TENANT SCRUTINY REVIEW OF WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

1. WHY WE CHOSE THE SERVICE

Following review of Community Gateway Associations (CGA) insight data, Gateway Central commissioned a review into written communication due to the level of dissatisfaction relating to communication.

2. SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

Following a briefing on the types of written communication sent by teams across the organisation and the frequency with which these are sent, the Tenant Scrutiny Group (TSG) agreed that all forms of written communication by teams would be included in the review, which are:

1) Letters
2) Emails
3) Text messages
4) Calling cards

The teams which received the highest number of service requests would be included in the review. The Complaints Team were also included due to the volume of complaints currently received by the organisation and as this was an area of focus. Below is a list of the teams included in the review:

1) Responsive Repairs
2) Investment and Greencare Team
3) Tenancy Management Team
4) Income Team
5) Complaints Team (Service Improvement Team)

The TSG agreed that the following would be considered for each type of communication across each team:

1) Is the written communication effective?
2) Is the written communication customer friendly?
3) Is the written communication professional?

3. APPROACH TO THE REVIEW

The TSG reviewed a range of letters, emails, text messages and calling cards for each team alongside information on when the written communication is sent during the service delivery.

4. OVERVIEW OF TSG FINDINGS

All teams had set templates for letters and although minor recommendations were made in relation to formatting, the letters for all teams except for the Repairs Team were effective, professional and customer friendly.

Where freeform text is used (in emails, text messages and calling cards), there was a lack of uniformity and consistency which could lead to confusion and further complaints in relation to communication.

As the Complaints Team had templates across all the written communication types utilised by the team, no recommendations were made for the team.

The table below demonstrates a Red Amber Green (RAG) rating overview of the TSG's findings for each team across each type of communication:

	Letters	Emails	Text Messages	Calling Cards
Repairs Team				
Investment and Greencare Team				
Tenancy Management Team				
Income Recovery Team				
Complaints Team				N/A

A detailed breakdown for each team can be found below, alongside the recommendations made by the group. Section 10 of the report includes overarching recommendations for the organisation.

5. REPAIRS TEAM

Letters	Emails	Text Messages	Calling Cards

5.1 STRENGTHS

The text messages sent by the team were effective, professional and customer friendly:

- **Text messages sent from the system:** Reminder text messages for repairs were effective, professional and customer friendly and it was understood that further information could not be included due to the word limit. The group felt it is important for tenants to know which trade is attending if they have multiple repairs booked so it was recommended that the team look in to how this can be achieved.
- **Text messages sent by staff members:** There were limited examples of text messages sent by the team, however, the messages the group viewed of the team supervisors set a good example for the whole organisation. These were polite and effective and responses were prompt and in line with the 2 working days agreed within the Customer Service Commitments.

5.2 AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The written communication sent by the team was not consistent in content or writing style and lacked uniformity. Guidance and set standards for all staff in the team will help the team in setting clear expectations and in turn help tenants in understanding the process better.

- **Appointment letters:** Appointment letters sent to tenants for responsive repairs included technical terminology with information that was not relevant (for example, details of measurements or acronyms which tenants may not understand).
- These letters also did not include information on what would happen if the repair could not be completed on the first visit. The group felt it was important to communicate to tenants that on some occasions a further appointment may be required.

- **Emails:** These differed across the whole team and were not effective, professional or customer friendly. In many cases, there were grammatical errors, and the TSG were concerned this could affect the trust in the team and CGA. The lack of explanation and information in the emails was also resulting in repeat queries.
- **Calling cards:** These included jargon and acronyms which could cause confusion for tenants. Handwriting was difficult to read and in many cases, there was no name of the staff member who attended. Furthermore, the name of the team also differed; for example, some stated the name of the team, whilst others stated the trade.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ensure details of the work being completed is in tenant friendly language and free from jargon and technical terminology.
2. Ensure key information stands out in the appointment letter.
3. Remove the 'appointment key' in letters and add the exact times for each timeslot (e.g. instead of AM, include 8am-12pm).
4. Include guidance on pets when CGA visit a tenant's home.
5. Add additional information in the appointment letters and emails that a further visit may be required.
6. Rewrite the 'Party Wall Letter' ensuring support is offered and signposting if the customer has any queries.
7. Ensure details like 'URGENT' cannot be viewed through the envelope window.
8. Introduce templates for emails.
9. Explore how information in relation to the trade attending can be added to the text message sent from the system.
10. Ensure a consistent team name is used on the calling cards.
11. Provide training to staff on the expectations of written communication, handwriting and the impact this has on the organisation's reputation and liability.
12. Consider what review process will be put in place for monitoring the

quality of the written communication sent.

6. INVESTMENT AND GREENCARE TEAMS

Letters	Emails	Text Messages	Calling Cards

6.1 STRENGTHS

Positively, the letters, text messages and emails demonstrated effective, professional and customer friendly communication to tenants and no recommendations have been made in this area.

6.2 AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Improvements were identified for calling cards:

- **Calling cards:** These lacked consistency, with some including minimal information, and others including more information. The handwriting was also difficult to understand in some examples the group reviewed.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Provide guidance on handwriting to ensure it is clear and easy to read.

7. TENANCY MANAGEMENT

Letters	Emails	Text Messages	Calling Cards

7.1 STRENGTHS

The letters sent by the team demonstrated effective, professional and customer friendly communication to tenants:

- **Letters:** The team use templates when communicating with tenants and the group found that these were customer friendly and professional. Minor changes were required to ensure that all letters were effective, for example, including a cover letter when

issuing an 'Undertaking' to explain what this is and ensure the tenant understands the document.

7.2 AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The written communication sent by the team was not consistent in content or writing style and lacked uniformity. Guidance and set standards for all staff will help the team in setting clear expectations and in turn help tenants in understanding the process better.

- **Emails:** The emails were not professional and included several grammatical errors. This was concerning due to the potential impact if these were used in legal proceedings.
- **Text messages:** The group found that the messages were customer friendly, however, they were not professional. Due to the length of the messages, the group felt that the text messages were not effective and should be more concise and to the point.
- **Calling cards:** Handwriting was difficult to read and in several examples, acronyms were used for team names which would be difficult for tenants to understand and there was a lack of uniformity.

7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Introduce cover letter for 'Undertaking' document.
2. Include example pictures of the CGA's expected garden standard to help tenants understand this expected standard.
3. Introduce templates for emails.
4. Provide training to staff on the expectations of written communication, handwriting and the impact this has on the organisation's reputation and liability.
5. Ensure a consistent team name is used on the calling cards.
6. Consider what review process will be put in place for monitoring the quality of the written communication sent.

8. INCOME MANAGEMENT TEAM

Letters	Emails	Text Messages	Calling Cards

8.1 STRENGTHS

The letters sent by the team are effective, professional and customer friendly:

- **Letters:** The group were pleased with the level of support provided by the team throughout the letters and the overall approach taken to support tenants when in financial difficulty. The letters were all customer friendly and professional. We have informed the Service Improvement Team of wording and formatting changes that we recommend for these letters and due to these being minor changes, we have not included them in the recommendations.

8.2 AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- **Emails:** Several emails viewed by the TSG were conversational and informal. Although it is understood and accepted that the Income Officers build a rapport with tenants it is important that communication always remains professional.
- **Text messages:** The group found that there were acronyms and jargon throughout the messages, grammatical errors and variation across different staff members and were concerned by the lack of consistency and professionalism.
- **Calling cards:** The messages left by the team on the cards varied a great deal and some had direct lines, whilst others included the 0800 number.

8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Introduce templates for emails and ensure they remain professional.
2. Introduce templates for text messages.
3. Provide training to staff members on the expectations of written communication and the impact this has on the organisation's reputation.

4. Consider what review process will be put in place for checking the quality of written communication sent.

9. COMPLAINTS TEAM

Letters	Emails	Text Messages	Calling Cards – Not Applicable

9.1 STRENGTHS

The letters, emails and text messages sent by the team were all professional, effective and customer friendly. The team use templates and where free form messages are sent, it is clear that staff members have a clear understanding of the organisational standards and the importance of clear, concise communication.

As the team do not use calling cards, this area was not reviewed.
We have informed the Service Improvement Team of wording and formatting changes that we recommend for these letters and due to these being minor changes, we have not included them in the recommendations.

9.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

None.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANISATION

1. **Opening of communication:** Ensure the opening of communication is consistent. The group recommends 'Dear' for legal communication and 'Good morning/Good afternoon' for all other forms of written communication.
2. **Contact details:** Ensure all staff include their full name, job title and appropriate telephone option for their team.
3. **Hand posting of letters:** We found that there are several ways to record proof of hand delivered letters. Some teams updated the central

housing management system, whilst others updated their dedicated team system. Some teams took photos as proof, whilst others did not. We recommend that this process is aligned across all departments, including the standard way of taking photos and a central location for recording that letters have been hand delivered.

4. **Letter References:** Include only one reference and not multiple references.
5. **Text messages:** To improve monitoring of the quality and volume of text messages, consider the introduction of an online function where text messages are sent from and received to.
6. **Calling cards:** Introduce calling cards for all teams which include more text boxes and less free form text boxes.
7. **Training:** Provide training and guidance to staff members on the expectations of written communication and the impact this has on the organisation's reputation.
8. **Induction:** Ensure that training and guidance on written communication is included as part of staff induction.
9. **Ongoing monitoring:** Ensure this guidance is regularly reviewed with tenants.