

Plus Dane Housing Customer Assurance Panel (CAP)

Minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2023 on Teams

Present – CAP

Mark Sumner – Chair

Shaf Choudhary

Joanna Rushton

Peter Juerges

Rachael Johnston

Amanda Graham

Angela Needham

Ian Francis

Ian Corbishley

Present – Plus Dane

Irene Crone

Jennifer Priest

Emma Sneyd

Kate Jungnitz

Ann Hoskins (Board member)

CAP 001 Apologies

Charity Foxton

CAP 002 Welcome and Introduction

Mark welcomed everyone to the first CAP meeting.

CAP 003 Key Issues Report

Kate explained that her reports will bring three or four issues to each meeting, so the CAP have an understanding of business priorities.

Rent Cap

Ann explained the difficult decision Board had when agreeing the 7% rent increase - balancing the cost of living challenges with the needs of the business (providing a high-level repair service and having enough surplus to invest back into the business.)

Amanda asked if the 7% rent increase was sufficient given the high cost of building materials etc. Kate acknowledged the challenges to PD particularly because inflation is higher than the rent increase. PD will prioritise core services such as repairs when setting budgets and are aware of the pressures to run this and all services effectively.

Shaf asked if PD will be monitoring the impact of the rent increase on customers and asked what help is available. Kate explained that PD will be monitoring rent arrears and also any increases in need for support services. There is support for customers in place – this will be covered in the Cost of Living Report.

Angela acknowledged the difficult position for PD reflected in the recent regrade from the regulator from V1 to V2 and was concerned that PD could be vulnerable and possibly susceptible to a merger. Kate explained that PD are financially secure and that the regrade is reflected across the sector. PD are not particularly susceptible to a merger at this time. Rents are not increasing at the rate of inflation, so these are difficult times.

Rachael questioned the thinking behind increasing rents - if rents increase and customers cannot pay their rent then PD could lose money. Kate acknowledged that there is a risk - a balance between pressures on customers and on the business needing to be able to function. PD does have an understanding of customers struggles with support in place and also have an income team to support and help customers pay their rent.

Damp and Mould

Kate explained that PD already had an approach to damp and mould which was in place prior to the death of Awaab. This has since been strengthened and all staff are now aware of their responsibilities for reporting problems when they come across them.

Mark asked if PD have had any serious cases. Kate explained that there have been no cases referred to the Ombudsman.

Joanna asked how the 600 contacts over the last 2 months compares with other winters. Kate explained that there has been an increase although there are differing levels of severity – not all cases are extreme.

Rachael was concerned that if PD are prioritising damp and mould that other environmental concerns would be neglected e.g. rats. Kate gave reassurance that other concerns are being dealt with there is just a separate process for damp and mould.

Task and Finish Groups

Kate explained that the purpose of Task and Finish Groups is to bring Board, colleagues and customers together where appropriate and produce an action plan.

CAP 004 Cost of Living Report

Emma explained PD's approach in supporting customers is to be more resilient during the current cost of living crisis. This includes; mapping those most affected and in need of support, the roles of teams within PD who directly support customers, working with partners and the use of the Emergency Fund set up to provide financial assistance. In response to the crisis PD set up a task and finish group in the summer to look at existing provision and what further things could be done to support customers in need. PD will be working through the action plan produced by the group.

Angela asked about the process for sign posting and supporting young families when they sign up for a new tenancy. Emma explained that support is given to all customers but that she would explore this further.

Action Emma to look at existing provision for young families on sign up and explore if PD could do more.

Shaf expressed concerns about how widely PD promote the support available to customers – with particular reference to those who are not digitally engaged and also recycling of white goods. PD could consider the use of community champions/holding neighbourhood events, but need to investigate other ways to engage with customers who feel excluded. Shaf also mentioned recycling of white goods. Emma explained that there is comprehensive support in place and customers can refer via the Customer Access Team so they can be directed to the most appropriate support. Plus Dane's website also has a vast amount of information and a Cost of Living leaflet has been produced. PD are hoping to be more visible in neighbourhoods and do currently attend and deliver events - more of these are taking place post Covid. PD are currently looking at ways to recycle white goods.

Ian C asked whether there was an improvement programme for those homes that are difficult to heat. Emma explained that the Task and Finish Group had identified 4,500 homes that are below standard. PD are currently working on a plan to bring all properties up to EPC level C standard. This includes applying for government support through the initiatives available such as the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund.

Peter commented that PD do not always promote the good work they are doing in general and are reactive rather than proactive when working in neighbourhoods. Emma reassured the CAP that this was not the case and PD work with a number of partners and customers to develop projects, however agreed that more needs to be done to promote activities in neighbourhoods. Irene explained about how PD have taken a leading role and are working with partners to set up a food pantry in Anfield. PD have just started a piece of work to map provision and support and to identify gaps.

Action Emma to contact Peter to provide more information on how we are working in partnership with residents and communities and enabling community led action.

Amanda commented that the Cost Of Living leaflet mentioned that the community shop in Halton provides a service, however this is means tested and residents can only use the shop if they are eligible through this assessment .

Action Emma to check eligibility of the community shop in Runcorn and make amendment to the cost of living leaflet as part of the next re-print.

Joanna asked how PD is supporting young people to get into training and employment and to tackle debt. Emma gave an example of how PD works with Liverpool in Work and has supported 102 customers into work or training last year. Often there are additional support needs and the Engagement Team provides this alongside partners.

CAP 005 Customer Satisfaction Update

Kate explained that there is often a 15% variation between transactional and perception surveys because of the differing approaches. PD is mindful of 'survey fatigue' so customers who have received a transactional survey will not receive a perception survey that month. PD is aware that there is still work to be done in terms of customer satisfaction.

Kate acknowledged that satisfaction with complaints is not where PD would like it to be and that improvements are needed. However, satisfaction appears to be low because customers were previously asked how satisfied they were before PD had the opportunity to complete all tasks. Customers are now asked about satisfaction two weeks later once the commitments made as part of the complaint resolution have been delivered and this has shown a 13% increase in satisfaction.

Measuring the customer experience for complaints is important although this is often difficult for customers to separate from satisfaction with the outcome.

Tenancy Satisfaction Measures

Kate explained that the TSM's themes had come from the White Paper following Grenfell. PD's research partner will carry out the surveys by phoning customers each month. Specific questions are asked and have been set up to compare performance -like with like - across the sector. PD do not have any properties with cladding issues.

Joanne asked if there are expectations about how PD should be performing. Kate explained that nothing has been set and that information will be available soon after the submission of the first year data in Summer 2024. League tables could possibly be established.

Angela asked if geographical and economical differences between landlords are built into comparisons as it seems to be solely based on size. Kate explained that although they are based only on size, there may be some regional breakdowns but PD will have to wait 18 months until the first year data to find out. The TSM's will be something the CAP can look at in detail.

CAP 006 Agreeing the three key issues for Board

Following each CAP meeting Kate will feedback three issues to Board. This gives the CAP the opportunity to highlight issues that they feel are important.

Issues highlighted;

Mark – How PD get information to hard to reach customers and those who do not engage.

Rachael – Not all information PD uses is user friendly or accessible.

Amanda – PD should refresh communication formats so that each message is different and has an impact. Instagram has not been updated since 5 November and includes nothing about support.

Shaf – Need to look at improving digital access for vulnerable customers and investigate why some people do not engage digitally.

Peter – PD need to step up use of social media. There should be a continuous flow of information to keep conversations alive.

Action Invite Comms Team to next CAP to discuss PDs approach to communicating with customers, how it can be improved and to give assurance to the CAP going forward.

Joanna – Customers are struggling with the cost of living crisis and this needs to be well monitored and progress measured.

Key issues for Board;

- Communication with customers – digital access, how PD engage with vulnerable customers, keeping messages to customers up to date and fresh, use of social media and other methods of communication
- Cost of Living Crisis – monitoring support and the impact on customers who are struggling. To use this to help shape services and raise awareness when Board/senior staff make decisions.
- Corporate Plan – to be involved with and to influence the development of the next Corporate Plan as well as having sight of the last year of the existing Plan.

It was agreed that Kate will include these 3 key issues in the Chief Executive's report to Board.

CAP 007 Items for next meeting

CAP members all felt the first meeting had been positive and the structure, topics and timing had all worked well.

Peter suggested that KPIs should show where PD's performance is at the moment and where they would like to be.

Amanda suggested the CAP would benefit from not just reacting to information and actions but feeding into and influencing key issues going forward.

Amanda suggested that the CAP should be involved with the Corporate Plan refresh. Kate explained that PD are about to go into the final year of a 3 year plan so the timing would be good for the CAP to get involved. Ann felt this would be something Board would be keen to see and that either Sir Peter Fahey or herself would attend the CAP meeting when it is discussed.

Action Corporate Plan to be included on the agenda at the CAP meeting in May.

Next meeting - 3 topics for the agenda in March;

- Communication
- Performance – focus on complaints and or regular dashboard
- Emma/Kate to speak to Exec Team/Board to identify themes where the CAP can have an influence

Action To speak to Board to identify themes for future meetings

Action Follow up meeting with Mark and Engagement Team to agree details of the last 2 topics above.

CAP 008 Any Other Business

There was no further business

CAP 009 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Wednesday 1 March at 6pm on Teams

ACTION POINTS

Minute number	Action	Who	Target date	Comments	Status
CAP004	Look at existing provision for young families at sign up and explore if PD could do more	Emma	1/3/23		
CAP004	Provide more information to PJ re partnership working	Emma	1/3/23		
CAP004	Check and review Cost of Living leaflet	Emma	1/3/23		
CAP006	Invite Comms to next meeting on 1 March	Kate	1/2/23		

CAP007	Speak to Board to identify themes where CAP can have an influence	Kate/ Emma	15/3/23		
CAP007	Corporate Plan to be included on CAP Agenda May 23	Irene	15/3/23	To be agreed at agenda setting meeting with the Chair	
CAP007	Meeting with Chair to agree agenda for next meeting and three items to go to Board	Irene	1/2/23		