

CUSTOMER SCRUTINY MEETING FEBRUARY 2022

Meeting Summary

This paper sets out a summary of discussions held at the Customer Scrutiny meeting of February 16th 2022.

The meeting focused on the two issues of Elim Customer Satisfaction and Customer Complaints.

The following documents were provided for information in advance of the meeting:

- A powerpoint presentation comprising the meeting agenda and additional background information relating to the meeting and the two scrutiny items
- A copy of Elim's quarterly customer satisfaction tracker report which included the satisfaction data collected between December 2020 and December 2021
- A copy of Elim's complaint monitoring form which sets out the total number of complaints received in the year until December 2021, descriptions of these complaints and how they were resolved.

Summary of Discussion

The bold headings below separate out the key issues discussed.

How Elim uses the customer satisfaction information it collects

It was suggested that we could do more to provide our customers with further information on any trends or patterns in feedback that we receive. We have agreed to take this forward as an action and will provide feedback to our customers following each quarterly satisfaction report we receive. The next report will be available in June 2022.

As part of this conversation we also discussed the overall impact of the pandemic on the levels of satisfaction that our customers are reporting. We know that our customer's satisfaction with the maintenance service they receive is an important factor in how satisfied they are with Elim as a whole, in addition to how straightforward it is to contact us so that issues can be resolved.

Customer Satisfaction with rent and the value for money our services represent.

We were told that it might be helpful and informative for customers to understand more about the breakdown of Elim's expenditure, and where the income from household rent goes.

We discussed the current presentation of this information in Elim's annual report, but we were asked to review the opportunity to share this on a more regular basis, and to consider whether we could include more localised information (perhaps relating to geographical area or housing type). It was suggested that the quarterly rent statement communication could work well for this type of message. We have agreed to trial this in the 2022 / 2023 financial year.

Information relating to the annual rent increase

We were asked questions relating to the rent-setting process and the way in which we determine the new rents each year. As part of this discussion, we explained the guidelines which apply to different properties, including our properties in Wales or our homes for Gypsies and Travellers.

We were asked to acknowledge the impact of increased living costs on single-person households, as there is only one person's income to absorb the total cost of rent, alongside increases in council tax and utility costs. We were asked to reference this in future communication from Elim to demonstrate our awareness of cost pressures, and to support single people to feel more able to come to us if they are struggling with living costs.

Levels of satisfaction among Elim's Shared Ownership Customers.

We were asked to provide an explanation for the lower satisfaction scores that we have received from Elim's Shared Ownership customers, and we discussed areas where Elim could potentially improve the service they receive. This included:

- Improved communication with shared owners in relation to annual costs (including rent and service charges) so that we are always clear about our responsibilities and the expectations our customers should have for Elim as a landlord.
- It was recommended that our shared ownership households should sometimes receive information which is completely focused on the service they receive. We should make sure they are not being sent too much generic communication which is not that relevant to them
- Making sure that Elim is upfront about total shared ownership costs before new shared owners buy their home, this ensures there are no surprises further down the line.
- The need to learn from feedback. We always survey new homeowners after they have been in their home for 6 months. We will continue to keep an eye out for any trends or common themes that emerge from these surveys.

Satisfaction with Elim's Cleaning and Grounds Maintenance Service

We were asked to provide further information on the contractual arrangements that we have in place with our cleaning and grounds maintenance contractor.

We were encouraged to make better use of before and after pictures to demonstrate that work has been done on time and to the standard we expect. We already ask our contractors to use this approach, but we have also agreed to encourage our customers who receive a cleaning or grounds maintenance service to take photographs and share them with us to let us know if they are particularly happy or dissatisfied with the work undertaken.

Rising utility costs

We discussed the energy performance of Elim's property and the impact that this can have on household heating bills. We are in the process of ensuring that we hold Energy Performance Certificates (EPC's) for every property we own.

We will use the EPC information to help us organise our planned maintenance work so that we can improve the energy performance of the lowest EPC rated properties as a priority over the next few years.

Elim's Maintenance Service

Our customer highlighted some of the comments in the survey responses relating to outstanding or forgotten maintenance requests. We answered questions on how the maintenance system functions, and we were asked how maintenance orders could become 'lost', if the system was working effectively.

We were asked how the contractors acknowledge that a repair has been raised (this is the second stage after the customer's first contact with Elim), and we were asked to review the communication process so that we could be sure that our customers receive proactive contact from our contractors to arrange the repair date.

Elim's Gypsy and Traveller Services

We were asked to provide additional background information on the Gypsy and Traveller Service, and we answered questions relating to the homes we provide and how payment arrangements work for rent and utility bills.

Review of Customer Complaints

Anonymised information was provided on a total of 12 complaints. It was noted that only three of these had been formally escalated to a stage 2 review by the complainant, and there were no clear trends in the complaints received.

We were asked to share our learning from the only complaint that was escalated to the Housing Ombudsman, and this was the need for Elim to make sure our complaint handling process is as streamlined and clear as possible. We have addressed these issues with an updated two stage complaints procedure, which means that every complaint is reviewed by our Complaints Officer at Stage 1 and a member of our Leadership Team at Stage 2. If the response at stage 2 remains unsatisfactory, the customer is able to refer their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.

We were also asked the question 'What constitutes a lot of complaints?'. This is a good question and we do not have a clear answer. Recently, we have received between 10 and 25 complaints each year. We are going to find out how many complaints similar size organisations have received over the same period to see how Elim compares.

Key issues for discussion at the next scrutiny meeting

It was requested that the next customer scrutiny session focuses on Elim's budget setting and expenditure. This will include a review of how we spent our income between April 2020 and April 2021.

The next meeting will be held at the beginning of May 2022, and the date will be shared on our website, social media and via email.