



City Homes
Communal Window Cleaning Service

Report

8 October 2013

Introduction

The role of the Housing regulation Panel is to monitor the standards of Housing Services to ensure they are quality services which give value for money. It monitored the Communal Window Cleaning Service Standard during the period December 2012 to September 2013.

City Homes provides the Communal Window Cleaning Service which is delivered by an external contractor. The current contract commenced in 2011. In Autumn 2010, HRP was invited to send two representatives to two information meetings at an early stage in the contract procurement process.

The Service Standard is described in the Window Cleaning Contract Specification which City Homes made available to HRP.

Monitoring

Prior to commencing its monitoring of the service, HRP had two briefing meetings in December 2012 and January 2013 both attended by a City Homes Housing Officer and the Contractor's Head of Operations.

Information was collected from the following sources:

- City Homes, including site visits and follow-up meetings with Officers when requested by HRP.
- The Contractor's Head of Operations (until he left the Company in February 2013).
- Estate Champion.
- ILS Maintenance Manager.
- Business Manager and Principal Accountant.
- Finance Manager and Accountant.
- Business Development Officer.
- Housing Regulation Panel site inspections.

Co-ordinating the programme of site inspections presented HRP with a logistical challenge. The service is delivered by an external contractor, so all HRP communication about the cleaning schedules was through City Homes. HRP recognises that this increased the work load of the City Homes Housing Officer who was HRP's main contact. The cleaning is scheduled every four months in specific weeks but the contract allows for work to be completed within a maximum of 14 days either side of the published date which presented a further challenge to co-ordinating the programme of HRP

site inspections. The Housing Officer liaised with the Contractor who agreed for the Cleaning Supervisor to send text messages to the HRP Chair confirming the locations where cleaning was complete. In fairness to the Contractor, HRP carried out its site inspections during the cleaning cycle scheduled from May to August 2013, on the day after the cleaning was done at each location. HRP carried out the site inspections working in pairs. It inspected the standard of window cleaning (in flat blocks randomly selected) at 11 South General Locations, 11 North General Locations. In all, the cleaning standard was inspected at 54 flat blocks. HRP also inspected the cleaning standard at 5 Sheltered Schemes.

Evaluation

- There is little information available to tenants and leaseholders about the Communal Window Cleaning Service Standard. There is a very brief reference on the council's website in the section "who-is-responsible-for-what".
- The standard of service delivery generally does not comply with the specification and does not give value for money. At many of the sites visited, the glass was not left free from marks, smears and streaks, window frames and cills remained dirty and cobwebs were not removed. HRP concluded from the evidence gathered during its site inspections that the service standard is generally poor city wide. The only areas where the cleaning fully complied with the specification were the windows at the entrances and in the reception areas of Sheltered Schemes.
- If the standard of service delivery complied with the specification, it would give value for money.
- Invoices are not being sent consistently to the named officers for signing to authorise payment.
- In some locations, obstructions left by residents, adjacent to glazing prevents proper cleaning of windows.
- One of the main weaknesses is the level of communication between the Contractor and City Homes which makes it difficult for City Homes to carry out effective monitoring.
- The Window Cleaning Contract Specification states that the council may carry out checks to ensure that the specification is being met at any time. This may involve site checks as well as interviews with the contract manager or contractor staff as appropriate. City Homes confirmed that they mainly rely on residents to monitor the cleaning

of windows as they do not have the capacity to inspect all the areas after each window clean. Where caretakers are in place they will obviously do this. In addition there is feedback from resident inspectors. The Sheltered Schemes are slightly easier to monitor as they have staff in and out of the buildings all the time. Negative feedback is always acted upon.

- No specific performance information (benchmarking, complaints information etc.) is kept centrally for the service. There is minimal local performance data kept by City Homes.

Recommendations for improvement

- Details of the Communal Window Cleaning Service Standard and the Cleaning Schedules made available to tenants and leaseholders. This could be achieved by adding more information to the section already on the Council's web site, including details in the new tenants pack if the property receives the service and publicising the information in "Open Door".
- Liaise with the contractor to agree a mechanism for more effective communication so that service delivery issues can be addressed.
- Although City Homes has stated that it does not have the capacity to monitor the service delivery standard after each window clean, there is a need for effective monitoring to ensure the cleaning is delivered to the standard described in the specification. This could be achieved setting up a simple system for Caretakers, Independent Living Service staff and Housing Officers to report window cleaning issues when they are on site. To do this effectively they need to know the service standard and the cleaning schedules.
- Monitoring the service provides an opportunity for resident involvement and could be the main way the service is monitored. The grass roots resident involvement strategy should include facilitating residents, resident inspectors and resident representatives to monitor the service.
- Ensure invoices are sent to the named officers for signing to authorise payment.
- A system for recording the service performance information needs to be developed. Some examples of feedback about the service standard and actions taken made available to HRP.
- The issue of residents leaving obstructions adjacent to glazing so it cannot be cleaned properly needs to be addressed.

- For the future, consider revising the frequency of the cleaning of communal windows to twice a year. One cycle between February and April and the second cycle between August and October. When HRP did its inspections it became apparent that window cleaning between November and January was severely disrupted by winter weather and sickness of the contractor's window cleaning operatives.

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