



emh homes scrutiny panel

Challenge | Change | Improve

emh homes Scrutiny Panel

Grounds Maintenance Report: November 2018

Scrutiny Panel for this Investigation:

Gill Leverton-Taylor: Chair

Terry Farrelly: Panel Member

Brian Carpenter: Vice-Chair

Jim Marks: Panel Member

Jim Humphreys: Panel Member

Amanda Boulter: Panel Member

Shash Jivan: Panel Member

Terry Silverwood: Panel Member

Emh Scrutiny Panel Grounds Maintenance Report

Index:

1. Introduction	Page 3
2. Methodology	Page 3
3. Presentation and Desk Top Review	Page 4
4. Observations	Page 4
5. Survey to Tenants	Page 5
6. Staff Interviews	Page 6
7. What we felt could be improved	Page 6
8. In conclusion	Page 7
9. Recommendations	Page 7
10. Acknowledgements	Page 8

Purpose:

To identify a need to look further into the processes and management of **Sharpe's Garden Services**.

1. Introduction:

- 1.1 This Scrutiny Report on Grounds Maintenance was requested by tenants in 2017 during the cutting season of 2017 by Sharpe's Garden Services.
- 1.2 This came at a time when the Scrutiny Panel were completing the Internal Communal Cleaning Investigation, presenting this to Board and had been requested to look at the distance of travel in Fire Safety for emh homes by the Director of Property Services, Adrian Cheetham.
- 1.3 The request came following the Grenfell Tower tragedy. The Panel thought that this should be a priority.
- 1.4 However, we did not ignore the facts surrounding Ground Maintenance and were able to speak with Adrian on how the situation occurred with grass cutting services. The Scrutiny Panel also gained valuable information as to how there had been long periods in areas across the estate as to the current situation at that time.
- 1.5 The situation at the time of meeting with Adrian was improving and we found that contacts directly with Scrutiny Panel from residents and through members of other Special Interest Groups had reduced.
- 1.6 Once, the Fire Safety Investigation was complete, the Scrutiny Panel did want to look at the Grounds Maintenance Service to tenants.

2. Methodology:

- 2.1 The Scrutiny Panel started with a **Presentation from Sharpe's**.
- 2.2 This led to an indecision of not knowing if this should be a full investigation. The information given to the Panel was excellent during the presentation.
- 2.3 The decision was then to tap into area using specific tools from our tool box that would help us with a decision.
- 2.4 The tools the Panel used were:
 - Presentation
 - Desk Top Review of Information
 - Observations
 - Survey to Tenants
 - Staff Interviews

- 2.5 This was more extensive than the Scrutiny Panel would have liked at this stage of our Eleven Step Plan, however the Panel always remain flexible in their approach to using the set procedures, so that we can be fair in our assessment of the area of the business that we are looking at.
- 2.6 There was no specific area identified by the Panel that we needed to look at before using these tools to look at the service and with the indecision by the Panel as to if it really needed to be investigated. **Therefore, no scope for this probable investigation was developed by the Panel.**
- 2.7 It was a case of what can be found, if anything, given things had been so wrong in the past for tenants during the grass cutting season of 2017, however the grass cutting appeared to be working well for this current season.

3. Presentation and Desk top review

- 3.1 The presentation was in depth covering all aspects of systems relating to Garden Services. This included the history of Sharpe's; information on Cattows Farm; equipment used; staffing and the structure levels; the services that Sharpe's provide; how they schedule services and; health and safety in abundance. The Scrutiny Panel found this very informative
- 3.2 During the presentation the Scrutiny Panel were given a file of information on how Sharpe's works: the Policies and procedures they have in place. This included a Handbook on Farm Safety: which included Fire Safety: incidents and accidents: machinery and equipment: risk management COSHH: induction of staff and; safety disciplinary policy. These are just a few of Sharpe's policies and procedures identified from this document. There was also clear and bright information on hedge cutting and mower handling and strimmer use. There was also documentation relating to the completion of mandatory training for operatives which included refresher courses. The Scrutiny Panel were very impressed with all of this and would congratulate Sharpe's Garden Services on the duty of care to their employees and the very detailed information that they provided the Scrutiny Panel on all aspects of safety identified within their work structure, policies and procedures. The Scrutiny Panel thought that they should be proud of this.

4 Observations:

- 4.1 During the observations the Scrutiny Panel were able to talk with staff about a typical day in services.
- 4.2 What the Scrutiny Panel observed
- A barn which is used as an operational centre for equipment, administration and motorised mowing equipment. Any repairs to equipment takes place in this barn.
 - There was a white board with listed areas of work with times and dates. It was explained that this was currently an effective management tool of work schedules. However, this is soon to be computerised. Rob Sowden explained the working of this to members of the Scrutiny Panel. Another barn close to the one they work from contains silage, this is due to have a wall built around it.
 - A written agreement for hedge cuttings and grass cuttings to be rotted down and spread over the farmer's field.

- A Landfill Policy that has a zero percent. It is Sharpe's responsibility to remove the waste.
- Insurance Policy was in a clean environment.
- COSHH instructions on containers.
- Scrap is kept away from the public paths.

4.3 The Scrutiny Panel were told that there are five Managers, seventeen Supervisors, and a total of forty other employees. Colin Sharpe, himself is responsible to Adrian Cheetham. They are open and honest in their discussion with each other and they both have a mutual respect for each other.

4.4 Other areas discussed during this observation visit:

- **Equipment Maintenance:** This is mainly conducted in house. Operatives are encouraged to report any component failure whether by wear and tear or accidental damage or misuse. Equipment is replaced when service life expires and parts become useful for other equipment
- **Team Success:** This is needed for the purpose of team success, members of the Scrutiny Panel were told that when equipment tracking was raised this was a definite **NO** from emh homes.
- **Recycling:** all green recycling is collected and disposed of by specialist company
- **Moving Forward:** The use of tablets is being initiated to make the planning of visits to areas more efficient, from planning the best route to work on sites to photo recording on arrival and completion of work.

4.5 The Scrutiny Panel found the farm completely safe and clean working conditions were observed for operatives

5 Surveys to Tenants

5.1 The Scrutiny Panel were keen to find out what the residents experience is of the Gardening Services. A sample of 100 residents was used with a good response. The Scrutiny Panel developed 18 questions that would give them the information that they required. These questions related to frequency of grass cutting, value for money, other work that Sharpe's are responsible for such as weeding, fly tipping and gritting.

5.2 There were other questions relating to complaints and complaint handling, provision of details of Gardening services e.g. what the Residents can expect from the service and if they are informed of any changes to the service and Housing Officer involvement.

5.3 Nearly all residents said they would like more grass cuts but were not prepared to pay for it, they also said that they did not feel they were getting value for money. Majority were not aware or did not know how often other services took place e.g. weeding. 60% of the returns to the survey said they had problems with fly tipping.

5.4 Most of the returns also said they did not think there was help with gritting. Residents were asked if they would be prepared to pay more in service charges for additional services. 70% said they would not. Most returns said they did know how to make a complaint however they had no reason to make a complaint.

5.5 The Scrutiny Panel concluded from this survey that more information on services from Sharpe's would be appreciated along with any changes to the service. Those residents spoken to in local areas to the Scrutiny Panel state that it is a good service and the job is well done.

6. Staff Interviews

6.1 The Scrutiny Panel's next stop was to interview staff of Sharpe's Garden Services. The Scrutiny Panel interviewed five members of staff.

6.2 What we concluded from the Interviews

- Sharpe's services are well organised, their staff are experienced, well organised and aware of their responsibilities. They are well trained in relation to mandatory training; other training that enhances their skills; training that keeps them up to date and; training that has to be refreshed.
- All agency staff have to be compliant and have had all mandatory training before being taken on as temporary workers. PPE is provided whilst operatives must provide their own boots and trousers.
- All staff are given a full day induction and agency staff are taken on for four weekly periods.
- There is a good relationship between emh homes Health and Safety department and Sharpe's. Updates are provided to Sharpe's on health and safety from emh Health and Safety department. There were examples of good practice in dealing with resident complaints. An example of this was a complaint from a resident about the length of the grass cut.
- Regular audit checks are done by Sharpe's Garden Services Management and not by emh homes staff.
- The Scrutiny Panel interviewed the General Manager and would like to congratulate David who manages all his responsibilities in an orderly manner, working closely with emh staff on Health and Safety. The Panel identified that David has a key role in making the organisation an effective and efficient one.

7. What we felt could be improved:

7.1 There are a few areas that the Scrutiny Panel thought could be improved and these will be reflected in the recommendations of this report.

- Non recording of any confrontations or abuse from residents to operatives whilst working out in the field.
- COSHH displayed internally
- The forty-day procedure for requests from residents for work to be done often leads into complaints because they are directed to wrong departments, delays within departments, this often escalates into a further 40 days being added by the time the situation reaches Sharpe's
- The reliance on one Maintenance Manager (The Scrutiny Panel felt that this was a concern).

8. In Conclusion:

- 8.1 This report by the Scrutiny Panel has met the purpose identified at the beginning of this report.
- 8.2 The Scrutiny Panel would like to congratulate Sharpe's on the systems that it has in place and the duty of care to those that it employs and agency staff.
- 8.3 The safe use of equipment has been clearly identified by the Scrutiny Panel, along with maintenance and the required staff training. The mix of staff with different skills is clearly identified by managers and supervisors for each job required and a good monitoring schedule of work is in place, albeit it being in white Board format at the time of this report.
- 8.4 There are clear plans to develop further the services going forward, which the Scrutiny Panel acknowledges is an exciting time for Sharpe's Senior Management Team.
- 8.5 The Scrutiny Panel would like to see somewhere within the systems, the compliments that Sharpe's receive for the work that the operatives do; perhaps they could be displayed and/or celebrated maybe in the Annual Report to residents or the echo.
- 8.6 The Scrutiny Panel concluded that a full investigation was not necessary, they were impressed with what had been found to date.
- 8.7 It is important that the Scrutiny Panel look positively on parts of the business that deserve to be celebrated, as well as addressing areas of the business that require improvement. It is the Scrutiny Panel's responsibility to acknowledge the excellent parts of the Business and highlight these to the Board Members, Directors, Senior Managers and Residents.
- 8.8 We extend our congratulations to all of Sharpe's operatives, their Directors, Senior Managers, Managers and Supervisors. Your systems and procedures, as well as your duty of care to your workforce we find excellent and one that is identified specifically through the survey to Residents.

9. Recommendations:

9.1 The Scrutiny Panel would like to recommend:

- **That the COSHH regulations are displayed internally.** *On cylinders is acceptable but these are disposed- you need to show some recognition elsewhere in the business.*
- **There appears no checking of the agencies that you use for staff.** *The Scrutiny Panel feel this should be done periodically.*
- **Resolve the 40 day issues with the Customer Service Team.** *Contact Dave Morris or Mari Hughes. This continuous situation leads to complaints being made; we would recommend that all complaints go to Sharpe's direct for them to deal with and sign post.*
- **Review the Gritting Procedures.** *Residents appear unsure who is responsible for the box and doing the gritting.*
- **That the Scrutiny Panel are regularly kept informed, at least four monthly about:** How you will address the communication issues with CSC and the progress of the integration of Communal Cleaning into the Service.

10. Acknowledgements:

10.1 The Scrutiny Panel would like to thank all of those that have supported this part Investigation

- The Quality and Standards Team
- The Staff of Sharpe's for their co-operation and time
- The operatives who willingly answered questions whilst out working
- Adrian Cheetham (Mentor for this Investigation)
- Residents who took part in the survey

10.2 Thank you to all of the Scrutiny Panel who gave extra time for this investigation:

Gill Leverton-Taylor Chair
Brian Carpenter Vice Chair
Terry Silverwood Panel Member
Terry Farrelly Panel Member
Amanda Boulter Panel Member
Shash Jivan Panel Member
Jim Marks Panel Member