

Bield Improvement Group

Scrutiny Report

'The Life of a Repair'

May 2018



Foreword

Introducing the Bield Improvement Group

Selecting our scrutiny activity

The Journey of a Repair

Findings & Recommendations

Next Steps

Appendix 1 – BIG membership

Foreword

Welcome to Bield Improvement Group's (BIG) second scrutiny report. Over the last six months the group has been reviewing the repairs reporting process operated by Bield Housing & Care.

BIG was launched in 2016 and has been working with Bield Housing & Care to make a difference to our landlord services. We would like to take the opportunity to thank the staff of Bield Housing & Care for participating in this worthwhile scrutiny review. Particular thanks are due to Chris McShane, Carol McSkimming, Heather Thomson, Steven Rankine, Maria Martin, Linda Adam, Peter MacKay, Sharon Wightman and Morag Coutts.

Thanks also, to the Development Managers and the tenants who took the time to respond to our survey and meet with group members to answer questions and share their thoughts and ideas. Last but not least we would like to thank the BIG members for their voluntary time and commitment they have dedicated to this exercise.

Introducing the Bield Improvement Group

In planning for the Scottish Social Housing Charter Bield Housing & Care, in discussion with tenants, agreed to develop a body which would have a role in scrutinising the services that they provided. Bield Housing & Care carried out a recruitment exercise early in 2016 and held the first session in March 2016.

The group undertook a training programme provided by the Tenants Information Service which covered the following key areas:

- The Scottish Social Housing Charter and the new regulatory requirements
- The role of tenants in the self-assessment process
- The role and remit of a tenant scrutiny group
- Practice examples of how tenants are involved in scrutiny across Scotland
- How to develop a terms of reference and code of conduct
- The range of scrutiny activities that can be used to assess services.

At the end of the training programme spanning two sessions BIG was developed. Membership has changed over the course of the 2 scrutiny exercises, however there were 13 members of BIG at the outset of the second scrutiny exercise and a list is included in Appendix 1.

The main role of BIG is:

- To work on behalf of Bield Housing & Care tenants and service users to ensure that landlord services are delivered to a high standard

- To ensure that tenants and service users are at the heart of the business of Bield Housing & Care
- To work with Bield Housing & Care to continually review and improve landlord services
- To make recommendations to the Senior Management Team and the Management Board on how landlord services can be improved
- To independently review the performance and delivery of landlord services by Bield Housing & Care
- To take account of tenant satisfaction, and value for money for tenants and service users.

Our work is based on the following core standards:

- Being accountable to tenants and service users
- Being transparent
- Reflecting the needs and aspirations of tenants and service users
- Respecting the decision making role of the board
- Making recommendations based on robust evidence.

Once the group was formally established we received further training and support from the Tenants Information Service throughout the scrutiny activity. Training sessions were delivered on:

- Understanding the Charter
- The Annual Return on the Charter
- How to understand performance data and benchmarking.

As part of our initial training programme we were grateful to tenants from East Ayrshire Tenants and Residents Federation who came to speak to us, and talk us through their tenant scrutiny journey.

Throughout the process Chris McShane was on hand to respond to queries from the group, and to organise appropriate speakers.

Selecting our second scrutiny activity

BIG were delighted with the positive reaction to the recommendations that were developed as part of our first scrutiny exercise: Ending your Tenancy, and we were keen to move on to the next scrutiny activity.

After an evaluation of the first exercise and a consideration of some of the lessons that we learned we gathered the following information to assist us in selecting the next area for scrutiny:

- Personal views of tenants
- Performance information

- Views of the landlord
- Complaints information
- Regulatory concerns

After considering the above, and reviewing some of the topics that had been identified as possible subjects for the first scrutiny exercise, the group agreed that they would like to review the service area of repairs, focusing specifically on the ‘lifetime of a repair’ following the journey from reporting to completion. After some discussion, the group agreed they would **not** look at procurement of contractors or repair quality as part of this exercise.

The Lifetime of a Repair

Once we had agreed our topic, we once again worked with the Tenants Information Service to develop an action plan which would guide us through the scrutiny process. This action plan included the following scrutiny activities:

- Review of relevant legislation
- Review of publicity material and communications from Bield Housing & Care relating to the repairs service
- Review of policies and procedures used by Bield Housing & Care
- Review of policies and procedures used by other landlords
- Review of performance information presented by Bield Housing & Care
- Review of complaints received in relation to the service area
- Shadowing Development Managers and Repairs Staff
- Mystery shopping
- Survey of Development Managers.
- Survey of tenants to find out what they think about the service currently provided.

Over the course of six months we met monthly to work through the survey activities identified above, and learned a great deal about how the service operates. We are grateful to the staff who took the time to speak to us, and to prepare information for us.

Findings and Recommendations

What we did	What we found out
Reviewed requirements of Scottish Social Housing Charter in relation to Outcome 5: Repairs, maintenance and improvements.	Landlords must ensure tenants’ homes are well maintained, with repairs and improvements carried out when required, and tenants are given reasonable choices about when work is done.

<p>Reviewed Bield's policy and procedure documents and all repairs literature published in hardcopy and available on-line.</p>	<p>The current policy documents and procedure notes are lengthy and not designed to be accessible for tenants.</p> <p>The information in the handbook is accurate and up-to date but limited in content.</p> <p>The website provides useful information but is difficult to navigate and doesn't include an on-line reporting option.</p>
<p>Reviewed the existing repairs works order.</p>	<p>We discovered that the works order is largely a record that the contractor turned up to do the repair. It doesn't record quality, or provide tenants the opportunity to request further action where they are not satisfied.</p>
<p>Investigated the current ways in which tenants can access the repairs service.</p>	<p>Depending on the type of development tenants live in they either report repairs directly via phone or email, report repairs to their development manager, or pull their cord in an emergency.</p> <p>Tenants living in developments with Development Managers on-site don't have the option to report repairs directly.</p>
<p>Explored the approaches used by other landlords in relation to providing repairs information and the repairs reporting system.</p>	<p>We identified some good examples of repairs literature/guides, and we established that on-line information can be made readily available and that a range of on-line reporting tools are in operation.</p>
<p>Met with Development Managers to discuss how they report/progress repairs and identify any issues they would like to record.</p>	<p>We found out more about the current process and the ways in which Development Managers support tenants to deal with repairs.</p>
<p>Met with repairs staff on 3 separate occasions to clarify issues that had been uncovered as part of the review process.</p>	<p>We clarified and focused the action plan.</p> <p>We got more information about the repairs process and how the Bield systems operate.</p> <p>We explored some of our early recommendations discussing feasibility and appropriateness.</p>

<p>Shadowed repairs staff receiving calls/emails at the repairs office in Glasgow.</p>	<p>We discovered a lot more about the repairs process and in particular it was very clear that the repairs staff work extremely hard.</p> <p>The section is under-staffed, and staff were unable to pause for breaks during the time they were being observed.</p> <p>Staff were clearly very knowledgeable and very thorough, asking questions to ensure they had all the information to process the repair.</p>
<p>Prepared an experience-based case study – reporting an actual repair and feeding back to the group on the outcome.</p>	<p>There was a breakdown in communication and the repair was not logged with the repairs team until it was reported by the tenant for a second time.</p>
<p>Prepared and circulated a survey for development managers.</p>	<p>Development Managers identified a number of challenges and areas that might usefully be improved that have been reflected in the recommendations set out below.</p>
<p>Prepared and circulated a survey for interested tenants.</p>	<p>Tenants are generally quite happy with the repairs service and are clear about how to report repairs.</p>

Following consideration of the above information, and discussions amongst the group we noted the following recommendations. These have been grouped into themes:

(i) **Policies & Procedures:**

<p>Recommendation</p> <p>Bield should update the repairs policy and associated procedure notes to ensure it is clear and easy to read and can be made available to residents upon request.</p> <p>The documents should be set out using plain English and accessible formatting and Bield should ensure that they are up kept up to date and reflect legislation and good practice.</p>
<p>Reasoning</p> <p>Group members felt that the current policy and procedure notes were difficult to read and included a lot of padding and jargon.</p>

The survey evidence suggests that there is a degree of variation in repairs policy knowledge amongst Development Managers and an easy to access version might usefully form part of employees' induction and/development training.

Recommendation

Bield should provide all Development Managers with a list of re-chargeable repairs and the cost of each of these so that tenants can be advised when reporting such repairs.

This could usefully include on the reverse a list of 'approved tradesman', 'handy man' services or care & repair projects in the local area that tenants can contact.

Reasoning

The survey of the Development Managers indicated some variation in levels of knowledge about re-chargeable repairs and the cost of these. A number of respondents requested a list that they could show tenants to help them organise such repairs and to help resolve disputes.

(ii) Staff Recruitment, training and development:

Recommendation

Bield should ensure all staff involved in the repairs process, including the Development Managers where they are responsible for reporting repairs, receive comprehensive training and relevant development opportunities from appropriately qualified personnel to ensure a consistent, standardised service is offered to Bield residents regardless of which development they live in.

Reasoning

The survey feedback and the experiences of group members suggests that there are variations in both the level of knowledge about aspects of the repairs services amongst development managers and the level of service in relation to repairs reporting provided to residents.

(iii) Repairs Information and Advice:

Recommendation

Bield should produce a repairs handbook that clearly sets out all the information about the repairs service – how to report, categories, responsibilities, timescales.

This could usefully include emergency information – e.g. what to do if you have a leak, smell gas, have a power cut etc.

This should be issued at the tenancy sign-up stage and could usefully be part of a 'walk round' service – where a Development Manager or Housing Officer shows the tenant round their new property and shows them how everything works and explains all the processes in relation to repairs and other services.

The group recognised that the development of the design and content of such a guide fell outwith the remit of the current scrutiny exercise, however we considered a number of guides produced by other landlords and would highlight GHA's as a particularly good example that delivers information in a clear, easy to understand format.

Further, the group would recommend that tenants are recruited as part of a working group to design the guide if this recommendation is taken forward.

Reasoning

The current tenant's handbook has limited information about repairs. Given repairs is such an important issue for tenants, the group suggests that a separate guide would be useful and would provide a single point of reference for tenants looking for information and advice about repairs. It could also provide information about local handyman or care & repair services to help with tasks for which the tenant is responsible.

Respondents to the Development Manager survey indicated that there are occasions where tenants don't agree with the categorisation of their repair – a clear section in the handbook explaining what category the most common repairs fall into would help avoid confusion and conflict.

Recommendation

Bield should update and improve their website to ensure that information about repairs is readily available and easy to access. A button on the website home page that takes the user directly to the repairs page(s) would be the most user-friendly option.

An electronic version of the repairs handbook could usefully form the repairs pages online to ensure consistency and allow for easier updating.

Reasoning

When reviewing Bield's website we discovered that users currently need to use the search function to find information about repairs. The other landlord websites that we reviewed all had repairs clearly signposted on the home page and the information was a lot easier to access as a consequence.

(iv) Repairs Reporting and Updates

Recommendation

The option to report repairs directly should be introduced for all tenants. Direct reporting would be one of a range of options available to tenants, who would still be able to report via the Development Manager where preferred.

Reasoning

Development Managers play an important role in supporting tenants with issues such as repairs. The survey evidence demonstrated that Development Managers encounter individuals who need extra help and support to report repairs and that they work with family members or carers where necessary to ensure this support is available.

However, where tenants are willing and able, reporting repairs directly would remove a layer from the process, and allow tenants the independence and flexibility to report repairs and make follow up queries how and when it suits them.

Recommendation

The option to report repairs on-line should be introduced and should be delivered as part of a wider review and update of the repairs website to include a 'report a repair' link.

This could be readily linked to the 'Silver Surfers' programme to provide support and training for those keen to report repairs on-line.

The 'report a repair' link could be used by tenants - using a pc, tablet or smartphone in their own home; a pc in the development lounge or Development Manager's office – or by Development Managers, when they are reporting repairs for tenants.

Reasoning

On-line services are increasingly more widespread and while current tenants might not be familiar or confident with digital technology, future tenants increasingly will be.

A number of Development Managers responding to the survey indicated that they would find it useful if they could record repairs directly and an on-line reporting tool would allow for this.

The Bield 'Silver Surfer' programme reflects Bield's commitment to supporting tenants develop digital skills and moving to a more digital repairs system would further reflect this commitment.

Recommendation

A diagnostic tool should be developed to help residents and staff identify exactly what repair is required.

The tool could be produced in the repairs booklet and a copy kept in Development Managers' offices to help managers work with tenants to clarify the actual repair required in cases where there is confusion about the repair.

An interactive diagnostic tool would usefully support on-line repairs reporting.

Reasoning

During the shadowing exercise we observed repairs staff making use of the current diagnostic tool and they agreed that if it was available at the reporting side it could improve the accuracy of reported repairs and prevent the need for call-backs to get more information or for repairs needing to be logged again after the contractor visits and discovers a different repair is required.

The survey of Development Managers suggested that contractors often arrive to undertake repairs with the wrong/no equipment. More accuracy at the reporting stage would help ensure contractors arrive prepared for the required repair.

Recommendation

The Development Managers should be able to access the repairs system to check progress on a repair and should be able to contact contractors directly to follow-up if they haven't arrived or where there is a problem.

Reasoning

The observation of the repairs team demonstrated that they were extremely busy and measures that reduce the volume of calls they receive would be welcomed.

The survey of Development Managers also indicated that a number of them would find this useful as they can find it difficult to get through to the repairs team in the busy periods.

A direct link between Development Managers and local contractors would mean one less layer in the repairs process, improving efficiency and saving time.

Recommendation

Bield should introduce an appointment system for all repairs other than those classed as an emergency. Appointments could be agreed at the time of reporting and contractors could usefully get in touch with tenants – on the day or night before

- to confirm that they will be attending at the given time or make changes to the arrangements where required.

Reasoning

Several members of staff in the survey highlighted that contractors often turn up without arrangement and this can often mean the tenant is not home leading to a wasted visit.

Having an appointment means that tenants can arrange for the work to be done at a time that suits them and they can ensure that they are at home. This would deliver a more customer-focussed and more efficient repairs service.

(v) Quality control and tenant satisfaction

Recommendation

The existing works order should be re-designed to clarify its purpose. The current system of posting all works orders out and posting them back is costly and could be replaced with an email/scan process or an on-line system.

A completion notice should be introduced that would be completed by the development manager, where applicable, after they have visited the property and been satisfied that the work has been completed.

A satisfaction survey should be introduced allowing the tenant to confirm that they are happy with the work and to request further action where they are not. Again, this could be done using email or texting services to save the cost and hassle of postage. The system should be responsive and trigger further action, it should not just be used for statistical purposes or performance measuring.

Reasoning

The current works order completion process is time consuming and the comments/satisfaction section is used only for the purposes of data collection and creation of monitoring statistics.

The survey of development managers suggested that not all works orders are completed and returned by tenants and there are cases where they sign it and return it themselves.

The current system isn't responsive and doesn't include a 'quality control' element that might be introduced if the repair wasn't recorded as complete and the contractor paid until the completion notice was signed off by the development manager.

Next Steps

This report will be shared with the Senior Management Team, and the Performance and Audit Committee within Bield Housing. We will also produce a summary version which we will make available for tenants and other customers of Bield Housing. We would welcome the opportunity to prepare an article for inclusion in the Bield tenants' newsletter.

We will expect Bield Housing & Care to prepare, and share with us, an action plan which will outline how they will implement our recommendations where they are accepted, providing clear timescales. Where recommendations are not accepted we expect Bield to provide clear reasons why not, and explain how they will address the concerns we have expressed.

We will expect Bield to provide us with quarterly update reports on their progress at implementing the agreed action plan.

We will undertake a review of this scrutiny activity, so that we can apply lessons learned to our future work.

We will be looking to identify future service areas for scrutiny, and look forward to continuing in our role.

Appendix 1 – Current BIG membership

Peter Hanson Paton
Rosemary Ann Clarke
Alastair Kerr
Moyra Blackie
Alice Bayne
Alexander Fraser
Bill Hunt
Edith Chesney
John Thompson
Myra Stevenson
Sheila Hull
Marie Barratt
Tony Keyte