

Annex 4: Transfer Position Statement, as at 1 October 2020

The following report shows the health of the service on transition from EKH to TDC, using qualitative data to highlight the challenges faced by staff. This report needs to be considered in conjunction with the quantitative data from the KPI position at the end of November 2020.

1. Introduction

The functions of East Kent Housing (EKH) were transitioned to TDC at pace, using a 'lift and shift' methodology.

Qualitative data can help form a picture of the health of the service on transition; and combined with the performance indicator data form a baseline position, from which we will measure the success of the improvement initiatives we put into place.

What cannot be shown in PI's is the detrimental effect of poor people management and the toll of large scale change has had on the staff. They do not reflect the enormous amount of work, over and above business as usual, that staff have undertaken to correct many issues that had been created by EKH.

The below report uses qualitative data, gathered from interviews with front line staff in the first month of transition, giving insight into the difficulties faced by staff on transition.

2. Methodology

Qualitative data was collected by interviewing front line staff including officers, senior officers and managers from across our new Tenant and Leaseholder Services (TLS) team, including both staff that transitioned from East Kent Housing (EKH) by TUPE and staff newly recruited into the service.

We used a technique called 'Grounded Analysis' to analyse the data; which meant we coded the data by putting it into different themes. With this methodology, the themes are not predetermined, the data speaks for itself and themes emerge from the discussions.

The following themes were evident from the data we collected and paint a picture of the challenges staff faced on transition of the service:

- Out of remit workload
- Covid 19
- Culture
- Customer
- Capital programme

- Systems
- Data
- Contractors
- Processes

3. What we Found

3.1 Out of remit workload

This describes work that would fall outside of business as usual (BAU) remit, where we have had to unpick complex disrepair claims or complaints that had not been dealt with by EKH.

The team has had to pick up this extra workload as it has arisen, due to the nature of the issues, they are critical and therefore often need to be addressed immediately.

Staff have picked up these issues and resolved them professionally and collaboratively, as well as training in new roles, learning new systems and keeping the service BAU operations running smoothly.

Issues have included:

- Repairs that had not been completed
- Complaints that had not been responded to.
- 6 x disrepair claims that have not been responded to
- Other councils asking for help
- Other departments/agencies wanting help with issues that EKH had not dealt with
- Customers complaining about how EKH had dealt with issues in the past

Some examples of repairs/complaints that have not been dealt with:

Issue	How long outstanding
Missing window	1st July 2020
Missing window	14th June 2020
Car crashed through wall	8th July 2020
Leak from flat above and D&M issues. No works completed, subsequent disrepair claim received Dec 2020	August 2019
Number of outstanding issues including damp and mould and fault windows. Raised in April, no works carried out. Subsequent disrepair claim.	16th April 2020
A number of outstanding issues in relation to rendering left by Mears. Subsequent MP enquiry, most of the defects resolved to date	1st July 2020

Outstanding works following leak	1st July 2020
All windows have been broken and boarded. Still awaiting new windows	18th July 2020
Tenant promised cavity wall insulation by EKH but it was not installed	2019
Ongoing damp and mould problems	Unsure of date
Number of issues with heating and hot water	March 2020
Tenant wanting compensation after no heating for 14 weeks - asked EKH but no response	June 2020
Tenants warm air unit not been working for some time and has been without heating	Unknown
Fire at property but no works arranged	March 2020
Bed bug issues to flats and communal areas	Unknown

3.2 Covid 19

This has had a great effect on operations for everyone this year and it has added an extra layer of complexity to transitioning a service from EKH, in house. For our team, it has been harder to access training, build relationships with new colleagues or seek support required when starting a new role.

How we have addressed this:

- We were able to hold 1 induction day on the 1st October, staff were placed into bubbles and could not mix with other bubbles
- Teams held training sessions in the office, where possible, and online
- Managers hold meetings with greater frequency (including team meetings and 121's)
- Online coffee breaks are held daily during lockdown
- Online xmas parties are being organised

Other aspects of the work our staff found harder due to Covid 19 are as follows:

- Carrying out legislated inspections
- Unable to assist people whose preferred communication is face-to-face
- Unable to carry out repairs
- Identifying repair issues, hoarding or fire risk in properties

Resident engagement is more complex:

- Establishments where residents use the internet may be closed
- Halted community events activities
- Unable to hold face-to-face meetings with residents

3.3 Culture

The staff have described a culture at EKH of blame, secrecy and disempowerment, as evidenced in the poor relationships with other stakeholders and silo mentality between teams.

We can see evidence of a lack of decision making and responsibility being taken for issues, leading to many of the problems described in this report and leading to the decision to bring the service back in house.

Staff have been wary of TDC management; but as time has gone on they are gaining trust and confidence, speaking out and bringing ideas for improvement to the table.

We have an increasingly motivated, dedicated team that is skilled, works hard and is gaining confidence in making their own decisions. We believe we are forging a culture that is collaborative and supportive, which can be evidenced by the following:

- Improved relationships with council departments
- Improved relationships with partnering contractors,
- Collaboration across teams when resolving issues,
- Coming together in various workshops to share ideas, create processes and improve their service.

3.4 Customer

This section describes the current, low level of engagement we have with our tenants and leaseholders. We have no insight into this at the moment but with the recruitment of our Insight Officer, who has now started, we are hoping to gather vital information as to why engagement has been low and how we can change this.

We know that our residents have suffered from a lack of communication in the past, therefore our new Resident Involvement team are working hard to change this and have released the first of a series of block specific quarterly publications to the residents in each of our tower blocks and the first edition of our quarterly 'Tenant and Leaseholder News', released in January 2021. In addition a transition newsletter was also circulated in October 2020. The January newsletter includes a resident survey that will measure current satisfaction in the service and asks about the areas of the service that are most important to our residents for us to focus our service improvement on

3.5 Capital programme

This section reports the position we took over the capital programme on 1 October. Annex 1 provides a narrative on the position in regards to the PI (Capital programme spend), which is vastly under spent.

We believe that the culture of EKH had a huge impact on the performance in this area, drawing on the evidence in this report, for example:

- Front line staff not empowered to make decisions: Programmes have not moved forward, stalling where decisions are required
- Lack of communication: Staff in other teams and residents have not been communicated with regarding capital programmes on their estate, leading to dissatisfaction
- Lack of responsibility for tasks/actions: Evidenced by the amount of invoices that were overdue
- Blame culture, leading to inappropriate decisions made: As the PI is the amount of budget spent, EKH instructed inappropriate and potentially unnecessary works, to spend the budget before transition and improve the result of this PI. The knock on effect has meant the budget has been spent inappropriately and now needs to be reviewed to ensure resources are available for where it is required.

3.6 Systems and data

This section describes the difficulties that have come to light with the various systems transferred from EKH. We have data in many different systems, including manual spreadsheets, which increases the chance for inaccurate reporting and human error.

Our housing management system is running on an out of date software release and there has been inconsistency in its use. It is hard to pull desired reports from the system and often this is due to the lack of or poor quality of data.

In response to this challenge, the following actions are being taken:

- The council's Digital Team has a project plan to upgrade Northgate, including installing a document management system,
- Formal training for Northgate will be rolled out to the teams
- Resources identified for the procurement of a new system to hold all landlord compliance workstreams

Interim processes have been put into place to address the current shortfalls:

- Tracking spreadsheets have been developed to monitor programmes, performance and give assurance for compliance workstreams
- File structure created in Google to hold all documentation
- Template letters cannot be created in Northgate, therefore a interim process is in place

3.7 Contractors

On transition, we found there was minimal contract management. Annex 1 describes the issues we have faced with contractors, the knock on effect of this and the remedial actions we have taken.

3.8 Processes

We have found many roles and processes carried over from EKH to be ineffective or inefficient. For example, staff in the planned works team held different functions, thus many officers were working on a single project. This has meant that no one had taken responsibility for moving projects forward or making decisions.

Housing officers were working in specialised teams, meaning officers were not taking responsibility for resolving issues in neighbourhoods or for communicating with our tenants. This structure also made it difficult for customers to speak to the right person when they had a query, and often staff were not sure who was responsible for what aspect of work.

We addressed some of these issues in the organisation of the new structure:

- Appointed named contract managers for planned and day to day works
- Surveyors are responsible for a capital programme from conception to completion
- Teams have admin support
- Housing officers have moved to generic roles and have been assigned patches

Further work is being carried out to:

- Develop efficient processes
- Review all policies
- Support and train officers in new roles
- Review and improve systems
- Ensure the work we are doing is compliant with regulatory and legislative requirements

4. Change Management

The effect of change on staff is often understated, the feeling of loss of control and uncertainty in staff experiencing a change situation leads to stress and sometimes a resistance to the change.

The staff that transitioned from EKH are coping with the effects of change, for example:

- New organisational structure meant staff came into new teams, with different colleagues and managers.
- Some officers are working in a different location (other than working from home).
- Experiencing a different culture.
- Coming into a large organisation and reestablishing relationships with colleagues in Council departments.
- Learning new systems - Google.
- Retraining in roles (ie Housing Officers going from specific to generic roles and Compliance Managers taking on more workstreams when they were used to being responsible for a single discipline).

What we did to minimise the impact of change:

- Weekly meetings with EKH officers prior to transition
- Google site, giving up to date information on the transition
- Availability of the Director of Housing and Planning and the Project Manager to discuss concerns privately or in groups with EKH staff
- Collaborating with transitioning staff to set up new teams and bring operational detail
- Robust induction programme
- Intense Google training & continued support for those that need it
- Identification and delivery of formal training required
- Workshops with all staff to find out what they found hard and where they think improvements are required.
- Create opportunities for officers to get together (virtually) and bond
- Empowering officers to make decisions and feed into improvements