



Wythenshawe
Community Housing Group

Scrutiny Group review findings - Grass Cutting and Cleaning

July 2023

Summary

During June and July our tenant-led Scrutiny Group conducted a review of the grass cutting and communal cleaning services. This report details how the review was conducted, its findings and its recommendations.

In summary, Scrutiny Group found that the services are well-run and demonstrate value for money.

However, sometimes customers are dissatisfied with standards and uncertain about WCHG and MCC responsibilities. Scrutiny Group also identified a need to increase customer engagement in relation to the services, especially through feedback surveys.

While Scrutiny Group found service charge calculations to be understandable and fair, it found that these were not communicated well with customers.

The Review

In 2023, Scrutiny Group was requested to carry out a review into grass cutting and communal cleaning by Customer Experience Committee. The review was particularly necessary because:

- **Dissatisfaction** – customers are reporting dissatisfaction with the service charges
- **Time since last review** - the last review was in 2014/2015 and cleaning services have not yet been reviewed by customers
- **Change in grass cutting cycle** – there has been a change in the cycle to maximise value for money for customers
- **Use of communal spaces**– Scrutiny Group members have noted issues with the use of outdoor spaces

Members sought to answer the following questions, which they set in consultation with the Chair of CXC:

- Are the grass cutting and cleaning services delivered to a high standard?
- Is the way that service and estate charges are calculated fair to customers?
- Are the service and estate charges value for money?
- Are customer appropriately consulted on service standards?
- Is there sufficient communication with customers about service standards?
- Do we have appropriate mechanisms in place to gather and understand customer feedback?
- What are we learning from customer complaints and other customer feedback?
- How does our grass cutting service compare to others?
- Are there more sites across the estate which could be “returned to nature”?
- Are the communications to customers about use of communal outdoor spaces sufficient?

In completing the review, members of the Scrutiny Group carried out the following activities:

- Desktop review of key information:
 - How visits to site are recorded
 - Benchmarking (GMES, visit to Southway Housing and a visit to WCHG by Stockport Homes)
 - Customer complaint trends relating to the services
 - How hourly rates and service charges are calculated for all our services
 - Review of complaints for the services in 2022/23
 - Review of satisfaction data about the services
- Leaseholders' and High Rise Living Forums provided feed back on their experiences of the services
- Reality checks where the SG carried out on site inspections of grass cutting and communal cleaning
- Interview with Barry Warner
- Review of service standards
- Review of sites that could potentially be 'returned to nature'

Findings

Are the grass cutting and communal cleaning services delivered to a high standard?

Finding: Mainly yes, the 2022/2023 GMHP satisfaction measures indicates WCHG is in the upper quartile with 69% satisfied with communal areas. However, members felt that standards were not universal across sites.

Areas for improvement:

More work needs to be done around standards across Wythenshawe to ensure consistency in areas including:

The products used, the clearing of cut grass, maintenance of car parks and paths, trimming of bushes and grass more often, cleaning of bin rooms, time spent on site for both services, increased mopping easier and reporting mechanisms.

Is the way that service and estate charges calculated fair to customers?

Finding:

Yes. The Scrutiny Group was shown how service charges are calculated, including the breakdown for hourly rates, how other service costs were calculated for waste removals, contractor works and how these were applied to each site.

Areas for improvement:

Although Scrutiny Group was happy with *how* charges are calculated, it felt that customers need to be more informed of what the charges were and for what activities.

Are the service and estate charges value for money?

Finding:

Yes, when compared to data obtained from other local providers and when compared with contractor cost our charges do represent value for money.

We benchmark with the Greater Manchester Estate Services (GMES) and are part of the MHPP and the HQN estate services group.

Areas for improvement:

Maintain benchmarking with groups, identify any action that can improve value for money for customers.

Continue to obtain better quality and more up to date data from other providers.

Are customers appropriately consulted on service standards?
Is there sufficient communication with customers about service standards?
Do we have appropriate mechanisms in place to gather and understand customer feedback?

Findings:

In the case of the each of the above questions, WCHG could be doing better. Prior to the pandemic, customers were consulted on service standards through paper surveys. Since the pandemic, WCHG has focused on obtaining feedback through online surveys which can be accessed via QR codes dotted around communal areas. This has brought only limited success. Scrutiny Group was critical of the singular use of QR codes generally. Members noted that customers often do not know how to use them.

Areas for improvement:

- Improve usage of QR codes to improve feedback (inc. location identification for specific issues)
- Engage Digital Inclusion team to improve skills
- Effectively use data and insight (Power BI) to identify trends
- Accessible satisfaction figures
- Standards regularly reviewed alongside customers
- Increasing digital inclusion

How does our grass cutting service compare to others?

Findings:

WCHG grass cutting service is comparable with other local providers and reflects how the weather has an impact on service delivery.

The Scrutiny Group commented how our service compares favourably with the local authority.

Areas for improvement:

Weed footpaths more frequently

Trim bushes and grass more frequently

Demonstrate value for money

Are there more sites across the estate which could be 'returned to nature?'

Findings:

Yes, there are 29 potential sites that could be returned to nature, 18 within communal grounds and 11 on open spaces

Areas for improvement:

Ensure a balanced approach to returning sites to nature vs maintenance costs

Make sure plants are appropriate to the environment to ensure WCHG does not create monocultures

Consult with customers that may be affected by the change of use

Recommendations

Scrutiny Group recommendations

4 main recommendations were identified by the group

1. Management to develop a plan to ensure that standards across all sites are universal, including cleaning, grass cutting, weeding paths, products used.
2. Management to improve communication and data accessibility in relation to grass cutting and communal cleaning services.
3. Management to develop improved reporting mechanisms using Accuserve to drive performance improvements and transparency of service.
4. (Neighbourhoods) Management to produce a policy for the use of shared communal spaces.



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