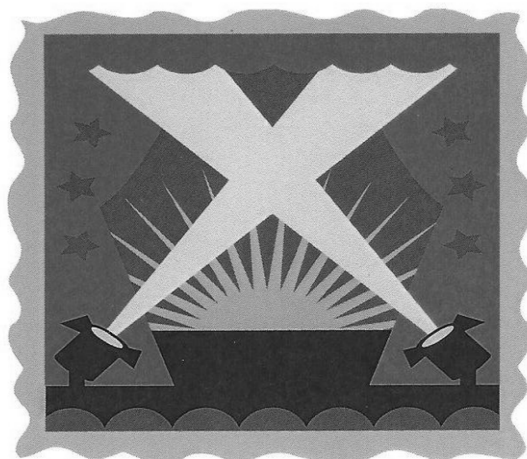


CROYDON HOUSING SERVICES INSPECTORS



Spotlight on Services

Report on the Inspection of Housing Caretaking Services
February 2012

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1. Introduction

This report details the findings of an inspection of the London Borough of Croydon's Caretaking Services during October and November 2011.

2. Scope & Methodology

The decision to inspect the Caretaking Services was discussed and agreed at the Tenants & Leaseholders meeting on 4th July 2011.

The Service is managed by the Neighbourhood Services Teams in each of the three District Housing Management offices. Each District comprises of the following:

1. Neighbourhood Services Manager.
2. Two Neighbourhood Caretaker Managers.
3. Teams of Neighbourhood Caretakers.

The inspection took place between 18th October and 18th November 2011 and used a variety of inspection techniques to assess the procedures and monitoring of the current Caretaking Services.

The inspection techniques used to test compliance with service standards were:

1. A desktop review.
2. Site visits/work shadowing.
3. A 'Focus Group' interview with Caretaking Staff. This interview consisted of two Caretakers from each District.
4. Interviews with a Caretaker Manager from each District.
5. Interviews with a Caretaker from each District.
6. Telephone surveys.

During the course of the interviews, the Inspectors heard many references to "Friday meetings", so they requested that they be permitted to attend a "Friday meeting" in each District as observers and this was then added to the inspection techniques. The Inspectors felt that by observing, they would gain a fuller picture of the overall service and the consistencies and inconsistencies borough wide.

3. The Process

An evaluation meeting took place on Tuesday 3rd January 2012 at which the Inspectors discussed the inspection process and agreed on the key findings and recommendations to be presented from the inspection (refer to Chapters 5 & 6).

The Inspectors felt it had been a worthwhile inspection and although they had received support from the Resident Involvement Team, the inspection had been their work from the onset of the desktop review, the observations from the site visits/work shadowing and the notes taken at all of the interviews and "Friday meetings".

4. Summary

The Inspectors observed many points of good practice throughout the Caretaking Service. The Staff and Managers they spoke to were conscientious and committed, some with many years of experience. The Caretakers take time to build a good rapport with residents, and provide support, particularly to vulnerable tenants. Many Caretakers undertake extra duties rather than waiting for someone else to do them and provide help and support to other service providers.

The Staff who took part in the inspection had a good understanding of the requirements of the service and gave the inspection team a number of thoughtful and constructive suggestions on how the service might be improved.

These and other issues identified by the inspection team are detailed in Section 5 with recommendations for solutions in Section 6.

5. Findings

Findings from the key service areas tested by the Inspectors are listed below. The techniques used to inspect the service are also detailed in Section 2. The recommendations made as an outcome of these findings are in Section 6 of this report.

1. Carry out cleaning duties to internal areas and bin chambers according to the agreed enhanced cleaning standards and frequencies. (Amber – Partial)
(Desktop Review; Staff Interview; Staff Focus Group; Work Shadowing; Resident Interviews; Team Meetings)

Following site visits and interviews with Caretakers the Inspectors felt that all Staff and Managers are clear on the duties and standards for cleaning. It was also noted that Staff are very conscientious and often perform duties that are beyond the basic requirements, or the responsibility of other service providers.

Residents, particularly new Tenants, seemed unclear about which services the Caretakers are responsible for and how often they should be carried out. The cleaning schedules are sometimes removed from display in the blocks.

Some Managers reported difficulty communicating with Veolia regarding bin collection schedules and bins not returned to bin chambers but left in the street for Caretakers to return.

Some issues with recycling bins were also discussed at the Team meetings. There is a feeling that Veolia are not engaging with Caretaker Managers to resolve issues.

One Caretaker said he used Jeyes fluid to disinfect bins while others said this should not be used. Clarification and consistency is needed on this issue.

There was also a lack of clarity by Caretakers and Managers about who should be responsible for cleaning the inside and outside of bin chamber doors. There is a concern that this is not carried out in the absence of clear guidelines.

Lack of safe storage for cleaning equipment was noted by Inspectors. Some equipment had to be stored at a different location and carried between blocks. Staff providing cover did not always know which location to find the equipment they would need and had to spend time looking for it.

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2. Carry out regular inspections of lights and lamps and fit replacements as necessary. (Amber – Partial)

(Desktop Review; Staff Interview; Staff Focus Group; Resident Interviews; Work Shadowing; Team Meetings)

Staff in all areas carry out regular checks to light bulbs and timers. Timers on lights are adjusted when necessary. Light bulbs are replaced. The light fittings and surrounds are cleaned and checked if they can be reached using a three step ladder, and the fitting is not broken. If the light is broken or higher than the safety limit it is reported as a repair.

Staff reported that it can sometimes take some time before the Repairs Team fix a light. Residents do not know that some lights or problems are the responsibility of a different team and see this as a failing of the Caretaking Service.

Some Caretakers feel unqualified to adjust the timers on lights. This is a training issue for their Managers to address.

3. Carry out secondary monitoring to ensure Streetscene Services (external cleaning/litter picking & refuse collection) are being delivered to agreed standards. Report any concerns or performance issues to Neighbourhood Caretaking Manager. (Green – Pass)

(Desktop Review; Staff Interview; Staff Focus Group; Resident Interviews; Team Meetings)

There is a clear monitoring and reporting process for Streetscene Services that is understood and followed by both Caretakers and Caretaker Managers.

The feeling from interviews and the focus group is that reports are generally acted on promptly and there is a good working relationship between them and Streetscene operatives.

However, a number of issues were raised regarding when reports are not acted on in a timely way. Some issues have to be reported more than once, or follow-up reports have to be sent to say a job has not been completed.

Caretaker Managers do weekly monitoring to identify missed sites.

Some Caretakers felt that, while the reporting process is clear, it is overly complicated, going to the Caretaker Manager, then to a Call Centre, then to the Streetscene Manager and then to a local operative for action. It would be helpful if a more direct route for communication could be established.

Feedback from Streetscene regarding progress on reported issues can be poor.

One Caretaker said he would pick up leaves or litter himself if it is a hazard, rather than waiting for a report to be acted on.

Feedback from Residents indicates that many are not aware of the difference between Caretaking and Streetscene responsibilities. This affects residents' overall perception of the Caretaking Service.

4. Report repairs to communal areas and monitor completion of these jobs. (Amber – Partial)

(Desktop Review; Staff Interview; Staff Focus Group; Caretaker Manager Interviews; Team Meetings)

There is a clear process for reporting and monitoring repairs to communal areas that is understood by Caretakers and Managers.

As with Streetscene, issues were identified in all areas regarding poor communication and feedback from the Repairs Team on jobs that are not completed within the priority guidelines.

The Inspectors felt that there should be a process to ensure outstanding repair jobs are addressed. There is a tear off slip to say a job has been completed but not one to say it is outstanding after the advised date on the job sheet.

Some Caretakers say that if a job is not completed they just keep reporting it.

5. Carry out Health & Safety inspections as required by the Neighbourhood Caretaking Managers, making sure areas comply with Policy and Legislative requirements. This includes wearing correct protective clothing, use of equipment and materials, personal protection while working on site alone.

(Red – Fail) *Uniforms and boots in particular*

(Desktop Review; Staff Interview; Staff Focus Group; Caretaker Manager Interviews; Resident Interviews; Team Meetings)

Caretakers have had Health and Safety training and have a practical understanding of their duties and requirements relating to their jobs.

There is a Health and Safety lead officer in each District.

Health and Safety is a standard item on the agenda for all Districts' weekly Team meetings.

A number of issues were raised during the Service Inspection.

Doormats on landings outside Residents' flats are a tripping hazard and prevent Caretakers from thorough cleaning of the landing floors. They can get very dirty if Residents do not clean them. The mats should be moved inside flats or removed. Items such as prams and wheelchairs are left on landings outside flats. These are a hazard. If not removed when Caretakers make the request this becomes a Tenancy issue but Caretakers feel unsupported by Tenancy Teams.

Uniforms, I.D. badges and protective clothing are not consistently worn by Caretakers. Not wearing appropriate footwear was noted in particular. There was no evidence that correct uniform was enforced by the Caretaker Managers.

One Caretaker has said he has been waiting a long time for uniform and boots but they had not been issued.

6. Visit all new Tenants', explain the arrangements for disposal of domestic refuse and issue a copy of the Neighbourhood Services Handbook.

(Red – Fail)

(Desktop Review; Staff Focus Group; New Residents' Interviews; Team Meetings)

Two telephone surveys were carried out on a random sample of Residents in each District. One was used with new Tenants who had moved to their property within three months and one for people who had Tenancies for a year or more. A letter was sent to all Tenants in the sample informing them that the survey would take place and that it was a legitimate activity on behalf of the Council. The survey asked questions about Tenants' understanding of the Caretaking Services and what they thought of the service they received. In addition new Tenants were asked about the visit they should receive from their Caretaker when they moved in.

The survey was completed in North and South Central Districts. The survey in East District was abandoned due to the number of abusive responses received by the Inspector when she made the calls.

67.86% of new Tenants said they had not received a visit from a Caretaker.
82.70% of all Tenants surveyed said they understood what services Caretakers provide.

71.43% of new Tenants said they understood what the Tenants' responsibilities are, but Caretaking Staff have said during the inspection that many of the problems they encounter are due to anti-social behaviour, bulk rubbish and household rubbish left in inappropriate places and items left in communal areas.

7. Ensure all communal areas are free of bulk rubbish. (Green – Pass)

(Desktop review; Staff Interview; Work Shadowing; Resident Interviews; Team Meetings)

Caretakers have a good understanding of their duties. They build good relationships with Residents in the blocks on their patch which helps prevent items being left in communal areas.

However all the Caretakers who took part in the inspection have said that there are persistent offenders who continue to leave items on landings or rubbish for Caretakers to clear.

The instructions from Caretaker Managers is inconsistent, with some Staff being told to approach Tenants directly, but politely, and others saying it is a Tenancy issue and should be reported to the Tenancy Teams.

Many Caretakers feel unsupported by Tenancy Teams, particularly since they no longer meet regularly.

Other findings

(Desktop Review; Staff Interview; Staff Focus Group; Work Shadowing; Caretaker Manager Interviews; Resident Interviews; Team Meetings)

8. Communication (Amber –Partial)

Caretakers communicate with their Managers through two way radios via the District Office.

These radios have poor reception in some parts of the borough.

They can only be contacted if someone is at the District Office to use the radio.

There are no regular checks on reception.

If the radios do not work Caretakers are expected to use their personal mobile phones for which there is no reimbursement.

9. Supermarket Trolleys (Red – Fail)

Supermarket trolleys left on Estates are a problem for which no one is taking responsibility. The supermarkets will not collect them and Veolia is not contracted to return them. If they are left close to Council blocks, Caretakers feel they are expected to deal with the problem but there is no process for this, although in North District they are added to the bulk refuse collection and then delivered back to the Supermarket.

10. Overtime (Red – Fail)

In the focus group Staff from each District said they had a different procedure. One received payment of up to one hour, one received time off in lieu of up to one hour and one did not receive anything. The Inspectors felt there should be consistency in the way this is dealt with.

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Marilyn Smithies, Housing Services Inspector, January 2012

11. Team Meetings (Red – Fail)

The Inspectors observed a significant difference in the way these were conducted in each District and felt that some Caretaker Managers should receive training or guidance on best practice to ensure all Caretakers receive the same information about changes and developments to the Service.

12. Grounds Maintenance Reports (Amber – Partial)

The Inspectors were very impressed with the maps used by North District to pinpoint areas needing attention by the Grounds Maintenance Team. These are available on the intranet GIS system to all Staff in District Offices and should be adopted by the other Teams as best practice.

13. Training (Amber – Partial)

Some Caretaker Managers seemed unclear about the status of professional training received by their team members.

6. Recommendations

1. Clarification needed on the following issues:
 - The practice of using Jeyes fluid.
 - Overtime policy.
 - The point at which Caretakers should stop giving Tenants warnings about items left on landings and refer the Tenant for breach of Tenancy conditions.
2. A formal reporting procedure should be put in place to improve communication with Veolia. Ideally, a regular monthly meeting between Veolia and Caretaking Management, to discuss outstanding issues and track progress on agreed actions.
3. All Caretaker Managers should carry out an audit of training to establish if there are any gaps, including programming the timers on lighting systems.
4. Regular meetings should be held with Streetscene Management to discuss progress on outstanding jobs and raise issues.
5. A procedure should be put in place for reporting, feedback and escalation of outstanding repair jobs. Caretaking Teams to keep a record of outstanding repair jobs that have passed the date by which they were told it would be completed, including a note of how many times it has been reported. Report to be sent to Repairs Management on a weekly basis for action plan and feedback.
6. Regular meetings with Tenancy Teams to be reinstated to agree action on anti-social behaviour regarding Caretaking Services and items persistently left in communal areas.
7. An audit on Caretakers' uniforms should be carried out with replacement items ordered. Caretaker Managers should enforce wearing correct uniforms while on site.
8. A policy decision about doormats on landings should be made. If they are banned this should be enforced with the support of Tenancy Officers.
9. A borough wide policy decision regarding supermarket trolleys should be made.

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10. The use of radios and mobile phones by Caretakers on site should be reviewed. Issuing corporate mobile phones to Caretakers should be considered.

11. With regard to new Tenant visits, pre-printed cards should be produced and given to all Caretakers. These cards should have the contact number for the Lettings Team and a space for the Caretaker to add their name. The Lettings Team to make appointments where possible or provide the relevant information to the new Tenant.

12. The use of location maps in Grounds Maintenance reports by the North District should be adopted by other Caretaking Teams as best practice. This may also be helpful when reporting issues to other services, such as fly-tipping or broken street lights.

7. Key

Housing Management Areas	East North South Central
Total Number of Residents Interviewed by Telephone	52
Caretaking Staff Interviewed	<u>Caretaker Managers</u> East: Kingsley Eze North: Terry Edwards South Central: Kai Powkawa <u>Caretakers</u> East: Steve Gentle, Paul Chima, Howard Berry North: Bill Penfold, Keith Waldoock, Hamid Siniane South Central: Winston Hall, Steve Baah, Christine Hallett
Site Visits/Work Shadowing	<u>Caretakers</u> East: Gavelin Thomas North: Gilbert Yuma South Central: Steve Baah
Friday Team Meetings	East: <u>Caretaker Managers</u> Kingsley Eze and Chima Wabara <u>Caretakers</u> = 16 North: <u>Caretaker Managers</u> Adrian Nunes and Terry Edwards <u>Caretakers</u> = 16 South Central: <u>Caretaker Managers</u> Kai Powkawa <u>Caretakers</u> = 18