

Name of meeting	Purpose Committee		
Report title	Customer Assurance Panel Update	Agenda item	6
Date of meeting	22 July 2024		
Author & job title	Angela Needham, Chair of Customer Assurance Panel		
Report status	Assurance		
Confidentiality	Non-Confidential		
Appendices			

1. Purpose of report

1.1 To update Purpose Committee with activities within the Customer Assurance Panel (CAP in Q1). CAP met on 10 July 2024, preceding the meeting was a closed session for the panel to meet the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH).

2. Recommendation

2.1 Committee is asked to:

- a. Note the update from CAP.
- b. Consider and respond to the points raised in section 10.

3. Key issues

3.1 A number of key issues were discussed by CAP:

- **NHF Code of Conduct** – in line with Plus Dane’s adoption, CAP agreed to move from their own code of conduct to the National Housing Federation’s (NHF) code. To support the application of the Code of Conduct, a process for managing breaches was reviewed, with officers asked by CAP to update to include a mechanism for responding to non-attendance at CAP meetings by members.
- **Schedule of business** – we approved our schedule of business but accept that through the year we reserve the right to be agile to emerging issues or consider issues at a more granular level to support assurance on key areas such as performance or compliance with Consumer Standards.
- **Consultation on Social Tenants Access to Information Requirements (STAIRS)** – CAP were presented with Plus Dane’s draft response to the consultation. Members queried if the response was too negative and challenged as to whether officers can weave in some points for how we would like the process to work. CAP will provide further updates to officers on the consultation offline.

4. Regulation

- 4.1 This paper contained two elements, the first being Plus Dane's approach to Consumer Regulation and the second was information about the completion of the recent review.
- 4.2 With regards to consumer standards members were asked the following key questions, with our decision included against them:
- *Does the self-assessment give assurance of compliance and planned improvement to members?* Members are comfortable it does, but they are keen to explore service outcomes through menu of insight and data to gather their own view on whether we are delivering expected outcomes.
 - *Does the information on the website and planned for Unity go far enough to raising awareness of the standards? If not, what else could we do?* Committee are keen to balance the needs of customers who require information in alternative formats and see update through social media which can often be more accessible.
 - *How should CAP test compliance? Is this through deep dives?* Officers will develop a menu of options which CAP can draw down on.
 - *Do you want to receive future updates at each meeting or review annually?* We will conduct a spotlight quarterly.
- 4.3 There was natural disappointment in the results of the rent review for the 1% of customers impacted but we were assured around the controls and improvements that have been put in place. We challenge the position on potential undercharging and are pleased Audit & Assurance Committee are reviewing this, but we understand that customers will not have retrospective increases. We also talked about a case that was reported on the day of the meeting where a council was found in breach of the RSH Rent Standard with half of its tenants impacted and a financial hit of £3m so we noted Plus Dane's position against this and that this has been contained in last year's financial position, CAP were pleased to review the communication before it was sent to those customers who were impacted.

5. 53 week rent year

- 5.1 We were presented with an overview of what went wrong and what we have changed as a result of this year's rent review. We were keen to discuss ongoing reminder communication with customers to prevent rent arrears.
- 5.2 We did welcome the response from Plus Dane on the issue but were keen not to diminish the impact this had on customers in what remain challenging economic times.

6. Q1 Tenant Satisfaction Measure Performance

- 6.1 We focused on the perception measures, noting improvement from March 2024 in most areas. We did question the targets against current performance but accepted the challenge Board had made in May 2024 to the executive to retain targets to encourage improvements in performance and recognise the number of improvements underway to tackle key areas where we need to improve.

- 6.2 We are keen to start to see the impact of the improvements, but we did also receive a report from Housemark reporting there is usually an 18 month lag from improvement to satisfaction levels.
- 6.3 The panel will review in more depth the 121 customers who were dissatisfied with the time taken to complete the latest repair to be assured the improvement actions will address the customers area of dissatisfaction.
- 6.4 We have also asked officers to look at the colours used for reporting the TSM's to make sure there is no confusion with the use of green when targets have not been met.

7. Repairs Catch Up Programme

- 7.1 We heard about the performance of the programme with the volume for internal repairs at 2700 reducing from 4200 in September 2023. We recognise that work is underway to procure contractors, recruit to our own team and trial initiatives to improve productivity but the news that the programme is extending to quarter 4 was extremely disappointing for the panel and we challenge Purpose Committee and Board to explore a way of delivering in line with original timescales.

8. Engagement Review

- 8.1 We received the draft report and appreciate it was in a raw format for members to review and influence. We also heard about the executive views and how they want to see the context and layout of the report improve to differentiate between observational findings and those made against current practice in the sector.
- 8.2 The executive presented a change to the paper and asked CAP to consider holding the discussion and agree to a joint session with CAP, with the opportunity for members to attend so that we can shape the recommendations and agree a way forward.
- 8.3 CAP welcomed this and suggested views from customers about what engagement looks like for them and how and if they know current opportunities exist so we can feed into the planned session. On this basis, the discussion was held.

9. Vibrant Communities Planning Framework

- 9.1 We had an animated discussion around the proposals for the framework. The intent behind the framework was not questioned but panel did challenge use of some of the language describing neighbourhoods as this could be detrimental on customers and communities.
- 9.2 We welcome the inclusion of social measures to review how a neighbourhood is performing but we would like to see much more qualitative community based information supporting this such as access to amenities, community activities and intelligence. We look forward to seeing this work progress.

10. Feedback to Board and Committee

- 10.1 To summarise the key points:
- Extension of the repairs catch up programme needs to be reviewed with assurance to CAP that this is the only option available.

- We welcome an opportunity to work collaboratively to discuss the recommendations from the engagement review and would like to hear the customer voice through that process.
- To give clarity on performance to customers, we would like Plus Dane to consider the colour palette on performance infographics to customers.

Angela Needham

Chair of Customer Assurance Panel