue with the aid of Senior Management in particular, and a more planned way of working.

Brian Carpenter

Chair Residents Scrutiny Panel

MAIN REPORT

Investigations and Outcomes

GAS SERVICING

In the light of the disruption caused by the upgrading of the Orchard System and the change in staffing within emh, we decided that our first investigation would be more of a desk top review rather than a full investigation, thus keeping to a minimum the effect of our work within emh.

The KPI indicated a less than perfect result with regard to the servicing of gas installations within emh. Only 98.8% of properties had been serviced within the required period of the previous year. This lower percentage was due to two emh properties where service engineers were unable to gain access, as a result they were not serviced during the prescribed period.

Following a meeting with Gas Servicing Team Leader, we were provided with a written statement, outlining the procedure of gaining entry to properties in order to carry out the service. We were supplied with copies of the various stage letters sent out to tenants, requesting an appointment to carry out the service, together with a copy of the Solicitors letter demanding a response from the tenant. We further learned that in order to gain access to properties, there were approximately 6 cases of court action each year at a total cost of some £3000. This investigation was intended to be no more than a desk top review but, as we have often found during our comparatively short time of existence, areas that we investigate often prove to be more complex than they appeared to be at the outset.

This investigation is not yet complete due to changes in the Asset Management structure within emh and we look forward to a session with the Director of Property Services on the 13th of July of this year.

Challenges

- Only having one meeting with a member of emh staff.
- Ongoing development of the Asset Management structure.
- Working from a written statement that was provided after the meeting

Positive areas of this investigation

- a member of our Panel, Amanda Boulter, was familiar with the procedures from her experience with another Housing Association, and was therefore, able to lead on this investigation to considerable effect.

Activities

- Recommending amendments to the correspondence used to encourage tenants to co-operate with emh staff trying to gain access to carry out the service.

We are shortly due a presentation by the new Director of Property Services, after which we hope to finalise this exercise.

WEBSITE

The second investigation undertaken by the Panel was to examine and make recommendations for improvements to the Website. In particular, we compared emh website with those of other housing associations and found the emh site to be not user friendly.

Panel member Terry Silverwood took the lead on this investigation. In order to test the site, each member of the panel were allocated areas to investigate and report on their findings. This proved to be very informative, and supplied us with many questions to ask when we were given a presentation by a member of staff.

Records showed, that users spent a very short time on the site. We suspect tenants used it to obtain emh telephone numbers, rather than use the website for the purpose it was intended.

This investigation has been completed and an action plan agreed. Due to the ongoing nature of the development of digital formats in general, some aspects of the timetable of the action plan are somewhat flexible. We accept this, and with the possible aid of members of the SIGS groups, overseen by Terry, we will follow our usual procedure of monitoring progress into the future.

Positive areas of this investigation

- As with the Gas Servicing investigation, this subject enabled us to engage a lead on a specific subject, instead of being too reliant on the chair or vice chair.
- A positive outcome, enabling us to reach agreement with management on a timetable to implement our recommendations and work closely together in the future.

Aims

- Our main aim of this investigation was to provide an environment on the Website to encourage tenants to use it to both communicate with emh as well as keep up to date with events and the progress of their Housing Association.

Challenges

- Time delays in meeting with a manager to receive a presentation and ask questions of them that were posed during our own use of the Website .

INTERNAL CLEANING

The Panel were concerned about the number of complaints being received via various sources, in regard to the quality of the internal cleaning. They therefore decided to investigate all aspects of this procedure, from the allocation of contracts through to the operatives working on site. We decided that it would be a sensible idea to visit various sites to see for ourselves what work was involved and how it was carried out.

We met with Contractor's staff on site, at both Erewash and Northampton, and later at Memorial House for interviews, and found them to be very helpful.

Challenges

- Because of the distances between properties that we wished to view, our inspections involved two meetings.
- It was often difficult to appreciate that a site was being attended by the same contractor i.e. one building immaculate and another far from immaculate.
- Some properties showed signs of neglect that were not within the remit of the cleaners. It was disappointing to find that there was little or no communication with emh on such matters.
- We used members from the Communications Special Interest Group to conduct a telephone survey. They made 100 calls and received very few responses. We went on to use an online survey that proved to be far more successful.

Aims

- Our aim was to try to ensure that tenants were getting what they paid for in their service charges.

Positive areas of the investigation

- The Panel were grateful for the time and courtesy that both members of emh staff and the Contractor's staff showed to us.
- The contractors raised the question of the lack of action or communication between emh and people on site, be it contractors, residents or emh staff, in regard to faults that needed attention, some of which were urgent.
- The electronic survey proved to be far more effective in terms of responses gained than the telephone survey.
- The investigation gave the Panel the opportunity to see first-hand, a variety of properties owned by emh, and to meet with contractors' cleaning staff.
- The Panel were able to identify for themselves methods and standards of cleaning, both internal and external.
- Although the investigation is completed and an action plan agreed, it will not be presented to Board until their next meeting in September. However, we were pleased to note that some of our recommendations have already been implemented.

The Panel were appreciative of the time and courtesy given to them by emh staff and the staff of the Contractors.

Activities

- Visits to various sites.
- Interim recommendations to the Executive Director of Housing with regard to areas requiring urgent attention, with a view to urgently improving the company ethos in this regard.
- Interviews with emh managers and staff.
- Interviews with Contractor's staff
- Interview with the Procurement Manager
- Development of a questionnaire for use in conducting the survey of residents.

The Panel would like to take this opportunity to thank Jane Churcher and Theresa Winfield for their efforts in the telephone survey.

Membership of the Scrutiny Panel

Whilst not of immediate concern, we feel that recruitment of additional members would be advisable for the continuity of the Panel.

It is our intention to continue to seek out new membership and the Quality and Standards Team are assisting us with devising a recruitment campaign.

The current membership of the Panel is as follows:

Brian Carpenter	Chair	Corby, Northants
Gill Leverton-Taylor	Vice Chair	Stoney Stanton, Leicestershire
Amanda Boulter		Chesterfield, Derbyshire
Jim Humphreys		Whetstone, Leicestershire
Terrance Farrelly		New Brinsley, Nottinghamshire
Terry Silverwood		Ashby, Leicestershire

Support from emh Staff

The Panel would like to thank emh homes and emh group management and staff for the support given to us throughout the year.

Thank you all once again, your support and advice has been invaluable.

Value for Money

In our last Annual Report we stated that it was difficult to determine the value for money of the Scrutiny Panel, this situation has not changed. Because of the nature of the work that we do. However, this subject is under constant review.

In Conclusion

We, the Panel consider that we have had a good year, working together as an ever closer team, producing some good work that we hope has been of value to both emh and their tenants. Some ups and downs along the way; better than expected results and some disappointments, but all very interesting and enjoyable. Our relationship with the Board, senior management and staff has, in our opinion, gone from strength to strength.

Some interesting plans are afoot for the way the Scrutiny Panel plan to operate in the future. Whilst maintaining our independence, and where necessary,

confidentiality, we wish to be more open, and encourage assistance from Involved Residents who are willing to take on tasks on our behalf, thus utilising the knowledge and skills that they possess. This we hope will raise our profile within emh, and supplement the hours available to the Panel.

Scrutiny Panel June 2017