



GGHT Customer Consultation Panel

Tuesday 29 November 2011

Orford Day Centre

Minutes

Attendance:	<p>Fred Butler (Chair), Peter Sutton, Joanne Sutton, Jean Stringer, Dot Thacker, Peter Thacker, Pauline Townson, Fran Murray, Sylvia Barcock, John Douglas, Derek Lightfoot, Doreen Sefton, Marie Smith, Carole Davies, Dave Balmer, Allen Bancroft, Dot Herbert, Jean Bullock, Lesley Earnshaw, Ann Marie Henderson, Brian Henderson, Paul Rusling, Stephanie Lee, Mick Rivington, Alf Clemo, Ray Powell, Jim Salt, Brian Whalley.</p> <p>GGHT: Peter Mercer, Tom Rowlands (Part), Alison Young (Part), James Doran, Carl Talbot-Davies, James Bacon, James Doran (part), Fiona Graham, Jacque Atherton, Charlie Martin.</p>
1. Apologies:	Lynda Booth, Karen Dyer, Katherine Zamfresco, Nick Zamfresco, Royston Willard

The meeting was chaired by Fred Butler.

Fran Murray and Sylvia Barcock declared an interest as GGHT Board Members and asked the panel to note they would not be voting.

		Action
2.	<p>Minutes of 27 September 2011</p> <p>Page 3 – F Butler advised asked for clarification on the ‘four points’ that would be incorporated within the revised Former Tenant Arrears Strategy. At the meeting on 26 July 2011 the panel had discussed the incorporation of the following four points for consideration within the Former Tenant Arrears Strategy:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deceased accounts – Should GGHT commence recovery on deceased accounts by e.g. a letter to the next of kin or estate executor, where known? 2. Debts under £75 are currently written off automatically. Should GGHT pursue them using an Experian check (assuming this is cost effective) and implement recovery where the debtor is found? 3. Older person in residential home – currently an automatic write off. Do we 	

	<p>consider a letter to the former tenant or relatives where we have alternative contact details?</p> <p>4. Prison – where the tenant serves a sentence again this is an automatic write off but should GGHT consider recovery via next of kin; former debtor upon release?</p> <p>The minutes were proved as a true and accurate record by F Murray, J Stringer, S Lee and C Davies.</p>	
	<p>Update on September Actions and Consultations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contractors ID Badges ACTION: J Stringer reported that contractors had visited properties in their own cars and without ID Badges. C Talbot Davies advised that this was not acceptable and that all contractors must wear proper uniform and show ID Badges before accessing a property. It was agreed that this issue will be followed up with Bramall. Update on action/response from James Doran: Bramall have issued their staff with new High-Vis Vests which have a slot for the ID badges in and been told that they must have ID and high-vis vests on at all times when on site. All contractors have had meetings with their staff to re-enforce this. • Capital Investment Programme Update - James Doran -: ACTION: D Balmer asked when the security package would move to Dallam. J Doran advised that he was not sure of the exact dates but would report back to the Panel. Update on action/response: The security package is in Dallam and started in Dallam in September the work is expected to be completed in January 2012. • Renewable Energy Update – Ian Robinson: ACTION: S Barcock suggested that the PV scheme continues to be highlighted in News and Views. C Talbot Davies agreed and proposed that maps are included to show areas that are eligible for PV installation. Update on action/response: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information planned for News & Views. • Due to recently announced potential changes in the Government financial support mechanism for PV installations we're not in a position to issue any maps at this stage. • PV pilot installation programme commenced 31 October 2011 • Programmed to complete 229 properties by 9 December 2011 • Pilot installations to date have been undertaken in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Longford area – Gough Avenue, Northway, Densham Avenue and ○ Bewsey area – Lilford Avenue, Molyneux Avenue, Holford Avenue, Reid Avenue. • Further locations are being considered after consultation with the electricity 	

	<p>District Network Supplier - Scottish Power</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter Mercer/Clair Phillips: ACTION: J Stringer reported that the employees working on the handyman service had arrived at a property to prepare a wall for decorating with no steamer. Update on action/response from C Phillips: A steamer is available for them to use but in the handypersons views they can cause the plaster to fall off the walls so they prefer not to use them. 	
<p>3.</p>	<p>Business Plan Priorities Update (Presented by Allen Barber – Director of Business Services)</p> <p>AB provided an update on GGHT's financial position, rent increase for 2012-13 and plans for investment based on the outcomes of the Board Away Day on 21/10/11. AB advised that no final decision on rent increases or investment will be made until early 2012 and a further update will be brought to the next CCP.</p> <p>AB highlighted the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ GGHT is in a good financial position. ❖ GGHT has a loan facility of £70million from Santander which will need to be repaid at a later date. ❖ The Offer Document states that GGHT will follow the Government Policy on rent increases. ❖ Increases under the Government's rents policy are linked to inflation as measured by the retail price index (RPI). ❖ The RPI in September was 5.6% and it is estimated that this will give an average increase for GGHT properties of around 7.10% ❖ Average rent will rise to around £71.95, an increase of £4.78 per week. ❖ 69% of tenants and 61% of rental incomes is from housing benefit and this would fund any increase in rents for those tenants in receipt of benefit. ❖ The Board were supportive of the proposal to charge target rent +5% on all void properties from April 2012. <p>PM advised that it was important to note that the rent increases are compliant with GGHT's 5 year rent guarantee as set out in the Offer Document. The increase would strengthen the Business Plan and enable GGHT to invest in options to benefit tenants.</p> <p>F Murray asked whether it was fair that tenants who were reallocated to void properties would have to pay more in rent. PM advised that tenants in under-occupied properties would pay more in running costs than if they rented smaller void properties. Under the proposed welfare reforms tenants under the age of 60 would live in under-occupied properties would have their housing benefit reduced.</p> <p>PM advised that private sector rent will increase by 20% in Warrington over the next two years as few people are able to afford a mortgage. Private landlords are becoming increasingly unwilling to give tenancies to tenants who receive</p>	

<p>Housing Benefit. This will put added pressure on social housing sector to house tenants. GGHT are working with WBC to deal with empty properties and buy back properties purchased under Right to Buy and bring them up to a lettable standard.</p> <p>AB advised that the Board approved that the investment of the £29million headroom into the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Bringing forward investment programme works – windows, central heating and bathrooms from years 4&5 to years 2-3 and bringing forward kitchen and bathroom works from years 6-10 to years 2-5 ❖ Underoccupancy incentives of £100k per annum for 5 years ❖ Buyback of RTB or private homes. ❖ GGHT Future job fund providing 25 work placement and training each year ❖ Furniture recycling Scheme ❖ Health Initiatives and partnership working with Primary Care Trusts and third sector ❖ Energy Efficiency actions to deliver the affordable warmth strategy ❖ Multi-Storey investment (subject to options appraisal) ❖ Replacement of flat roof properties with pitches roofs (subject to options appraisal) ❖ Retention of £4m of headroom capacity to provide new affordable homes. <p>AB advised that there are number of financial risks linked to welfare reform proposals and that, as result, headroom of £10million will be kept back as a contingency to cover the potential costs or reduced income due to these risks.</p> <p>A Clemo advised that the fly tipping and dog fouling have become key issues on estates. PM advised that this will be looked into and could perhaps be linked into the Future Jobs Fund.</p> <p>M Smith asked whether tenants would be able to purchase white goods under the furniture recycle scheme. PM advised that it is not envisaged that white goods could be purchased through the scheme.</p> <p>D Thacker asked whether tenants would have to pay charges for furniture received through the furniture recycle scheme. PM advised that this is currently being looked into. One option would be to provide tenants with vouchers to purchase furniture.</p> <p>M Smith asked whether energy efficiencies advice will be included in New and Views. PM advised this has been included as an item in the Winter edition of News and Views.</p> <p>D Thacker asked whether GGHT are looking to develop new multi-storey blocks. PM advised that GGHT is not looking to develop new blocks but to invest in and improve its existing multi-storey properties at Peninsula House and Kingsway House.</p>	<p>PM</p>
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	<p>C Davies asked whether the replacement of flat roofs included properties in Longford. AB advised that Longford will be included in the programme but that there are ongoing issues around how to approach the replacement of flat roofs on owner-occupier properties.</p> <p>R Powell asked whether the income received through the rent increase would be spent on developing affordable homes. PM advised that the higher rent will go back into the business plan and that a small amount of capital will be put aside for headroom if GGHT choose to develop in the future.</p> <p>Recommendations/Outcomes</p> <p>The CCP Panel noted the report</p>	
<p>4.</p>	<p>Capital Investment Update</p> <p>C Talbot-Davies provided an overview of progress made with the procurement and delivery of the capital investment programme.</p> <p>The following points were highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ The Security Package is progressing well with minimal disruption. ❖ The central heating project started in August and is progressing well. Up to 40 properties will have solar hot water system in Year 1. ❖ Backlog in in Aids and Adaptations is on target to be completed by December 2011 as planned. ❖ Recent recruitment has been successful and a new Gas Installation and Servicing Manager is now in post. The new staff member will manage the planned investment heating package and the servicing and maintenance contracts. ❖ Kitchen improvement work is being carried out by the in-house maintenance team. A new Planned Maintenance Manager is now in place and work is progressing well and is on target for the completion of the Year 1 works by March 2012 as planned. ❖ The fencing programme is being carried out by the in-house maintenance team and focuses on houses. The programme is behind schedule due to operational and resourcing issues linked to the Property Services restructure. ❖ Fencing will also form part of the castle walls project, but this work will not be carried out by the in-house team. The external contractor appointed to the delivery of the castle walls project will also undertake fencing work. <p>D Thacker asked what the 'local area blitz' involved. C Talbot-Davies advised that the term referred to site visits by members of the gas team and property services to properties that had not received a gas safety check.</p> <p>D Thacker advised that her neighbour had had tiles fitted into their kitchen and had to wait 6 weeks before the operative returned to complete the plastering. C Talbot-Davies advised that there has been delays between tiles being fitted</p>	<p>CTD</p>

	<p>and plastering work and agreed to follow up the query.</p> <p>D Balmer asked whether contractors recycled window panes that had been replaced. CTD advised that that this was indeed the case and that recycling replaced windows was a contractual requirement.</p> <p>Recommendations/Outcomes</p> <p>CCP noted the report.</p>	
5.	<p>Sanctions Linked to Investment Programme</p> <p>C Talbot-Davies provided the panel with an update on the proposals to link customer sanctions to the investment programme with a particular focus on the following tenancy breaches:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gas service overdue • No arrears payment plan in place • Serious ASB <p>C Talbot-Davies advised that tenants who are scheduled to receive programme work will be sent letters 6-9months in advanced. These letters will advise that tenants would risk jeopardizing their inclusion in the programme if their gas service is overdue, they do not have a payment plan in place, or they have committed serious acts of ASB.</p> <p>C Talbot-Davies advised that arrears may be linked to fuel costs and that tenants would be informed of the savings they would incur if they received new or serviced boiler. If tenants fail to respond to the letter and/or call outs from members of staff than any work they were scheduled to receive could be suspended.</p> <p>J Stringer asked whether tenants who were in breach of tenancies would be visited by staff. C Talbot-Davies advised that TLO's would visit tenants up until the cut-off date at which point decision would be made as to whether or not tenants would receive programmed work.</p> <p>C Talbot Davies advised that the sanctions would only apply to programmed works and non-urgent repairs.</p> <p>C Talbot-Davies provided an overview of the activity that GGHT would undertake to ensure tenants were aware of the sanctions that could be imposed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Investment programme letters – will include wording that that states customers jeopardise having investment work carried out if any of the above breaches are identified. ❖ Letters during programme at 6-9 months, 20 days and 7 days ❖ Complaint letters – will make particular reference to any tenancy 	

	<p>breaches as above.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ 'Investing in Neighbourhoods' – information pack / leaflets contain the same risk warning. ❖ Website and video / media – will also state the conditions that need to be met before having investment work carried out. ❖ Community events – specific reference will be made to sanctions that can be imposed if tenancy is breached. ❖ Energy / Fuel cost savings – will be highlighted in communication with customers. ❖ Only emergency repair work will be carried out if tenancy breaches are identified <p>P Sutton asked if more could be done to advise tenants on the need to check smoke detectors. C Talbot-Davies advised that contractors have set procedures that are followed with regards to installing and testing smoke detectors. Tests are conducted to ensure that the alarms function properly and include main/battery tests and the use of artificial smoke.</p> <p>P Sutton asked whether contractors maintained a record of the smoke tests and C Talbot-Davies advised that certificates of completed tests were kept on record.</p> <p>Recommendations/Outcomes</p> <p>The Panel approved the proposed sanctions and the measures GGHT will take to engage tenants who have breached their tenancy agreement.</p>	
<p>6.</p>	<p>GGHT Garden Service (Peter Mercer – Chief Executive)</p> <p>PM provided an overview of the new garden service contract which is currently provided by Sodexo. Sodexo's contract with GGHT is due to end on March 2012. Discussions for a new contract are ongoing and have included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Summary of tenant inspector activity and bi-annual satisfaction survey. ❖ Proposals for improving Sodexo's performance management ❖ Options for the new contract from April 2012 ❖ Potential impact of future welfare benefit changes <p>P Mercer advised that tenants currently pay a fixed charge of £7.36pw for the service. The Government's welfare reform proposals could potentially lead to a review of what service charges are covered by Housing Benefit. The worst case scenario could be that HB would no longer be paid for the garden service which would directly impact the viability of the service.</p> <p>Recommendations/Outcomes</p> <p>CCP endorsed GGHT's approach to the new garden service contract.</p>	
<p>7.</p>	<p>Older Persons Service</p>	

	<p>A Young provided the panel with an overview of the Older Person's Service including the areas covered by the service, applications for external funding and details of future events.</p> <p>The service covers the following key areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Gardening Service ❖ Income maximization ❖ Aids and adaptations ❖ Down-sizing- retirement living ❖ Energy Efficiency ❖ Access to Social Care ❖ Floating Support ❖ Handy Person Service ❖ Falls prevention ❖ Carecall <p>A Young advised that successful funding bids such as Get Digital have enabled GGHT to provide computer equipment to tenants at Sankey Manor sheltered accommodation scheme. GGHT had applied for lottery funding to tackle the issue of isolation amongst elderly tenants. Whilst the bid had been unsuccessful GGHT are looking to develop isolation schemes in partnership with WBC.</p> <p>Planned future events include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Computer training sessions at Warrington Collegiate ❖ Christmas Lunch at the Orford Day Centre ❖ Welfare Reforms (supporting people who will be most affected by the reforms) ❖ Retirement Living Campaign <p>A Clemo provided A Young with details of the Older Peoples Forum and suggested that the forum could be a useful resource for future partnership work.</p>	
	<p><i>Comfort Break</i></p>	
<p>8.</p>	<p>Recharge Policy (Tom Rowlands – Business Manager, Income Management)</p> <p>T Rowlands presented a report that outlined the specific objectives of the Tenancy Recharge Policy and areas that customers would be liable to charges.</p> <p>T Rowlands advised that tenants are responsible for work that may be required when moving out of their home in order to bring it up to an acceptable standard.</p> <p>J Bullock asked whether tenants would be charged in the event that a communal drain was blocked. T Rowlands advised he was not sure and that</p>	

	<p>clarification should be provided within the technical inspection report. T Rowlands agreed to follow the query up and feedback to Panel.</p> <p>Recommendations/Outcomes</p> <p>The Panel noted the report.</p>	TR
9.	<p>Direct Debit Balances on Rent Statements (Verbal Update) – Tom Rowlands</p> <p>T Rowlands provided the Panel with an overview of plans to remove Direct Debit balances from rent statements. Rent statements are sent out to tenants prior to GGHT receiving their monthly Direct Debit payments. For this reason the Debit shows as an outstanding balance on the rent statement and may lead tenants to think that they are in arrears.</p> <p>T Rowland circulated an example rent statement to the panel which had had all personal details removed.</p> <p>D Thacker asked whether there was a risk that tenants who use Direct Debit would forfeit their two week's free rent. T Rowlands advised that this would not happen as the payment system recognized that tenants had a payment agreement with GGHT.</p> <p>T Rowlands advised that tenants are encouraged to pay by Direct Debit as it is cost effective for both tenants and GGHT.</p> <p>Recommendation/Outcome</p> <p>The Panel agreed to remove the balances from quarterly rent account statements and to add a footnote which indicates the rent accounts expected balance by financial year end. The closing rent balance will be provided in the rent statement published at year-end.</p>	
10.	<p>Stamp Out Stigma (Verbal Update) – (Charlie Martin, Board Support and Development Officer)</p> <p>CM explained that November in GGHT is Mental Health & Learning Disability Month. This meant that through November GGHT has raised awareness of issues faced by people with ill mental health or learning disabilities.</p> <p>C Davies asked whether Mental Health issues could be considered alongside Learning Disabilities as people might have a mental illness that doesn't necessarily affect their ability to learn. The Panel also requested further clarification on the type of impairment that would constitute a learning disability. CM advised that he will forward the query to Cam Kinsella for clarification.</p> <p>Panel Members were advised that any queries concerning mental health should be directed to Cam Kinsella, Equality and Diversity Officer on 0800 25 2627.</p>	CM

11.	<p>Scrutiny Panel/Board Recruitment Update (Charlie Martin, Board Support and Development Officer)</p> <p>CM advised that interviews for the Scrutiny Panel had taken place on Wednesday 23 November and Stephanie Lee and Lynda Booth had been recruited Panel.</p> <p>Interviews for tenant Board Members will be held on Thursday 8 December. The interview Panel will consist of three GGHT tenant, Peter Mercer and Charlie Martin.</p>	
12.	<p>Shareholding Membership - Charlie Martin</p> <p>CM informed the Panel that Shareholding Membership is in the process of being rolled out to GGHT tenants who choose to apply. Shareholding Membership will enable tenants to influence the direction of GGHT and to hold the organization to account. Tenants interested in Membership were asked to contact Charlie Martin on 0800 25 2627 or email Charlie.martin@gght.org.uk</p>	
	<p>Items for Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welfare Reform Bill Update • National Housing Strategy • Social Housing Regulation • Happy First Birthday GGHT! 	
	<p>A.O.B</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free training flyer distributed and promoted. • Invites to involved customers Christmas thank you lunch distributed. • 2012 diaries distributed. • F Graham provided an overview of Smarterbuys – a group discount deal scheme designed specifically for social housing tenants. The scheme will enable GGHT tenants to purchase white goods, furniture and electrical products at discount prices with affordable finance options through credit union at no cost to GGHT. The Panel advised that they were happy for the scheme to be publicized to GGHT Tenants. 	
	<p>Next Meeting: Tuesday 24 January 2012, 10am, The Gateway Venue: The Gateway, Conference Centre</p>	