



The Better_____ Social Housing Review_____

REPORT 2024

Welcome to our first Better Social Housing Review Annual Report

It has been over a year since the Better Social Housing Review (BSHR) was published in December 2022, establishing seven clear recommendations to improve the quality and management of social housing in the UK. It was a key moment for the housing sector, illustrating challenges to overcome and our collective commitment to learning and making change.

Upon its publication, Torus made a clear commitment to work with The National Housing Federation, Chartered Institute of Housing, our partners and tenants to start delivering against the seven recommendations. I am confident that this report evidences the sincerity of that pledge.

Throughout its chapters you will be able to see how we are taking direct action to deliver and embed the seven recommendations. In many cases, you will also be able to see where our existing activity has been complimentary to this push. I am pleased that the activity in this report is clearly underpinned by evidence and examples of tenant views being listened to and acted on.

This report itself partially fulfils recommendation seven of the BSHR: Housing associations should support tenants and frontline colleagues to undertake an annual review of the progress each organisation is making in implementing this review's recommendations.

Reflection and critical appraisal are always a worthwhile exercise, and it is wholly positive to have this as a distinct priority. I hope it will provide the foundation for benchmarking and greater levels of transparency moving forward.

As always, tenants are at the heart of everything Torus does, and delivering against the BSHR will continue to make our relationship stronger. It has been wonderful to see tenants have an active role in shaping the initiatives in this report and also the document itself. Next year, our objective is for more tenants to be involved in shaping our activity and holding us to account.

Whilst this report covers many encouraging outcomes and developments, it does also shine a light on complex challenges and areas for improvement. It is important these topics are given the same level of exposure as the positives, and I hope the Group's transparency and honesty regarding these subjects provides assurance that they are being addressed.

I am excited to see how this report evolves year-on-year and look forward to driving the change it will present. I hope that all stakeholders reading this will come with us and support this journey.



Steve Coffey
Chief Executive Officer



2023 at a glance

- An investment planning consultation took place in October 2023, seeking the views of involved tenants on the key components we put into Torus homes, replacement timescales and future investment.
- Our Assets team developed and presented a 'roadmap' setting out a programme of home repairs and maintenance activities. This programme will start in 2024.
- We commissioned a specialist independent home surveyor to carry out essential surveys on all Torus homes, including blocks of flats. This will complete in the second half of 2024.
- Our 'Tenancy Visits' project started, aiming to visit every general needs home and talk to tenants about any issues they might have.
- Meanwhile, the 'Neighbourhood Patches' initiative is creating smaller patch sizes for Neighbourhood Officers. We will be more visible in local communities when this project finishes in spring/summer 2024.
- We began a two-year Data Maturity Action Plan (2023 to 2025). The plan covers data governance, data quality, data security and effective reporting.
- The Torus 'Tenant Census' launched in October 2023. This is helping us to overcome data challenges and will play a key role in shaping current and future services.



2023 at a glance

→ We established a dedicated Complaints Team, including a Complaints Learning Officer position.

→ We reviewed levels of Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) qualifications across frontline teams. Colleagues took on essential CIH training, ranging from level 2 to level 5. Such qualifications are now compulsory requirements when people apply for certain roles at Torus.

→ We identified areas of best practice and worked with tenants to gather feedback on services. Following this, Torus has started to implement changes recommended by tenants.

→ We started to develop a structured training programme for involved tenants. This programme is designed to bridge the gap between longer-standing British born BME communities and newer BME / faith communities.

→ We created a multi-agency working hub in Abingdon Grove, located in Walton, North Liverpool.

→ A series of Councillor focus groups took place across key geographies in July 2023. Torus heard councillor concerns and provided clarity on the scale of challenges affecting Torus and the wider sector.





Recommendation 1

Core purpose

Every housing association, and the sector as a whole, should refocus on their core purpose and deliver against it. **“to provide decent, safe homes for those who can’t afford the market”**

It is important for housing associations to stay focused on their core purpose and involve tenants in decision-making processes. By defining core purpose, housing associations can ensure their actions align with the needs and priorities of the tenants they serve. Consulting with tenants is a way of ensuring tenant voices are heard and that resources are directed towards the activities that have the most positive impact. This will lead to effective, tenant-centred outcomes.

Torus’ core purpose is to provide safe, affordable and quality housing. We are responsible for managing and maintaining our properties and ensuring they meet safety standards. We also offer a wide range of support to our tenants, helping to address housing needs, promote community development and contribute to social and economic stability.

Core purpose is not limited to providing homes. It means putting customers at the heart of everything we do. We take a long-term approach to improving quality of life and communities. In addition to offering safe and secure homes, we also provide support in terms of employment, social issues, money management, and health and wellbeing. This commitment provides a foundation for improved lives and life chances.

Customer service and complaints

Torus colleagues have successfully concluded a comprehensive training program aimed at improving their skills in effectively addressing complaints. Our dedicated complaints team has undergone a structured induction program with a strong emphasis on prioritising customer satisfaction. The training encompassed various modules, such as the Housing Ombudsman complaints handling code, composing professional letter responses, and introduced other business areas they will collaborate with in the future.

Diversity and Inclusion

Torus acknowledges the vital need to provide effective people-focused housing service to all tenants, irrespective of their background or characteristics. Our primary objective is to ensure that inclusion is deeply ingrained in our service delivery policies and procedures.

In 2023, we created our first Vulnerability and Reasonable Adjustments Policy, which sets out how we will work to support people with a vulnerability or barrier to accessing services. A new Customer Access Strategy will follow in early 2024. This focuses on ensuring services are easy to access for all.

Dedicated Inclusion goals and commitments will launch in 2024.

Investment in existing homes

Torus is investing more resources in existing homes than ever before.

An investment planning consultation took place in October 2023 to seek the views of involved tenants on future investment and replacing key home components. Tenants used this consultation to inform the development of a 10-year investment and delivery plan. This plan was also informed by data gathered through stock condition surveys.

Discussions took place around best practice and improvements regarding resources, transparency, tenants' priorities, communication with tenants and environmental and sustainability considerations.

Following on from the consultation, a communications plan is being developed together with a detailed procedural guide for colleagues. This will provide tenants with advanced notice of upcoming works, enabling them to plan accordingly. Additionally, an annual work programme will be published, which will inform tenants of the details regarding the works, including the 'what, where, when', and any modifications made to ongoing projects will be communicated.

While electronic communication methods are effective, it is important to consider that some tenants prefer paper copies. This preference will be considered when formulating the plan. Furthermore, tenants have expressed a desire to be informed if a sub-contractor is assigned to handle any repairs or maintenance in their homes. This is so they can ensure the sub-contractor has access to all necessary information to successfully complete the job.

Also, it is crucial to provide aftercare instructions once the works are finished, outlining how defects should be managed. Lastly, tenants emphasised the importance of having a designated contact officer for works, a specific individual whom tenants can reach out to in case of any issues or concerns.

Next Steps

Five priorities were established, four of which were the same priorities tenants had put forward. These are:

- **Preventing damp and mould**
- **Keeping tenant's running costs down** - measures that keep general running costs down should be done first e.g., efficient heating, door and window replacements
- **Timing of works** - roof, window, door and heating replacements should be planned for the summer months so that inconveniences are mitigated
- **Include/consider crime data** - prioritising window and door fitting and replacements and completing them in suitable hours
- **Combining the concept of worst first and practical packaging** - if the kitchen requires immediate attention but also requires the bathroom (which does not require immediate attention), it is advisable to address both areas simultaneously

Asset Strategy Roadmap

In July 2023, our Assets team presented a roadmap for repairs and maintenance, which set out planned activities for 2023 and 2024. The primary focus of this roadmap is to enhance the overall customer journey. In order to achieve the desired outcomes, the Assets team will be working closely with the Customer Hub and HMS.

At the time of writing (December 2023), 30 actions set out in the roadmap have commenced. Seven of these actions have been designated as Completed (Green); 4 are experiencing delays (Red), and the remaining 18 are anticipated to be finished in the coming months (also Green).

The final action, which entails a comprehensive evaluation of the call handling and works planning function, will be carried out after March 2024.

Completed actions include:

1. Renewal of the Repairs and Maintenance Policy
2. A review of the Complaints Management Procedure
3. A review of the process for conducting Asbestos Surveys
4. Addressing issues with late receipt of asbestos information that hold up works

The team is working to improve repairs and maintenance works and considered some basic rules to reduce the volumes of requests. They reviewed the amount of work generated by external surveyors and looked to minimise or stop additional “internal” surveyor requests if the data shows it.

Further, the team now allows relevant colleagues and Asset Surveyors to access essential ICT infrastructure on a “read-only” basis, so they have visibility of day-to-day operational diaries. This is beneficial as many of the calls are tenants inquiring about when a tradesperson is arriving.

Housing vision and neighbourhood offer

Our Housing Vision, created in autumn 2023, is to “consistently deliver exceptional landlord services that prioritise our tenants, leaseholders, and their families”. Tenants have the right to live in a safe, warm, and comfortable home, supported by clear, approachable, and effective landlord services.

We have five key commitments which will ensure tenants benefit from services they can trust and depend on. We will:

1. Treat tenants and leaseholders with respect, empathy and understanding, every time they access our services
2. Tailor how we deliver services to meet customer needs and preferences
3. Keep our promises - and keep tenants and leaseholders informed of how we are delivering them
4. Get it right first time and, if we do not act quickly and effectively to make things right
5. Be visible to our customers and actively present in our neighbourhoods, harnessing the power of partnerships with local service providers and community groups

Our ‘Neighbourhood Offer’, developed in parallel with the Housing Vision, underlines our commitment to providing comprehensive housing management functions that prioritise the needs of our tenants and the overall well-being of our communities.



Our offer is as follows:

Neighbourhood Housing teams provide a high-quality tenant focussed service covering a wide range of tenancy and estate management issues.

Our dedicated Neighbourhood Housing Officers are assigned to specific areas and offer a wide range of services to ensure that tenants receive support in managing their tenancies if needed. They enforce the terms of the tenancy agreements, provide assistance or guidance when necessary, and serve as a single point of contact for any tenancy-related concerns. As well, they actively engage with the community through estate walkabouts and community impact days.

To further enhance our services, our Neighbourhood Housing Officers collaborate with various departments within Torus, such as the Customer Hub, Assets, Income and Leasehold Services, Allocations and Lettings, Tenant Voice Teams, and Support Network. They also work closely with the Anti-Social Behaviour Team and Enforcement Officers to address any serious breaches of tenancy. Furthermore, our Neighbourhood Housing Officers will establish strong partnerships with local authorities, ward councillors, police, and social services to ensure effective collaboration and deliver positive changes at the neighbourhood level.

Torus is committed to working closely with individuals and communities to address any specific concerns raised by tenants. We approach tenants with disabilities and/or specific requirements with great sensitivity, ensuring that their individual needs are met.

The opinions and feedback of tenants are of utmost importance in driving service changes and conducting reviews at Torus. We firmly believe that tenant views are key in ensuring that our services are relevant and accessible to all.

Throughout the year, we have actively engaged with tenants through consultations on various aspects including the development of policies, complaints, neighbourhood services, repairs and maintenance, investment planning, and diversity and inclusion. Tenants are encouraged to critically evaluate how Torus services address the current situation and to identify any positive aspects or areas where improvements can be made.





Tenant feedback

Human Rights Act

Tenants emphasised the importance of the Human Rights Act in practice. Tenants are entitled to safe and decent housing, as well as the right to privacy within their own residence.

Neurodiversity network

One of our involved tenants engaged in a discussion about neurodiversity and how Torus can provide support for tenants with neurological conditions. Various recommendations were proposed regarding how Torus can cater for individuals with diverse neurological needs.

- Avoid using complicated words and jargon
- Provide Easy Read versions of documents
- Use more pictures and diagrams in communications
- Have employees available with experience of neurological disorders
- Provide named officers to reduce anxiety around new people

When communicating with tenants, Torus employees should use simple language, slow down, and build stronger relationships with tenants. They should treat everybody with respect and listen to tenants carefully.

Furthermore, it is important for Torus to enhance its efforts in promoting recruitment opportunities, actively seeking individuals from a neurodiverse background. It is crucial for Torus to acknowledge the unique skill sets those neurodiverse individuals possess, and recognise how they can contribute to strengthening workforces.

Focus on Torus

Our involved tenants stressed the importance of focusing solely on Torus, rather than working on the basis of findings from other Social Housing Associations.

Customer services and complaints

Complaints should be viewed as a positive rather than a negative. Torus should use complaints as a way of practically shaping services.

Additionally, tenants suggested that Torus should consider neighbourhood issues and work with tenants to understand local challenges. When Torus leaders interact with local councillors, tenant voices should come through.

Tenants

The significance of engaging with older tenants has been highlighted by our involved tenants. Torus should appreciate that some older tenants struggle to access and use technology such as computers and smartphones. Online communications are not as effective for this audience.

It is possible that older tenants may experience feelings of isolation, and Torus should adapt their communication methods to make sure they are not left out.

Recommendation 2



Housing associations should work together to conduct and publish a thorough audit of all social housing in England.

Housing associations have a responsibility to provide quality housing for all customers. However, there is currently no shared, detailed understanding of the quality of homes. The quality and detail of data on stock conditions collected across the sector is variable, meaning there is a need for a consistent definition of decency which will be helpful when prioritising resources.

Furthermore, there is a lack of understanding of inequities for tenants from a Black, Asian, and Minority-Ethnic background or those with disabilities. This needs to be addressed to ensure those who are particularly at risk from issues such as damp and mould, are prioritised.

Combining asset data with resident data can help housing associations address inequity. It is particularly important to understand and address the disparities for tenants from a BME background. Accurate information on the condition of the property will allow housing associations to make well informed decisions regarding the repair and maintenance of homes.

Torus is putting a strong emphasis on the data we collect and manage, as well as the insight this data can give us. During 2022/23, Torus enlisted the services of a consultant to conduct a Data Maturity Assessment. The assessment highlighted key recommendations for Torus to adopt in our operations, aiming to strengthen the reliability and precision of our data.

The results of this assessment have been used to develop a 2-year Data Maturity Action Plan (2023 to 2025). The action plan covers various aspects including data governance, data quality, data security, and reporting.

Torus are ready to support the creation of a full national audit at the appropriate time.

Key findings

Key findings from the Torus Data Maturity Assessment revealed several significant insights, including the need to enhance data ownership, the necessity for modernising data management architecture, the absence of codified processes for managing information and data quality and lifecycles, and the failure to fully utilise data benefits through contemporary techniques like Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Predictive Analytics.

Recommendations

Key recommendations were made to improve the governance of data and information. Recommendations include creating an Information Governance Strategy to ensure a shared understanding of desired outcomes and responsibilities, assigning the roles of Data Owner to senior business leaders and appointing Data Stewards for each critical service area.

Moreover, it was recommended that Torus introduce operational bodies, such as Stewardship Groups and Data Change Groups, to oversee data quality and change processes. Furthermore, it was suggested a set of protocols should be developed for managing key datasets, including those related to building safety/compliance, stock, rents, and personal data. It was highlighted that the protocols should encompass data standards, classification, and metadata.

It was also recommended that Torus invest in modern data architecture technology, including a data platform/warehouse. Lastly, it was put forward that an operational strategy should be devised to implement the retention schedule on both new and existing systems.

Torus is committed to carrying these recommendations forward.

Stock condition surveys

In early 2023, Torus commissioned a contractor to survey every Torus home. This programme is enabling us to understand the condition of our homes in detail and to plan for the future. Torus' own surveyors will also visit properties.

Over the past five years, Torus has conducted 23,892 stock condition surveys, which accounts for 63.4% of the 37,655 eligible properties that have been surveyed. So far, a total of 3,131 hazards, including electrical risks, structural repairs and damp and mould, have been identified and escalated for further action.

Stock condition surveys will continue throughout 2024, with the aim of being completed by June 2024.



Tenancy Visits

Since January 2022, Torus has initiated 'Tenancy Visits' to every general needs home following COVID-19. The purpose of this initiative is to offer tenants the opportunity to address any concerns or report any repairs that may not have been previously discussed. These visits have enabled Torus to extend support and identify areas where tenants require assistance such as self-neglect, unreported anti-social behaviour (ASB) and safeguarding.

The officers responsible for conducting these visits are utilising data from stock condition surveys, ensuring that there is no duplication and that we cover as many properties as possible.

15,000 visits have taken place to date; the programme will continue throughout 2024.

Tenant Census

Launched in October 2023, the 'Tenant Census' project is asking all Torus tenants to complete 33 key questions about their household and circumstances.

This initiative is proving a crucial step in overcoming the Group's current data challenge. We anticipate that these efforts will significantly improve the quality of information we possess in the upcoming months.

By having comprehensive knowledge about our tenants and households, we can effectively address their unique needs and preferences during every interaction. Moreover, this valuable information plays a vital role in shaping our present and future services, ensuring that they remain pertinent, suitable, and equitable for all individuals. The census concluded in December and findings will be analysed in early 2024 and will feed into service changes.





Recommendation 3

Housing associations should partner with residents, contractors, and frontline staff to develop and apply new standards defining what an outstanding maintenance and repairs process looks like.

Housing associations have a responsibility for the safety and quality of every home we manage. We must ensure our properties are in excellent condition. This involves ensuring gas and electrical safety through regular inspections, as well as both planned and responsive repair and maintenance works.

Across the sector, tenants are expressing significant dissatisfaction with the response to maintenance and repair issues, and there have been challenges in effectively addressing their complaints. Issues have proven to be especially problematic for individuals with mental health concerns and those from ethnic minority backgrounds, as their concerns are often not acknowledged or addressed adequately.

In 2022, Torus completed a total of 96,704 repairs. By December of this year, the number of completed repairs has risen to 108,313. The satisfaction levels of tenants have shown improvement, increasing from 89.6% to 91.2% when compared to the previous quarter.

In a recent benchmarking exercise conducted by Housemark, Torus' performance was found to be 2.84% higher than the median score of a peer group consisting of 172 Nationwide Housing Associations. This demonstrates our commitment to continual improvement.

Feedback received from tenants has highlighted their satisfaction with the professionalism of Torus' operatives, the efficiency of services, and the cleanliness and tidiness of works. Communication with tenants has also improved, with feedback focusing on being well-informed about repairs and receiving follow-up information.

However, it is important to acknowledge that dissatisfaction levels can also be influenced by communication. Tenants have expressed concerns regarding service delays, incomplete or substandard repairs, and unmet expectations. Work is ongoing to improve on these fronts.

Damp and Mould Scrutiny

Tenants were recently involved in the creation, development and review of our Damp and Mould Policy.

Aims/objectives

- To scrutinise the customer journey when reporting damp and mould
- To challenge the process to ensure it is fit for purpose and meets customer need

The process

Our Assets team presented Torus' approach to damp and mould. This was followed by a presentation from the Tenant Voice Customer Feedback Officer covering a customer experience case study and action plan. Information on complaints related to damp and mould and learning that has been taken from this were discussed.

Finally, tenants had the opportunity to take part in a mystery shopping exercise or tenant inspection.

Actions implemented following the recommendations

- Asset's Damp and Mould Policy has been amended to reflect customer's recommendations
- The information issued to tenants regarding damp and mould has been revised. Landlord Services, Assets and HMS are working to produce materials, both digital and printed, that will engage residents around damp, mould and disrepair. This will show how Torus is committed to ensuring tenants and their families do not live in damp homes

Communications will focus on the process of what happens following a report of damp and mould, this includes:

- Providing a clear view of the customer journey with approximate timescales
- Writing and distributing a newsletter on damp and mould for tenants
- Disseminating the key messaging from a detailed engagement program is currently under development. This program will encompass a series of events taking place across all Torus heartlands, with a strong emphasis on partnership with tenants, local delivery agencies, local authorities, and elected members

We are dedicated to providing transparent repairs and maintenance activities and are actively striving to enhance communication efforts to effectively engage with customers, empowering them to express opinions and give direct feedback on repairs and maintenance protocols.



Repairs and Maintenance Policy

The Repairs and Maintenance Policy was renewed and launched in December 2023. This focuses on providing a fair and consistent approach for all tenants. This policy has been created to offer tenants and leaseholders clear instructions on how to report a repair and the expected timeframe for its completion. It also outlines the repairs that tenants are responsible for.

To ensure effective communication, the policy states that tenants will receive either a text message or an email regarding their appointment and the estimated completion time for the repair work. Torus will consider the preferred method of communication for each tenant, whenever possible. For tenants who have disabilities or potential barriers including language, translation and interpretation services are available to ensure that all information related to reported repairs and tenant obligations is provided in appropriate formats and languages.

We are committed to working closely with individuals and communities to address any specific concerns raised by tenants. We will handle tenants with disabilities and/or specific requirements sensitively and in accordance with their individual needs.

Complaints team

Torus has recently formed a dedicated complaints team, with a particular emphasis on the Complaint Learning Officer position. Additionally, the team consists of two asset surveyors who are readily available to assist customers with any inquiries they may have.

Also, a new triage system called 'Two Too Many' has been put into effect, highlighting that two calls from a customer are considered more than is necessary. Consequently, when a customer contacts Torus for the third time, they will be promptly transferred to a manager for further assistance.

Tenant feedback

Subcontractors

When works are completed by subcontractors sometimes issues arise which need correcting. If this happens, subcontractors often visit again to correct the work. This can feel awkward for tenants if they have made a complaint against subcontractors, who are then turning up to correct the job. If a complaint is made about a subcontractor/s then the job should be immediately transferred to HMS. If this is not possible a different subcontractor should be assigned to resolve the issue.

Tenants suggested a new contract agreement should be in place between subcontractors and HMS/Torus.

1. Tenant complains
2. Stage 1 is actioned - work is automatically sent to HMS or another subcontractor. This removes the issue for tenants whilst the complaint is being investigated.
3. Appoint a Customer Liaison Officer, who gets in touch with tenants to ensure they are happy with the works.

Recommendation 4



CIH should promote the traditional housing officer role as a supported and valued employment opportunity with a Chartered Institute of Housing recognised programme of training and continuing development.

There is a growing problem with employee turnover across housing association frontline teams, making it increasingly difficult for tenants to build trusting relationships with their landlord. As a solution, it is recommended that housing officers reduce their patch sizes to provide more opportunities for face-to-face contact with tenants.

Furthermore, there is an increasing level of stress for colleagues in tenant facing roles – across the sector, they are reporting that they do not feel equipped to do their job and therefore cannot efficiently deal with the issues and concerns raised by tenants.

It is essential for housing officers to be adequately supported throughout their role and housing associations must ensure officers are equipped to succeed. The role of a housing officer should be promoted and valued, ensuring it is inclusive and any barriers for individuals with protected characteristics are eliminated. Additionally, it is important to ensure all tenant-facing colleagues have an appropriate understanding of the cultural needs of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic residents.

Torus is dedicated to making our organisation more representative of the communities we serve. We aim to develop a deeper understanding of our people and the communities they belong to. To achieve this, we will maintain accurate diversity data for Torus colleagues, conduct annual surveys to shape inclusion plans, and are utilising the Tenant Census to gain a comprehensive understanding of the diversity characteristics of Torus tenants.

CIH Qualifications

We fully support the move towards consistent professionalism across the sector.

In 2023, we looked at qualification levels across frontline teams and mapped the necessary qualifications for every customer-facing role at Torus. As a result, a number of Torus colleagues have either completed CIH qualifications, ranging from level 2 to level 5, or are working to achieve this.

Our People Services team is now ensuring that all new vacancies include the necessary CIH qualifications or that the appointed candidate is willing to work towards them. At the frontline officer level, the number of colleagues holding a minimum level 3 CIH qualification or working towards it has increased from 17% to 27%. Torus will be collecting certificates to validate these responses and providing monthly compliance reports to Housing colleagues.



Competency framework

- Competencies levels of Torus colleagues
- Tiers of seniority

Tenants feedback

Professionalisation of tenants

The concept of instructing tenants and subsequently having them train newly engaged tenants was proposed as a means to relieve the workload on colleagues. However, tenants were notified that the training is conducted by an external company (TPAS) rather than Torus colleagues.

In addition, tenants recommended exploring additional involved tenant groups and/or expanding the existing ones.





Recommendation 5

Housing associations should work with all residents to ensure that they have a voice and influence at every level of decision making across the organisation, through both voluntary and paid roles.

Housing associations have worked with tenants to increase resident engagement; however, there is still more work to be done to ensure there is a meaningful tenant voice that has an influence throughout the sector.

Nationally, tenants from Black, Asian and minority Ethnic backgrounds and residents with a disability face disproportional barriers when accessing housing services. This means the issues that often affect these groups, such as overcrowding, unsafe housing, poor quality housing and language barriers, do not always receive the attention they deserve. Furthermore, the BSHR report highlights that the lack of diversity in leadership positions and on housing association boards intensifies this problem. It is crucial that all tenants' voices are heard and that diverse perspectives are represented.

In response to this, Torus has identified areas of best practice and worked with tenants to gather feedback on our services. Using the findings of this exercise, Torus is working to implement changes recommended by tenants.

Torus' involvement framework serves to ensure the Group in maintaining best practice in regarding to tenant engagement.

An external review was conducted in December 2022 by DTP (David Tolson Partnership Limited), an independent consultancy that advises housing providers, charities, and commercial enterprises, as well as higher education institutions throughout the UK. The aim of this was to improve customer experience.

Findings from the review highlighted that Torus places great emphasis on customer feedback and collaboration with tenants to develop policies, improve services and drive change.

"It is evident that Torus have acted quickly and invested in tenants being involved at every level."

The review also emphasised how Torus is committed to prioritising customers and putting their voices at the forefront of our work. Torus has taken significant steps to ensure that engaging and consulting tenants is as easy as possible. We offer a varied range of groups, forums and consultation opportunities that encompass a wide range of front-line services.

A recruitment drive is currently in progress and will utilise the insights gathered from the tenant census and other intelligence sources to ensure our involved tenants accurately represent the overall tenant base.

Case study: Tenant involvement helping to shape approaches to gas safety

Following a discussion held at our Landlord Operations Committee, gas servicing was suggested as a matter to be thoroughly examined as Torus aim to address issues surrounding property access. Involved tenants, from Warrington, Liverpool and St Helens took part in the scrutiny.

Aims/objectives

1. Examine the customer experience to identify areas for improvement
2. Question the procedures to ensure they are suitable and satisfy customer needs
3. Review the company's journey to ensure compliance with legal obligations

The process

Torus' approach to gas servicing was presented to tenants by the Assets team, followed by a presentation from the business intelligence team on the levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with gas servicing. An overview of the revised Gas Safety Policy was then provided, along with information on complaints related to gas servicing.

Tenant inspection

Gas servicing processes and communications were the key points of the discussion. The group discussed various communication methods, such as texts and letters, and shared their personal experiences with their most recent annual gas service. Tenants also reviewed the Torus website to assess the quality of information and how easy the website is to use. To conclude, tenants recalled their most recent contacts with the Torus customer hub with regards to gas safety.

Findings/feedback

In regard to communication methods, tenants broadly agreed that the Torus Gas Service letters and text messages from the first appointment letter to the legal referral letters were well communicated, written in simple language and easy to understand. All tenant inspectors fully understood the reason Torus undertakes an annual gas safety check.

“It's important to have a gas safety check, most tenants will accept that. The letters are for me clear, concise, and easy to understand.”

“The text we receive during the gas service before and when engineers are on way are really useful.”

Over 85% of participants confirmed that they were given sufficient notice before their annual gas service. Too, all tenants stated that they received a text message before the arrival of the gas engineer and that the engineer arrived on time. 50% of tenants confirmed that the engineer showed identification, while the majority of tenants (85%) confirmed that the gas engineer treated them with respect.

“This year’s gas engineer was excellent he even offered to wear covers on his shoes.”

“The engineer who completed my recent gas service was fantastic, he explained everything to me clearly was professional and friendly really good gas service”

The information regarding Gas Safety and Service on the Torus website received positive ratings of very good or excellent from all Tenant Inspectors.

“The website in general has improved, reach deck good addition. People know why Torus complete the annual gas survey it’s for their own safety, the website clearly highlights this.”

Tenants were asked to provide feedback on the colleagues in the customer hub who took calls regarding gas safety. Specifically, tenants were asked are they knowledgeable, helpful, professional, and courteous?

“Staff at the hub I’ve found are mostly knowledgeable and helpful regarding repairs and gas services.”

“I haven’t had to call contact centre regarding gas service for years, as the written communication is so straight forward, and service gets done when the letter says”

Recommendations from tenants

1. Torus gas engineers must show their formal identification to tenants.
2. Torus should consider the significance of promoting Annual Gas Services to owner occupiers in Torus communities.

Tenants agreed that Torus offers an outstanding and professional annual gas service, while also ensuring excellent communication with them.

Tenant and Resident Associations (TARAs)

There are currently three Tenant and Resident Associations being created in Liverpool and St Helens.



Liverpool St Juliens Drive/ Ogden Estate

Tenants have joined forces with the local neighbourhood team to address local issues including anti-social behaviour. Residents have expressed their desire to engage with Torus more formally and several meetings have been held to discuss this. We have provided the group with information on how to establish a Tenant & Resident Association.



Warrington The Thames Estate

A group of residents have expressed concerns with several issues in the vicinity, including limited housing options, fly-tipping, a lack of Torus visibility within the area and the necessity for Impact Days to be arranged for their community.

Information has been shared with the group regarding what is involved in forming a Tenant & Resident Association.



St Helens Thatto Heath

The neighbourhood team has been approached by a group of residents to tackle the problem of abandoned garages in their locality. The group has taken the initiative to transform the space into a community garden, and the project is progressing well. The group is now looking to establish a more formal relationship with the neighbourhood team, and initial meetings have already taken place.

The team has provided the group with information on the process of forming a Tenant & Resident Association.



Training for involved tenants

Torus is currently developing a structured training programme for involved tenants. This is set to include the following training:

- Chairing meetings
- Diversity & Inclusion
- Keeping effective meeting notes / minutes
- Managing challenging behaviours
- Effective scrutiny
- Training for mystery shoppers
- Training for tenant inspectors

Moreover, involved tenants will have the opportunity to participate in training sessions that aim to promote community cohesion. These sessions are specifically designed to bridge the gap between longer-standing British born BME communities and newer BME/faith communities. Additionally, a bespoke training program has been developed for the Chair of the Independent Scrutiny Panel. The recruitment process for this role concluded in December 2023.

Lastly, ongoing meetings are being held with the Autism Society to create a specialised workshop for our Diversity & Inclusion Panel. The purpose of this workshop is to further enhance understanding and knowledge about individuals with neurodiverse backgrounds.

Tenants feedback

Work life balance

Tenants emphasised the importance of considering workloads on tenants. Being an involved tenant is a voluntary responsibility. It is important to acknowledge that tenants have their own personal and family lives to manage, alongside their volunteering commitments.

Multi generation work force

Torus should focus on attracting a greater number of involved tenants and make sure the involved tenant group is representative of communities. As well, more opportunities should be created for older tenants, such as 'buddying up' with younger tenants and chairing meetings. These initiatives will help foster a diverse, multi-generation volunteer workforce. To promote this, the idea of employing an Age Inclusion Champion was also suggested.



Meaningful involvement

Tenants highlighted the significance of Torus recognising the importance of working together with them in the creation of projects.

Torus should keep evaluating the results of past tenant involvement. Tenants are sometimes asked to comment on the same subjects during reviews and policy-making. Torus colleagues should collaborate with other departments to confirm whether any proposed queries have already been tackled by involved tenants.

Additionally, tenants emphasised that individuals who are delving into policies or assessments should possess a thorough understanding of the subject matter themselves.

Moreover, tenants also emphasised the important point of regularly communicating with them throughout their association with Torus and ensuring it is clear to tenants why their involvement is important. It is crucial to conduct more frequent follow-ups with tenants to ensure their active and meaningful participation.

Furthermore, it is essential to keep tenants informed about any changes that have been implemented or any measures that have been taken to address their concerns. Tenants should be informed where they can find this information, such as the Torus website or annual reports. This will tackle the matter of tenants repeatedly raising similar concerns, without being aware that measures have been taken to address them.

Tenants also raised the crucial point that involvement should be tenant-friendly and not 'feel too corporate'.

Training for involved tenants

Tenants expressed their delight upon learning about the availability of training sessions exclusively for them. They emphasised the significance of this initiative and displayed enthusiasm in acquiring further details and actively participating in the training opportunities.

Also, tenants suggested the specialised training for minority tenant groups should remain within the scope of general neurodiversity and general and psychiatric agencies that are already established and funded by the government.

Equality and Diversity Panel

Tenants strongly emphasised that the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Panel (EDI Panel) should fulfil its purpose by being fair, diverse, and above all, inclusive of all tenants' needs. It should focus on accommodating individual tenants' aids and adaptation requirements, leaving social services and NHS grants panels to address their own wants and needs.

In order to address this situation, Torus should ensure that this approach is applied to all tenant groups and their involvement.

Recommendation 6



Housing associations should develop a proactive local community presence through community hubs which foster greater multi-agency working.

Issues have been raised around the lack of face-to-face contact between tenants and their landlord. This lack of direct interaction has made it increasingly difficult for tenants to discuss and resolve their concerns, a particularly prevalent problem for tenants whose first language is not English.

To address this, it is recommended that housing associations establish community-based hubs or strengthen their community presence. Whilst community hubs may not be suitable for every housing association, having some form of local presence is crucial. This way tenants can easily access housing colleagues within their localities and resolve any issues they may have. This will create a more accessible and cohesive environment for both tenants and their landlords.

Torus is dedicated to establishing a strong presence within communities and fostering collaborative relationships with partners at a local level. As part of this effort, Torus has launched a 'neighbourhood patches' project aimed at reducing patch sizes and increasing our presence within neighbourhoods.

The project aims to decrease the size of neighbourhood patches assigned to housing officers, allowing them to dedicate more attention to tenants and provide them with better support from our colleagues. Torus is currently seeking to evaluate the skills possessed by our housing officers in order to ensure that they possess the necessary abilities to excel as neighbourhood officers.

To enhance the efficiency of patch sizes, specific guidelines have been established. It is recommended that each patch contains fewer than 1,000 properties, thereby enabling housing officers to manage them more efficiently. Furthermore, efforts have been made to minimise patch sizes by confining neighbourhoods within ward boundaries and considering the 13 new neighbourhood boundaries proposed by Liverpool City Council in 2023, as well as considering significant topographic barriers.

Moreover, the number of properties has been decreased based on a risk assessment. This assessment takes in account 24 indicators, including the number of bedrooms, property type, building age, complaints related to antisocial behaviour, and the frequency of no access to the property.

By conducting a thorough analysis of our neighbourhoods, Torus can allocate its resources in a more intelligent and focused manner. The development of this project will continue throughout the year 2024.

Multi agency Hub in Liverpool

In recent months, Torus has placed an emphasis on establishing multi-agency working hubs in Abingdon Grove, located in Walton, North Liverpool. A recent on-site assessment has shed light on various issues such as litter, mental health problems, ASB and crime. To address these issues, Torus has deployed two housing officers to the estate, guaranteeing a continuous Torus presence.

In addition, a multi-agency hub has been established in the area, allowing Torus tenants to access our services every Monday and Wednesday from 10am to 2pm. This collaboration involves Liverpool City Council, Merseyside Police, and the ASB enforcement team, all working together to address crime, fly tipping and ASB in the vicinity.

Tenants are welcome to visit the hub without prior appointment to discuss any concerns related to their neighbourhood or property, seek assistance with managing their finances, and address any other relevant matters.

The hub eliminates the need for tenants to commute to the city centre, resulting in saved time and costs. Tenants have expressed their satisfaction with the hubs and have provided feedback indicating that they feel more confident in addressing issues at the hub. Additionally, the utilisation of the hub also relieves housing officers from the need to travel. If the hub continues to prove successful, Torus will consider implementing this approach in other regions within the three heartlands as well.

Clean-Up Days

A special community clean-up day was organised by Torus in collaboration with Liverpool City Council in Abingdon, Liverpool in November 2023. The event involved cleaning up the local area and removing rubbish. A scrap collector was also in attendance to help with the removal of any larger items such as white goods. Also, tenants had the opportunity to interact with various teams from Torus, including the Neighbourhoods Team, Assets team, Tenant Voice team, Torus Safer Estates team (Anti-social behaviour) and Torus Foundation.

We provided advice and support to tenants on housing and tenancy issues, ASB, managing finances, health and wellbeing, employment, and training. Police and Liverpool City Council Street Scene were also in attendance. In December 2023, another successful festive clean-up day was organised in the vicinity.

These clean-up initiatives have fostered a sense of ownership among residents, motivating them to actively contribute towards improving their local area, including their communal gardens.



Councillor focus groups

A series of Councillor focus groups took place in July 2023 in Liverpool, St Helens and Warrington. While Torus operates in 11 local authority areas, these 3 local authorities contain the majority of Torus stock. There are plans to roll out more focus groups across other Torus geographies in 2024.

The aims of the focus groups were to:

- meet newly elected and re-elected Councillors following the local elections in May 2023;
- hear Councillors' concerns about housing issues, including complaints, neighbourhood services, repairs and maintenance, damp and mould, voids and allocations;
- provide clarity on the scale of challenges affecting Torus and the wider sector, as well as the active measures, and processes, in place to address them;
- reiterate points of contact for Housing, Assets and Neighbourhood teams; and
- talk about changes to the Housing leadership team, the creation of new neighbourhood patches and improvements to our active presence in communities

Both during and following the focus groups, Councillors were provided with a briefing pack containing wide-ranging data and information including:

- Complaints (volume and reasons);
- Key policies - including damp and mould, repairs, and complaints;
- Allocations policies and waiting list data;
- Damp, mould and property condition data;
- Environmental sustainability and net zero commitments;
- Stock data by ward;
- Development and investment plans;
- Support for communities;
- Tenant involvement opportunities; and
- A series of engagement tools explaining how Councillors can contact Torus alongside details of Torus' Housing and Assets teams.

During the sessions, there was enthusiasm from both Councillors and Torus to work more closely together on a range of issues, including ASB; resolving complaints; and increasing support for local communities. There were also commitments on both sides to forge better working relationships, increase trust, and share information. This meant improving data-sharing, for example on Torus' performance and, also, ensuring that key partners were made aware of engagement that was taking place in the community e.g., estate impact days and community walkabouts.

Councillors told Torus that they wanted to know the Torus colleagues 'on the ground.' In response, Torus' Neighbourhood Officers contacted their ward Councillors to introduce (or re-introduce) themselves and offer assistance for any tenant issues in their wards, and encourage further opportunities to work together. Councillors invited Torus colleagues to drop in at local advice surgeries and attend community events.



Tenant feedback

Neighbourhood officers

Tenants at Torus have voiced their concerns regarding the need for additional Housing Officers. They have also emphasised the importance of establishing trust with Neighbourhood Officers and have expressed their preference for a single point of contact to facilitate this process.

It is crucial for Torus to have a visible presence on the ground, as tenants prefer to personally interact with and know the individuals they are dealing with, rather than relying on communication through the call centre.

Councillor focus groups

Tenants had previously proposed enhancing collaboration within the communities throughout the region by engaging with local councillors as they are in a good position to tackle issues like ASB, in partnership with Torus, the Police and Local Authorities.

Tenants have expressed their desire to participate in or have some level of involvement in our councillor focus groups.





Recommendation 7

Housing associations should support tenants and frontline staff to undertake an annual review of the progress each organisation is making in implementing this review's recommendations.

To truly drive change and for the recommendations of the BSHR to make a significant impact, housing associations should engage with their tenants and frontline colleagues to evaluate their progress in implementing them.

By joining forces, our sector can collectively find solutions to overcome the challenges and barriers we encounter. Although every housing association is different, it is the frontline colleagues and tenants who possess the most direct experience and valuable insights to ensure that these recommendations are effectively put into practice.

Torus has taken several measures to address the suggestions put forth in the BSHR and has made a collective effort to incorporate them.

We will continue to provide annual updates of our progress against the BSHR, as well as identifying any challenges and how we can overcome them.

All feedback provided by tenants in this report will be taken into consideration, and Torus will ensure that they will provide tenants with regular updates on the progress of implementing these changes.

Next steps

Tenants agreed that having a follow up session with the external speaker who carried out the first BSHR consultation would help to build an understanding of progress and next steps.

Next Steps



The following initiatives will continue to make essential improvements to services in 2024.

Neighbourhood Model

The Neighbourhood Model project will launch in 2024. In line with our dedication to recommendation 6, there will be a rise in the ratio of housing officers to homes. This will enable officers to allocate more time and attention to tenants, thereby enhancing the level of support provided by our colleagues.

Understanding and working with tenants

A crucial objective for Torus in 2024 is to magnify customer voice. We aim to continue proactive collaboration with tenants and ensure they are a key part of decision-making processes.

To guarantee the accurate representation of our entire Torus tenant base, it is crucial for us to have a diverse group of involved tenants. This means ensuring that tenants with all nine protected characteristics are included/represented. By obtaining better data and gaining deeper insights, we will be able to achieve this objective effectively.

Our commitment to enhancing our data quality is evident through the utilisation of insights from the Data Maturity Assessment. These insights have played a significant role in shaping our 2-year Data Maturity plan. We are determined to apply the key recommendations put forward from this assessment in to practice and continuously improve the data we collect and manage.

By making effective use of the outcomes of the Data Maturity Plan (2023 to 2025) and the Tenant Census, we aim to create a more inclusive tenant involvement framework. This will enable us to create an environment that values and includes tenants from all backgrounds and characteristics.

Customer Experience

Torus will ensure we look at 'through the eyes of our customers' and use this to improve customer experience. It is essential that we provide tenants and leaseholders with a clear definition and expectations of our service offer, and that their experiences help us to shape services.

Repairs and Maintenance

We will complete a stock condition survey on all of our properties by June 2024.

Our investment roadmap has been completed following a consultation with tenants and our Assets' team will continue to drive home improvements in 2024 and beyond.





Tenant feedback

Customer satisfaction

Tenants have highlighted that it is crucial for the Government to strike a balance in their demands, ensuring that housing associations, colleagues, and volunteers are presented with a practical set of priorities to address. Torus is currently facing challenges in colleague recruitment and retention, and finding balance in workloads will contribute to resolving this issue. Colleagues often experience pressure due to heavy workloads, emphasising the need for additional recruitment.

Tenants have further emphasised the importance of investing in colleagues to enhance customer satisfaction.





The Better_____ Social Housing Review_____



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