

## **Tenants' Voice – Improving Services group Annual Review**

**2024/25**

We are delighted to have a group of tenants who volunteer their time to look at the services we provide from a tenants' perspective. These tenants make up our Tenants' Voice – Improving Services group.

The Tenants' Voice – Improving Services group carries out a vital role to make sure:

- our services meet the needs of our tenants
- we provide good customer service
- we meet the standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing

The group has helped to create this review of their activities during 2024/25. We hope this roundup will help others to understand the valuable role our tenants play in supporting the Group to develop and improve services to meet the needs and expectations of fellow tenants.

Here are what some of our tenants told us about why they are involved.

Elaine: "I like being involved in the scrutiny reviews as they support Progress in being one of the best housing associations in the country. More importantly, they improve the standard of our homes and environments, leading to a better overall experience for us as tenants."

Michelle: "Initially I got involved to get out and meet people in a safe environment, following a period of isolation. I am very pleased I did, as at all the different meetings I have been to, I have been welcomed and made to feel so comfortable by Progress colleagues and tenants. It has helped a great deal with my anxiety, as I struggle with unfamiliar environments. I feel so much better in myself and proud to be able to help shape and mould what happens in my community."

David: "Over the past 30 years, it has been proven beyond doubt that tenant involvement has led to continually improving services for all tenants, using invaluable first-hand experience. I believe that's reason enough to get involved."

Sheena McDonnell, our Group Chair, says: "The contributions of our tenants and the wealth of experience they bring are invaluable. Their insights, perspectives, and active participation ensure we continually improve our services. By working together, we create a more responsive, inclusive and effective service environment. Their dedication helps drive our commitment to excellence, making sure we serve the people who matter most – our tenants."

### **Who can be involved?**

A warm welcome is given to all our tenants who would like to join the Tenant's Voice – Improving Services group. No formal qualification, previous experience or training are needed. As a tenant, you will have the only qualification needed – being a tenant.

The Customer Voice Team and your fellow tenants will help you and guide you through the process.

We also provide support from independent mentors. They also help tenants by providing guidance and support to make sure:

- the right questions are asked
- the right information is provided
- recommendations are reasonable and will make a positive change for tenants and the service

### **Making a difference**

Between April 2024 and March 2025, the Tenants' Voice – Improving Services group carried out reviews on the following service areas:

- Group communication
- aids and adaptations
- communal areas
- involving tenants in the rent and service charge review

These reviews have made a real difference to the service provided to tenants. The reviews made a whopping 28 recommendations.

Here is the report regarding the service area reviews from the tenant members of the Tenants' Voice – Improving Services group:

### **Communication**

We decided to carry out a review of communication, as this is an issue highlighted in most of the reviews we carry out.

We decided to focus our review on:

- the guiding principles for good communications
- how tenants have been involved in developing these principles
- how strategies for improving communications will be embedded across the organisation, and the time frame for this
- what measures Progress Housing Group will use to identify where improvement has been made

To carry out the review we:

- received a briefing from the head of customer experience and the Marketing and Communication Team
- reviewed the Customer Access Strategy
- reviewed the customer service style, RAMP (**R**esolve issues, **A**dapt our service, **M**ake it easy, **P**roactive communication)
- reviewed the brand guidelines, including tone of voice and accessibility

We found that the following areas were working well:

- key communication issues have already been identified and are being addressed by the Group
- we support the Customer Access Strategy and RAMP, the customer service style

- we feel that the action plan within the Customer Access Strategy will improve communication with tenants
- feedback from tenants via a Tenants' Talk has informed the Customer Access Strategy and the customer service style, RAMP

We also made six recommendations on how the approach to communication could be improved further.

Since completing the review, one recommendation has been implemented with five being progressed.

We appreciate that due to the nature of the recommendations, it is going to take some time to see the benefits of the review.

Neil Bergin-Faragher, Head of Customer Experience, told us why he valued the review carried out by tenants.

"It was such a great opportunity to talk to our Tenants' Voice – Improving Services group about how we can improve communication with our tenants and customers. It is such a hot topic at the moment as we hear from our tenants through the Tenant Satisfaction Measure surveys, other transactional surveys, complaints and various face to face events and activities, that communication is something we can get better at.

We're committed to delivering against the six recommendations made by the Tenants' Voice – Improving Services group and have ensured this is reflected in a number of projects and initiatives such as RAMP, the Group's customer service style, over the coming months."

### **Aids and adaptations**

We carried out a review of the aids and adaptations service, as this is a key service to help tenants maintain independence, as well as supporting tenants with specific needs.

We decided to focus our review on:

- how tenants are made aware of the service
- the communication methods in place for tenants
- how tenant expectations are managed
- how tenants provide feedback on the service and how this is used to improve it

To carry out the review we:

- received a briefing from colleagues on the aids and adaptations service
- reviewed the policy and procedure with a focus on tenant communication
- reviewed letters that are sent to tenants
- reviewed the information available on the website
- reviewed how tenant satisfaction is obtained and used

We found that the following areas were working well:

- the Group is quick to respond and communicate well when colleagues have the information they need
- satisfaction levels are high for the service

We also made nine recommendations on how the service could be improved further.

Since completing the review, eight recommendations have been implemented, with one being progressed.

We have been particularly impressed by the proactive way the Aids and Adaptation Team has picked up and actioned the recommendations.

The review has seen changes introduced that have:

- improved communication, making sure clear timescales for works to be carried out are included
- improved communication provided on the Group's website and leaflets, this includes the first steps to take
- provided a clear step by step guide to the aids and adaptation process for small and larger adaptations
- improved the satisfaction survey, which now includes a question on communication and is sent to all tenants receiving the service
- introduced a visit some weeks after the works are complete, this will check that the works have met the needs of the tenant and could highlight further needs

Carly Mustoe, our Head of Housing Operations at RWP, told us: "Supporting our tenants through tailored aid and adaptations is not just about accessibility, but enabling independence. Having our tenants involved in improving our processes helps us better understand how to best deliver our services."

### **Communal areas**

We decided to carry out a review of the communal areas as we could see low satisfaction levels in the performance information the Group provides. This showed satisfaction at 66% for Progress Housing Group and 80% for RWP for the question "that communal areas are kept clean and well maintained".

We decided to focus our review on:

- cleaning and window cleaning services provided
- the service provided to tenants living in general let and independent living homes
- the level of service delivered
- the information given to tenants about the service provided

To carry out the review, we:

- had an initial briefing session with Kirsty Ellis, Head of Operations (Homes and Opportunities), who explained the service and how it is provided to tenants

- looked at performance information in the Tenant Satisfaction Measures for 2023/24
- looked at information telling tenants about the service
- visited three general let blocks and one independent living scheme
- looked at information provided on the website of three other housing providers

We found that the following areas were working well:

- the detail of what is included in the cleaning service
- the independent living schemes are kept very clean
- sign-off sheets are used to show when the cleaning was done
- posters on communal noticeboards telling tenants about the cleaning service
- information telling tenants about the cleaning service was clear and easy to understand

We also made nine recommendations on how the communal areas could be improved further. Whilst none of the recommendations are complete yet, work is progressing on each of the actions.

Once introduced, these will see improvements to:

- information provided to tenants in different ways, making sure this is clear and easy to understand what service should be provided
- making sure all communal areas have a noticeboard showing details of the cleaning service
- how tenants can report when something has gone wrong with the service
- same cleaning standard across all communal areas
- telling tenants what has happened after an issue has been reported

Kirsty Ellis, Head of Operations (Homes and Opportunities), told us why she valued the review carried out by tenants: “Through working together, this process has allowed us to understand our tenants’ needs better, work towards improving satisfaction and ensuring our services are both effective and responsive.”

### **Involving tenants in the rent and service charge review**

We carried out a review of the way tenants are involved in the rent and service charge review. This was to make sure tenants have an opportunity to have their voice heard in this important process and build on the success of previous involvement activities.

We decided to focus our review on:

- what information is provided to tenants
- how information is provided to tenants
- how tenants are involved in the review process

To carry out the review we:

- had an initial briefing session with David Roden, Financial Services Director and Sarah Heaton, Finance Business Partner - Rents
- looked at information that had been provided to tenants in last year's rent and service charge sessions
- looked at information provided to tenants in the rent and service charge review video
- agreed three questions to be asked to wider groups of tenants
- looked at information provided on the Group's website
- looked at information provided on three other housing providers' websites

We found that the following areas were working well:

- the information on the website is clear and helpful
- the information in the video is clear and easy to understand

We also made four recommendations on how the involvement process could be improved. Since completing the review, all four recommendations have been implemented leading to the following improvements:

- clear branding of information sessions
- clear and easy to understand information
- information telling tenants what their rent and service charges are used to pay for
- a different way of meeting tenants. This included attending community centres and activities to meet tenants and discuss their thoughts on the proposed rent and service charges

Sarah Heaton, Finance Business Partner – Rents, told us why she valued the review carried out by tenants: “It was really beneficial to get tenant feedback to ensure the information that we provide to tenants is relevant and easy to understand.

Following the review, we were able to present the information in a different format and reach more tenants as a result.”

### **What we are doing next**

Over the next year, we will be carrying out a scrutiny review of our supported living part of the business, RWP's engagement with tenants.

### **If you want to find out more**

If you would like to find out more about the work of the Tenants' Voice – Improving Services group, including how you can get involved or suggest a service for a scrutiny review, please visit [www.progressgroup.org.uk/scrutiny](http://www.progressgroup.org.uk/scrutiny) or contact Diane from the Customer Voice Team at [community@progressgroup.org.uk](mailto:community@progressgroup.org.uk) or phone 07870 900991.