

Equality Impact Assessment Stage Three – Telling the Story

Name of service area/policy/strategy reviewed

Abandoned Properties, Absent Tenants and Disposal of Goods Policy

Consultation undertaken and what were the issues?

Who was engaged

- Tenancy Management Review Team (x3 Residents and Staff member) – Survey/Questionnaire
- Tenants who have and are currently using the service via a questionnaire
- Staff via a questionnaire

Feedback from The Tenancy Management Review Team

- Policy is confusing and has some conflicting information
- Not many residents would understand the policy itself
- Clear section on the website needed
- Less use of abbreviations in Staff Procedure make it more user friendly
- Because there is a housing problem, (i.e. more people than.) all abandoned properties should be made habitable so that the housing problem would become less
- There is no reason to believe less favourable treatment of any of the equality groups may occur.
- You should be able to report abandoned tenancies on the CHA website
- The staff procedure which accompanies the policy is clear and easy to understand
- There are no improvements needed to both policy and procedures
- Abandoned properties or those that have been “moth balled” should be used as a community house where agencies could use as office space/would be less intimidating for local people./could be used as internet café etc etc

Feedback from Staff

- Have a spokesperson for all minority groups so as they can participate in reviews and processes
- Religion may require some of our tenants to go on pilgrimages which may require the tenant being away from their properties for 6-8 weeks – this should be taken into consideration
- Appendix 3a in the procedure is too complicated
- We can engage with minority groups to ensure they are involved in shaping and influencing the processes and services we provide. This can be done through asking for feedback from those who have used the service
- The first part of the policy contains jargon i.e. NTQ (notice to quit) and tenant may not understand this. This needs clarifying/explaining
- Perhaps the offer of incentives may decrease the numbers of abandoned properties
- Have a section on the website for reporting abandoned properties
- Have a clear and understandable procedure written by staff who use the procedure and taking into account best practice/legislation
- Residents should be asked on how we can improve the forms and procedures we use via consultation.
- Ask residents to simplify forms
- Item 6.1 in policy states allocations policy when should state Abandoned Properties, Absent Tenants and Disposal of Goods Policy
- Have a separate Policy (i.e. 3) for Abandoned Tenancies – Absent Tenants – Disposal of Goods
- Item 3 in the procedure – visiting the property within 24 hours is too ambitious and should state

as soon as practicable

- Times for responses and actions need to be explored and made more realistic and manageable based on resources and CHA tenant needs
- We should engage with equality groups through newsletters
- Newsletters giving all residents and overview
- The procedure should be easy to understand for both residents and employees
- Other improvements to policy and procedure – Links with other teams within the department, trigger points for e-mail information being exchanged.

Feedback from tenants

- The aims and objectives of this policy cover my needs
- The policy should be promoted in newsletters and on website
- There should be a report it section on the website so tenants can report such issues
- New tenants should be issued with this policy on take up of the tenancy
- Tenants should be allowed to be away from their home for up to 12 months if needed
- There is no need for 3 separate policies
- As a customer I would like CHA to have effective controls on this policy and commitment
- The service should be promoted by informing the individuals concerned
- 12 months is too long for a tenants to be absent unless they have informed the Housing Association beforehand
- As a customer what would you like from the service – all of the above i.e. commitments and aims
- I don't have access to a website
- There should be a service leaflet for this policy/service
- Sending a leaflet on these options open to tenants through post or leaflet like newsletters as you already do
- Cosmopolitan should take action sooner rather than later. In my property following the death of a tenant it took months to start removal of goods and even now, some of the tenants possessions are on the premises
- The policy is not easy to understand. It is not direct enough, from my experience the system takes too long to implement
- Do not have a service leaflet for this policy

– in response to being allowed to be away for 12 months question

- 1 month any longer could draw attention from unruly people
- I think 6 months is more than adequate except in extreme circumstances
- I think 12 months is about right
- You should have one policy for all issues
- If goods or belongings are not claimed maybe other tenants could purchase them for a small fee if they are in good condition, if not they could be sold off and money could be used by the Association to help keep their properties to a high standard that we are used to that way it helps everyone
- It would provide peace of mind and the reassurance that in the event of any unforeseen or unavoidable periods away from home the property would remain safe (as long as Cosmopolitan has been notified of the absence)
- The service could be promoted using notification via newsletter, or by direct letter to all tenants. It could also be indicated on Cosmopolitan website homepage with a link to specific section on the subject
- The policy should be 3 separate policies as it would make things fairer as they are three separate issues
- In this service I think the policy is well laid out and fair enough
- You could possible send an annual reminder with your yearly rent statement
- I once went absent on and off from a town for 2 years just before my dad died of cancer. I commuted up and down the country and lost everything

- I want a quick response from this service
- A free phone service would be appreciated especially repairs
- Tenants should be allowed to be away for 3 months
- The policies need to be less complicated
- Policies on removal of discarded furniture has been brought up in the past but never acted upon. I would like to see this rectified
- The service should be fair, and properties relet as quickly as possible
- Do not create another service leaflet
- Have one policy for all
- If tenants are leaving a property they should be aware of leaving goods would be disposed of
- It would keep properties full as there is always people looking for places to reside. But 12 months away may be too long, I would repossess earlier
- It is obvious not only to Cosmopolitan and other Housing Associations that properties need to be used and not left empty, as neighbours would prefer to have families in them and being used. Any items or furniture left could be disposed of or given to people who don't have much and would like an offer of various items (not myself)

Actions identified

Action	Who	When
<p>1 - Carry out a full review of the Abandoned tenancies, Absent Tenants and Disposal of Goods Policy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out consultation with staff, tenants and Tenancy management Review Team • Benchmark policy against other top performing Registered Providers and share/consider best practice • Write revised/reviewed Policy • Have Policy and covering report to Board ready for approval at next available board • Promote new Policy on website, intranet and in newsletters • Carry our "Kick Start" Event for staff once approved by board so as correct procedures can be created/written and tested. • Implement new procedure, advertise where appropriate 	<p>Colin Croxton</p> <p>Colin Croxton</p> <p>Colin Croxton</p> <p>Colin Croxton</p> <p>Colin Croxton</p> <p>Colin Croxton</p> <p>Colin Croxton</p>	<p>May 2010</p> <p>April 2010</p> <p>May 2010</p> <p>June 2010</p> <p>June 2010</p> <p>June 2010</p> <p>June 2010</p> <p>June 2010</p>
<p>2 - Update Website to be more informative, interactive and easy to use.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check other RSLs website for examples of best practice • Review information with Julie McNally 	<p>Colin Croxton</p> <p>Colin Croxton</p> <p>Colin Croxton</p>	<p>May 2010</p> <p>May 2010</p> <p>May 2010</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement Changes to tenant webpage on CHA website 	Colin Croxton	May 2010
3 - Community Houses	Colin Croxton	August 2010
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look at items of best practice in area 	Colin Croxton	June 2010
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult with Tenancy Management Review Team/Staff and tenant who made suggestion 	Colin Croxton	June 2010
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess feasibility of such project 	Colin Croxton	July 2010
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report back to Tenancy Management Review Team and tenant who made suggestion 	Colin Croxton	August 2010

Outcomes for customers

A number of recommendations from tenants will be used to shape changes to the Variation policy these include:

- Make the policy more user friendly and easier to understand for tenants
- Make the staff guide and procedure easy to use and understand
- Use less acronyms and abbreviations in policy
- Review the policy to ensure it does not contain unnecessary “red tape” which can slow up or hinder processes without having any legal standing
- Make the website more user friendly, informative and able to allow customers to be able to report issues of abandonment.
- Report back to tenants how CHA are meeting obligations in relation to managing abandoned properties and absent tenant requests
- Have a clear and accessible policy which can be accessed by all who need it
- Develop services that support tenants to maintain their tenancy and to prevent unnecessary evictions
- Conduct regular tenancy audits to ensure the correct persons are occupying CHA properties
- Ensure the use of tenant profiling prior to taking legal action or proceedings to recover possession
- Ensure disposal of goods policy/section is up to date with all relevant legal requirements taken into account
- Consider splitting policy into three separate policies
- Look at possibility of having a Community House or similar

Conclusion

The assessment has enabled CHA to look closer at its Abandoned Properties, Absent Tenants and Disposal of Goods Policy and how best to provide a service, which is accessible to all and as effective as possible.

Areas of action identified through the assessment will be incorporated into a wider action plan. The Action plan includes a full review of the service, which will be undertaken by June 2010, and further potentials enhancements, which will be investigated and implemented, if appropriate, by August 2010.