

CHANGES TO CLEANING CONTRACT

Report of the Director of Investment and Regeneration

1. SUMMARY

This report accompanies a verbal update from a representative of our cleaning contractor, Hi-Spec. It updates the Local Housing Board on developments in the service and asks the Board to recommend to the Council an improved service.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 That the Local Housing Board supports

- ongoing changes to increase the level of the cleaning service offered at blocks of flats
- the aim to set a minimum standard of cleaning across all blocks
- that cleaning of communal areas needs to be shared between Derby Homes and tenants / leaseholders.
- that new service charges are introduced that reflect the correct cost of the service.

3. MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Hi-Spec started as a new service provider on a new cleaning contract in April 2009. The previous contract had been very unsatisfactory and there were a lot of problems to deal with. A representative from Hi-Spec will be present at the meeting to provide an update on their service delivery and improvements.

3.2 There are

- 88 blocks with no contract cleaning
- 55 are cleaned weekly with a typical weekly charge of £1.04 but actual costs are about £4
- 83 are cleaned fortnightly with a typical weekly charge of £0.88p but actual costs are about £2.

3.3 The first issue is that many people assume all blocks are cleaned by Hi Spec, but a lot are not. The residents of those do not pay any charge and are jointly responsible for cleaning the communal areas themselves, which is a lot to ask. Some tenants do not clean the communal areas at all, despite the efforts of housing staff. It would be costly and possibly seen as unreasonable for us to use possession proceedings to enforce the tenants' responsibilities. The condition of a block would need to be very bad before a judge would support such actions. In some cases a small group of residents actually do a great job of this – and they should be commended. Although in practice it often relies on only one of them doing all the work, often an elderly person. But many of the

blocks not included in the cleaning contract are in the worst condition. Derby Homes as manager of the blocks needs to ensure blocks look clean and attractive to prospective new tenants, and has a health and safety duty to ensure floors are clean and not slippery and dangerous.

- 3.4 The second issue is that cleaning blocks only once a fortnight just is not realistic today if a reasonable standard of cleanliness is to be sustained many tenants do not do carry out any cleaning between the fortnightly cleans. The communal areas are used by many residents and visitors, coming in and out in all weather. In between these infrequent cleans, the residents are again jointly responsible for keeping the communal areas. We need to do more at these blocks.
- 3.5 As a result of these issues we are aiming to change the standard level of service, in all blocks, to one based on
- a weekly clean.
 - extra time for caretaking-type duties, e.g. looking after bin stores, drying areas and the building perimeter.
 - quarterly cleaning of windows in communal areas and
 - an annual strip and reseal of vinyl floors, to enable them to be kept clean.

We aim to introduce a service charge for each block would be calculated based on actual costs and shared between residents. The charge is eligible for Housing Benefit.

We also aim to provide a cleaning service to most blocks, only excluding those where residents are already doing a good job of it.

- 3.6 We are taking a step by step approach. It would not work if we tried to add lots of new blocks and double the frequency of cleaning at many existing blocks. HI-Spec would have to employ a lot of new staff and it is very difficult to find and keep good cleaners. Service standards would inevitably suffer, or at best be inconsistent, at exactly the time we need to demonstrate a reliable service and give confidence to residents.

3.7 Step 1

The first step was to include some caretaking work in addition to traditional cleaning. Previously these duties fell to our own caretakers, but in reality their time is taken up by responsive work, mainly removing dumped items from flats and taking it to the tip. They just don't have time for scheduled visits to every block every week and responding to problems inevitably takes priority. With Hi-Spec already having cleaners visiting these blocks it makes sense to have them do the extra tasks. This system will work very well when the large majority of blocks are included and they are being visited every week. For now it is a start.

3.8 Step 2

We are also working with housing officers to identify blocks we don't clean that are in an unsatisfactory condition. We've recently added a first phase of 14 new blocks, having notified residents and introduced a charge. These were blocks identified as being the worst and now receive the new standard weekly service with associated work. Other blocks will be added over time in phases, but we don't intend to include blocks that are kept to a good standard by residents.

3.9 Step 3

We have also just written to all fortnightly blocks. We said that we do not consider this to be good enough and proposed to move them to the new standard weekly service with associated work. We provided the revised cost.

- 3.10 Obviously many agree but a fair number are not so supportive, usually those who do not receive Housing Benefit. A negative reply typically questions why they should pay when it is other irresponsible residents who are to blame. We will discuss the situation with those who do not support the change, pointing out that somehow we have to ensure communal areas are kept to a satisfactory standard. We think some people will be persuaded, but where we still don't have agreement we will work with housing officers to identify which blocks are being kept to a good standard by residents in between our fortnightly cleans, and those which are not.

4. CONSULTATION IMPLICATIONS

Where we propose changing the service to weekly, we are consulting residents and encouraging them to give feedback either over the phone or by reply slip. We will discuss these proposals with the Council.

5. FINANCIAL AND BUSINESS PLAN IMPLICATIONS

Service charges are calculated for each block to recover the cost of the service, shared between all residents. In the past, any additional service charge income did not come to Derby Homes or into the cleaning budget, which made it very difficult to add blocks or to increase the service. But the Council has now agreed that any additional income from charges will be added to the cleaning budget, which is a breakthrough that allows us to move forward. As well as our responsibility to current residents, keeping the communal areas of flats in a good condition helps reduce turnover and makes flats easier to let, so increasing rent income and the sustainability of the block and area.

6. LEGAL AND CONFIDENTIALITY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The tenancy conditions state at 3.16

'You, or anyone living with you, must keep any communal area, either inside or outside the property, clean, tidy and free from rubbish or furniture at all times to the reasonable satisfaction of the Council.'

- 6.2 As the manager of the building, Derby Homes has a responsibility to take action to ensure communal areas are kept in satisfactory condition. Where they are unsatisfactory we have a responsibility to all the residents to take action. Where we feel it necessary we can take legal action based on a failure to comply with conditions of tenancy. However, this is likely to be limited to extreme cases of neglect.
- 6.3 We can introduce a new or revised cleaning service to achieve this aim and to recover the cost of doing so through service charges.

The areas listed below have no implications directly arising from this report

- Personnel
- Environmental
- Equalities Impact Assessment
- Health & Safety
- Risk
- Policy Review

If Board members or others would like to discuss this report ahead of the meeting please contact the author, or the Chief Executive, phil.davies@derbyhomes.org - Tel 01332 711010

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Background Information: None.

Supporting Information: None.