

## **1. WHY WE CHOSE THE SERVICE**

Following consideration of the Customer Insight Report, Gateway Central requested a scrutiny review into the overall customer service tenants receive from teams within Community Gateway Association (CGA). A scrutiny exercise took place in November and December 2024 focussing on all customer facing services in the organisation, excluding Responsive Repairs as a review had been carried out into this area earlier in the year.

## **2. SCOPE OF THE REVIEW**

The Tenant Scrutiny Group (TSG) chose the following areas for review:

- How accessible are CGA services?
- How timely is the response?
- What are the outcomes received and are they equitable?

The TSG was made up of tenants who have differing requirements when accessing CGA services. The group consisted of tenants living in a mix of general needs and supported housing tenancies, a range of ages, and those having specific needs due to a disability. Whilst drawing on their personal experiences and own requirements, the group also considered the wider tenant base and how services were tailored to individual needs.

## **3. APPROACH TO THE REVIEW**

The group used a variety of methods to gather a range of information and evidence with the following activities undertaken:

- Question and Answer sessions with managers
- Live testing some of the communication channels
- Analysis of performance data (Appendix A)
- An exercise to map the different channels that CGA operates (Appendix A)
- Customer satisfaction survey (Appendix B)

In this report, the group concentrated on areas for improvement. Where the group is satisfied that a channel is working effectively, the report is silent, and the reader may conclude that no further actions are required.

#### **4. OVERVIEW OF TSG FINDINGS**

The TSG has discovered that communication with CGA most often is accessible, timely, and the eventual outcomes are generally equitable. Some issues and areas for improvement were

identified and the group made a total of 12 recommendations which are detailed at the end of the report.

#### **5. HOW ACCESSIBLE ARE CGA SERVICES?**

There are eight ways in which tenants and customers can contact CGA:

- Email
- Phone
- Letter
- Website
- Social media – CGA Facebook page and Tenants Facebook page
- In person at CGA head office; Harbour House
- Directly to a CGA staff member
- Through a third party

These following services and functions are also available for tenants:

- Telephone translation service
- Sign language service via video conference call
- Website translation
- Website text to speech function
- Website styling and customisation e.g. change the page colour
- Recite me facility – Website accessibility tool
- Reading aid on the website
- Printed copies of policies, procedures and information documents on request

#### **5.1 STRENGTHS**

The group were pleased with the number of ways to contact CGA and the facilities available for tenants with different needs. Although tenants are unable to contact CGA by text, there is no need to provide this service as there are multiple other channels to contact CGA. Reception receives an average of 14 visits per day, and visitors receive a 'smooth and welcoming' service. The number of enquiries via social media is small and there has been a reduction in the last few months, which suggests that customers are accessing more appropriate communication channels successfully.

## **5.2 AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

There are no set processes for recording communications between tenants and CGA staff members while out on visits which results in each individual colleague taking their own approach in how they report back tenants' queries or concerns. Conversations are not logged and tracked centrally by all teams.

Only eight of the ten customer facing teams check for letters daily which could result in responses to tenants being delayed.

## **6. TIMELY RESPONSE?**

### **6.1 STRENGTHS**

The response timescale for all communication channels is two working days. By their very nature, some communication channels are faster than others. Phone data is accurate, readily available and constantly monitored. Most communications are dealt with within target, however, as detailed below some areas for improvement have been identified.

### **6.2 AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

The Asset Management Team handle the highest volumes of emails and calls and through mystery shopping it was identified that the service is inconsistent in responses to emails within two working days.

Across all teams, there is a lack of visibility of emails that are out of time due to the system used which cannot be viewed and monitored centrally.

As noted earlier in the report, as all teams do not check for letters daily, this can result in responses being sent outside the two working day target.

CGA staff member communications with tenants while out on visits are not logged and tracked centrally, and there are no timescales. Therefore, although an interaction in a neighbourhood may be considered instant and timely in itself, CGA does not know whether the query has been captured and dealt with in a timely manner. So technically, there is potential for requests to be lost or forgotten.

## **7. WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES RECEIVED AND ARE THEY EQUITABLE?**

### **7.1 STRENGTHS**

The TSG takes the view that there is equality of outcome through any of the channels but there are intrinsic differences in timeliness, and several issues that impact CGA's ability to provide consistent responses as highlighted below.

## **7.2 AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

CGA does not have accurate figures for the number of tenant email enquiries as the current data includes communications between departments.

When customer emails are redirected from one department to another, there is no guarantee that the team does not re-start the two working day target when they receive the referred email. There was an inconsistent approach between teams on whether email responses were sent from team email inboxes or from individual email accounts. Individual email accounts are not monitored and there is no data on direct emails between tenants and staff.

Overall, CGA does not have a complete picture of email communications. Service standards can dip if a member of staff is absent, and they have not added a message advising tenants of this when they email them directly.

A reality checking exercise found that there are teams within the organisation who do not check their post daily, potentially resulting in delayed outcomes to tenants.

A survey was sent by the group to tenants who recently contacted CGA by email and post. Of the responses received, 40 were from tenants who contacted by phone and one was via email. The results highlighted issues with the handling of enquiries and inconsistent communication when the query could not be resolved first time.

Disappointingly, eight out of 13 tenants reported not being told when they would be contacted, and three out of eight tenants advised targets were missed.

There was mixed satisfaction with call-handling that CGA needs to address with the objective of creating consistency across the organisation.

The group recognises that each call handler will have differing levels of experience and skill due to the time they have been with the organisation, personal training and development. It is recommended that the organisation has an agreed level of competency prior to call handlers dealing with tenants independently.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Auto responses to be added to email inboxes for each team that tenants contact.
2. Set an email auto response for staff who are unexpectedly absent.
3. Set an email auto response for staff who leave CGA.
4. Map the communication sphere to support CGA's understanding and management of its communication channels and how they link and interact with each other. Include analysis of the number of email addresses CGA is using.
5. State the purpose of CGA's social media platforms and what they should not be used for on the opening page of the platform.

6. Introduce email responses from a central mailbox so replies are not from and to individual mailboxes.
7. Consider ways in which monitoring of email inboxes can be improved and overdue responses escalated.
8. Introduce a process for handling letters to ensure consistency across the organisation.
9. Collect and monitor performance data on letter handling.
10. Introduce a process to support staff to report interactions with tenants while on neighbourhood visits.
11. Service Improvement Team should investigate the data regarding the time taken to answer phone 'Option 6' call and introduce a voicemail facility.
12. Set an agreed standard of competency before new call handlers begin speaking to tenants independently.

### **Next Steps**

The management responses to the recommendations are provided below. A monitoring report will be presented at future meetings to enable the Committee to track the implementation of the Scrutiny Group's recommendations.

## MANAGEMENT RESPONSES

Recommendation	Response	Target for completion
Auto responses to be added to email inboxes for each team that tenants contact.	<b>Accepted</b> – This will be introduced for all teams, with a timescale provided that tenants will be contacted within 2 working days.	Ongoing
Set an email auto response for staff who are unexpectedly absent.	<b>Accepted</b> – A process will be introduced to ensure an auto response is added.	Ongoing
Set an email auto response for staff who leave CGA.	<b>Accepted</b> – The team will ensure that the auto response is consistently applied when a colleague leaves the organisation.	Ongoing
Map the communication sphere to support CGA’s understanding and management of its communication channels and how they link and interact with each other. Include analysis of the number of email addresses CGA is using.	<b>Accepted</b> – Each communication channel and its purpose will be mapped out to better understand the different ways tenants contact us and how these channels link together.	May 2025
State the purpose of CGA’s social media platforms and what they should not be used for on the opening page of the platform.	<b>Accepted</b> – The Tenant Facebook Group has a set of ‘Community Guidelines’ which state the purpose of the platform and what tenants can expect from Community Gateway. The visibility of this will be enhanced.	Complete
Introduce email responses from a central mailbox so replies are not from and to individual mailboxes.	<b>Partially accepted</b> – This will be put in place for several teams across the organisation, however some teams (for example the Income and Tenancy Management Teams) are unable to implement this due to the way in which cases are managed within the teams. The timeliness of the responses will continue to be monitored through performance management.	Ongoing

Consider ways in which monitoring of email inboxes can be improved and overdue responses escalated.	<b>Accepted</b> – As detailed in the Customer Service Commitments, colleagues will respond to emails in 2 working days. This is being closely monitored by managers and through mystery shopping.	Complete
Introduce a process for handling letters to ensure consistency across the organisation.	<b>Accepted</b> - Guidance will be provided to all teams on the process of letter handing.	May 2025
Collect and monitor performance data on letter handling.	<b>Partially accepted</b> – All teams have been reminded of the importance of the timely collection of letters received in the post and this will be monitored through mystery shopping. Due to the low level of letters received, collection of performance data is not required.	Complete
Introduce a process to support staff to report interactions with tenants while on neighbourhood visits.	<b>Accepted</b> - An online form will be created so that staff can pass on service requests received for other departments whilst on neighbourhood visits.	June 2025
Service Improvement Team should investigate the data regarding the time taken to answer phone 'Option 6' call and introduce a voicemail facility.	<b>Accepted</b> - The voicemail facility has been introduced.	Complete
Set an agreed standard of competency before new call handlers begin speaking to tenants independently.	<b>Accepted</b> - The organisation currently has an expected standard which all teams are aware of. This will be included within the induction plan for each call handler and will continue to be monitored through call listening.	Complete

**The TSG wishes to express its thanks to all those who have supported and assisted with the scrutiny review.**