

Items from North Area Residents meeting held on Thursday 21st September 2017

1. Housing customer services phone lines

This was discussed at the Area Panel meeting. The response from Housing was:

- It would be too expensive to provide a Freephone number.
- They have looked at the phone logs and believe the service being provided is satisfactory.

The meeting felt this hadn't been addressed satisfactorily. Several further examples were given of poor service received by residents trying to phone customer services:

- One resident called customer services, selected an item from the menu, was given another menu from which they made a selection, and was then forwarded to an answerphone rather than being able to speak to customer services.
- Another resident phoned, selected the options, and then the phone went dead.
- Another example was given of a resident who got through to speak to a person, who then said they couldn't deal with the problem being reported.

Although some residents are able to contact the council online, there are still a lot of people who do not have access to the internet who depend on the customer services phone lines.

This process of making unsuccessful phone calls can be very costly to residents, especially affecting those on low incomes.

Action: 3 stars (👏👏👏)

The meeting agreed to submit this for the agenda of the Area Panel to request that Housing address the ongoing problems with the customer services phone lines.

Response from Hilary Edgar, Housing Service Operations Manager, tel: 01273 293250

I am sorry to hear that residents in the North area have had difficulty contacting the Housing Customer Service team. I was able to track back the complaint about this service that was raised at the last North Panel meeting as it included information about the time and date of the call. Unfortunately without this level of detail, it is not possible to investigate the calls described above. I would be very happy to do this, if the residents who made these comments can give me that information.

At a more general level, however, I can advise:

Options

Callers to the Housing Customer Service team have three options when they ring 01273 293030; 1) when pressed takes the caller through to the Mears' Repairs line – there is then no further options 2) when pressed takes the caller through to the Housing Benefit service – there is then no further options 3) for callers who want to make a rent payment – when pressed this leads to 3 further options; to make an automated payment, to speak to someone when making a payment and to be transferred to the Housing Income Management team.

Performance

The Performance report (on this agenda) shows that in quarter 2 (from 1/6/17 to 30/9/17) the team answered 95% of their calls. This is an improvement from quarter 1 and includes the period when calls volumes were higher following the Grenfell Tower fire.

Services supported by the Housing Customer Service Team

The Housing Customer Service team supports the 4 area based housing teams, the Seniors Housing service and can also answer most housing related queries. It does sometimes get calls about non Housing issues or those of a technical nature which have to be passed to specialist teams to answer. Residents have told us that this can be frustrating and, in response, the Resident Involvement Team is organising some information sessions on 'Council services and who to contact'. The first one is fully booked, but if anyone would like to attend please contact the team on 01273 294651 who will let you know when the session will be run again.