

Communal cleaning review consultation final report

Housing strategy and engagement team

February 2024

'Lovely to be part of the session. I do
enjoy these sessions and being kept in
the loop'



CHESTERFIELD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Background information

Chesterfield Borough Council's housing service recently completed a review of the communal cleaning service across 299 blocks of flats in the Borough of Chesterfield. The review was recommended by the Housing Ombudsman following their investigation into a complaint which was referred to them in relation to communal cleaning. The communal cleaning service was last reviewed in 2014.

For this report, the communal area definition refers to 'stairway, entrance hall, stairs and landing.'

As part of this review, The Housing Strategy and Engagement Team (HSET) have taken the lead to ensure that tenants, leaseholders, and private tenants are consulted with, ensuring their experiences, views and feedback are considered when reviewing the service. It is also important to ensure that the service is delivering value for money and is fit for purpose from a tenant, leaseholder, and private tenant perspective.

Engagement Methodology

Between the 9th of October 2023 and the 20th of November 2023, the tenant engagement team sent out a survey to all those in receipt of the communal cleaning service. This equated to a total of 1735 people. Each person could complete the survey by post or online via a unique number to ensure that we only received responses from those who receive the service.

The aim of the survey was to gather quantitative and qualitative information on the communal cleaning service. To encourage people to complete the consultation and to demonstrate appreciation for people's time, a £50 shopping voucher prize draw was offered for those who chose to enter.

We had a total of 225 responses received from tenants, leaseholders, and private tenants. This equated to a total response rate of 13%.

On analysis of the results, the findings were used to identify the key themes which were most prevalent and categorised as follows:

- Cleaning not being completed to a suitable standard (including cobwebs, bugs and mats in entrances not being cleaned)
- Cleaners not spending enough time in each block to complete cleaning tasks as identified in the cleaning schedule
- Concerns that cleaning is not completed as frequently as identified in the cleaning schedule
- Use of dirty water

- Windows (internal and external) not being cleaned frequently enough
- Bins stores not being cleaned
- Handrails & door handles not being wiped down
- Use of cleaning products which have little fragrance
- Nearly half of respondents felt the service offered value for money
- Over 70% of respondents felt the staff were polite and friendly

The findings from the survey phase of the consultation can be found as **Appendix 1**.

The findings from the survey were compiled into a report which was discussed and shared with the housing management service. Through discussion it was agreed to run several focus groups with tenants, leaseholders, and private tenants, which would focus on the service standards, value for money and communication.

Whilst the focus groups were being developed the housing management team and environmental services proactively identified where changes could be implemented from the feedback received to date. This included:

- Joint quarterly cleaning inspections and meetings to discuss service delivery
- Training sessions for relevant staff teams (commencing Feb 2024) and cleaning standards to be discussed at team meetings
- Weekly meetings between staff and cleaners onsite to discuss any issues
- Communal cleaning contract to be reviewed on an annual basis
- Cleaning schedule and logs to be reviewed and updated making them clearer to understand
- A review of the time spent by cleaners in the blocks
- Monthly spot inspections
- Discussion with staff regarding the use of fresh water
- Raise awareness of the environmental product purchasing agreement.

Within the survey element of the consultation, respondents were asked to indicate if they would be interested in participating within focus groups regarding the communal cleaning service review. A total of 67 tenants, leaseholders and private tenants expressed an interest and gave consent to be contacted.

The Housing strategy and engagement team contacted those who had expressed an interest via a combination of telephone call, email, and messaging apps to promote the focus groups and discuss any specific needs of attendees.

To ensure as many tenants, leaseholders and private tenants could attend the groups, we arranged to run three sessions across two dates offering both face to face and online groups to increase accessibility. The sessions provided were:

- Face to face group held on the 22nd of January from 2 - 4pm
- Face to face group held on the 24th of January from 10 - 12pm
- Online group held on the 24th of January from 6 - 8pm

A total of 18 people confirmed they would like to be part of the groups. Focus group attendees were sent a copy of the survey report (in advance) and a short video summarising the findings. This was to ensure the information was in accessible formats for all. The video was shared via Chesterfield borough council's social media platforms too, so wider tenants, leaseholders and private tenants were informed about what we had found through the survey phase of the consultation. For those who confirmed attendance to the online group, a copy of the presentation was sent in advance so they could read this.

All the focus groups were attended by representatives from the housing management team, environmental services, and the tenant engagement team. This was to ensure that any questions / queries which arose could be responded to by the most relevant department. The focus of all the sessions was to provide information, promote interaction and open dialogue, tailoring our approach to meet the needs and priorities of tenants, leaseholders, and private tenants.

Each department representative led different areas of information sharing and discussion within the groups which included:

- Why we are reviewing the communal cleaning service
- Introduction to the communal cleaning service
- How tenants, leaseholders and private tenant views have been gathered thus far
- What people told us
- Changes to be implemented because of the feedback received so far
- Open discussion focusing on the development of service standards, communication, and value for money.

There were some tenants, leaseholders and private tenants who were unable to attend the groups at late notice, so were offered an opportunity to send in any comments they had, which have been incorporated into this report.

Focus group findings

The findings below are taken from the three focus groups which were held on 22nd and 24th of January 2024. The findings also include 1:1 discussions which have taken place with those who were unable to attend the groups but wished to have their views included within the report.

The findings include some of the quotes taken from focus group attendees and responses given by housing management and environmental services in response to queries and comments. It was not possible to include all comments, however quotes have been chosen which reflect the views of the majority of attendees, or where a particular issue arose.

For ease of reference the findings have been grouped together across all three sessions, including the 1:1 discussions which have been held. The discussions within the focus groups reflected the feedback received in phase one of the consultation, with people being mostly concerned about:

The standard of and the consistency of cleaning

Within phase one of the consultation, the level of satisfaction regarding the standard of cleaning being completed was a priority for many respondents as evidenced in the table below.

How satisfied are you with the communal cleaning which is currently provided?									
Very satisfied		Satisfied		Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied		Slightly unsatisfied		Very unsatisfied	
No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
45	20.5%	59	26.9%	24	11.0%	37	16.9%	54	24.7%

Within the focus groups we wanted to explore this topic further with attendees. Attendees discussed rotation of staff and some attendees expressed *'you know who's been.'*

Two attendees commented that they

'Get embarrassed when people come round, and we pay for the charges.'

Information provided by people who could not attend but wanted their views to be included raised concerns about the use of 'wet floor' safety signs

'Use of wet floor signs can be sporadic, sometimes these are only placed on the ground floor, and if you live on the other floors, it can be risky. Also, the mop bucket has been left outside before and the mop taken upstairs dripping wet, surely this makes more work for the cleaners'

We also received feedback about the noise cleaners can make when completing tasks, and the difficulties this poses for those who work at nights and sleep in the day

'I have lived here a year and used to get home late at night from work. They (cleaners) would come on and bang from wall to railing, banging bedroom walls, felt like they were going full pelt and the noise resonated through the building. For those people in bed being disturbed a bit of consideration would have been nice'

A comment received from someone who submitted their views via email stated:

'May I respectfully request that, as the point has been raised, that perhaps the neighbourhood ranger (or whatever they are called now), or indeed a manager, might monitor that particular situation and report back if the standard is not adequate.'

There are three teams of two cleaners responsible for the communal cleaning service. Attendees commented that

'There are a lot of blocks for only three teams of two.'

Through the presentation, information was provided to attendees about the training, spot inspections and regular monitoring to look to ensure the level and consistency of cleaning is improved and issues are addressed and where possible acted on.

'It appears that the council has identified and is (at last) acknowledging the long-standing poor standards of cleaning.'

Following a meeting between the cleaners and the environmental officers, cleaners can now access plug sockets within the blocks and have introduced hoovers to address this issue. As expressed in the quote below, this is already being implemented:

'I am a Leaseholder and, in the past, have refused to pay for the service as I haven't been impressed by it. I want to be happy in my own home' Had a chat with the cleaners on Friday and I was quite impressed when I spoke to them, and they had hoovers too'

A number of attendees expressed a level of satisfaction with the cleaning:

'Used to work quickly, but did a fantastic job'

'Team do a very good job'

'In Holmehall it's the same team who do all the estate' and attendee commented that they 'don't have any concerns and it smells nice'

Attendees asked about the

'Possibility of a jet clean in communal areas – due to the build-up of dirt' and the hope that it 'may encourage people to have more pride in the place they live' and it 'gives something to set a standard to, for monitoring.'

Discussions were had about types of equipment which could be used – suggestions included a steam cleaner or a washer/dryer. Environmental services suggested a machine they have that might do this though there may be an issue with the stairs.

Attendees feel

'Cleaners need good equipment.' Housing management summarised that the suggestion was that we *'do a yearly/bi-yearly deep clean to then make it easier for the cleaners/tenants to take more pride in cleaning/where they live.'* This was supported by attendees.

In addition to the above, the training and monitoring which is being implemented is welcomed by attendees.

Knowing what is included within the cleaning schedule and the frequency of each of these tasks for completion

The table below displays responses received in phase one of the consultation regarding the communal cleaning jobs being completed regularly enough, there are also a considerable number of responses, where people expressed, they were 'not sure.'

Do you feel that each of the following communal cleaning jobs are completed regularly enough?						
	Yes		No		Not sure	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Floor areas and stairs – weekly sweeping and mopping	151	67.7%	64	28.7%	8	3.6%
Windowsills, walls, handrails, meter cupboard doors, entrance doors – weekly spot clean	87	39.4%	105	47.5%	29	13.1%
Windows (inside) – 3 monthly spot clean	65	29.5%	109	49.5%	46	20.9%
Windows (outside) – 6 monthly spot clean	65	29.3%	112	50.5%	45	20.3%
Bin stores – 3 monthly wet mop as required, sweep and place debris in the bin	60	28.4%	114	54.0%	37	17.5%

Discussions were had about attendees not knowing what was included within the schedule and the frequency of activities. Comments expressed included:

'Didn't understand about glass cleaning until had seen the schedule today'

'Didn't know how detailed the cleaning schedule was'

'Didn't realise that communal balcony areas were included on the schedule'

'Didn't know that meter cupboards were cleaned'

A copy of the revised cleaning schedule (attached as **Appendix 2**) and the updated cleaning public record (attached as **Appendix 3**) was shared.

Attendees felt having details of the cleaning schedule and the updated cleaning public record which lists each task for cleaners to sign off, would be beneficial.

'New cleaning schedule is better, happy it is clear and easy to understand'

Attendees felt having the direct contact details for the housing management team included on the forms, would enable people to contact the team, should they have any concerns.

'Happy with the schedule, respect for the amount of tasks cleaning team does'

Cleaners not spending enough time in each block to complete cleaning tasks as identified in the cleaning schedule

Within the value for money (qualitative comments) section of the survey, many respondents had expressed concern about the time spent by cleaners in each block. It was therefore important to explore this in more detail at the focus groups including providing information about the average time frames spent by each cleaner in a block, as this varies dependent on the size of the block, the communal area space etc.

'Well, my personal view on the cleaning is that they don't spend enough time in each block. They're not thorough at all and they miss areas. Doors and /or windows (on doors) are never done ever.'

'Rarely see staff together.'

It was explained that the cleaning teams work slightly differently,

'Some may work together, and others may follow one another completing different actions'.

Attendees expressed mixed views on this matter, which reflects the findings from phase one of the consultation:

'My tenant at Oakamoor Close Holme Hall reports, as recently as last week, that when the man comes to clean the communal areas, he does a thorough job. However, when the two women come, they spend a maximum of 10 minutes in the block, merely mopping the floors superficially and nothing else. That doesn't seem like good value for money and is certainly at odds with the leaflet's statement that two cleaners are expected to spend between 20-25 minutes in a block'.

'One person cleans my block, used to be two which worked well.'

Attendees were informed that the time spent has been reviewed by environmental services and the average time the cleaners spend in each block is 20 – 25 minutes per cleaner, however this varies dependent on the size of the block, time of year and other factors.

'If the cleaners are only spending half the allotted time, then the cleaning charge ought to be reduced by half to reflect that.'

'Never give the impression that the job is rushed'

'25 mins is not a lot of time to do everything, should alternate and spend more time'.

'Internal windows being spot cleaned leads to smears and surfaces becoming sticky.'

Also concerns about

'Things like the inside of lighting not being cleaned.'

As stated previously in this report, having more information about what cleaning tasks are included and more information about the time frames will help ensure tenants,

leaseholders and private tenants are more informed. Also having access to the housing management contact details allows for any concerns about lack of time spent to be raised. The introduction of spot checks and monitoring is also aimed at improving this.

Use of dirty water

The use of dirty water is something which many respondents referred to in phase one of the consultation.

An attendee asked a question about how the cleaners obtain water. It was explained that

'The water is held in the backs of the vans in a big vat' and that 'the cleaners do not have any way to access hot water.'

Some attendees expressed the cleaners *just come with mop and bucket'* and that some cleaners are

'Dipping cloths into buckets' which if the water is dirty adds to the issue.

Environmental services have stated they will be ensuring staff know to be using clean water.

'Hot water would make a difference'

Although at present it is not possible to access and use hot water, this should be considered within any annual reviews of the communal cleaning contract.

Windows internal and external not being cleaned frequently enough

Discussions were held regarding external window cleaning and the frequency of this. It was agreed that as window cleaning is either three monthly (internal) or six monthly (external) the date this was last completed will be included on the public cleaning record so people can know when the next window clean will be expected to be completed.

An attendee expressed they had

'Not seen internal windows being cleaned'

Environmental services agreed to investigate this and feedback to the person.

Bins stores not being cleaned

Chesterfield Borough Council have different types of bin stores and only some of these are within the remit of the communal cleaning service:

'Bin stores that are located internally within the block of flats are included in the cleaning schedule. Bins stores that are located outside of the building, often in a fenced off area, are not the responsibility of the cleaning team. It is the Environment Officer's responsibility to ensure the external bin stores are kept at an acceptable standard and order any required clearance works.'

When looking at what to communicate with tenants, leaseholders, and private tenants, providing useful information such as this is recommended so expectations are managed, and people know who to contact when.

Handrails & door handles not being wiped down

The issue of handrails feeling 'sticky and tacky' has been discussed with environmental services in a meeting prior to the focus groups taking place. Environmental services had stated that some handrails perish over time, and this can lead to the surface feeling 'tacky' when touched. This information was shared with focus group attendees and that where refurbishments have been completed this will be of a better standard than older properties.

One attendee commented they '*won't touch the handrails*' and there was also a discussion which demonstrated different handrail surfaces (wooden rails and plastic rails) can feel sticky. It would be beneficial for the cleaning staff to record where handrails, regardless of material, are deteriorating so this can form part of the spot checks and monitoring programme being implemented.

Use of cleaning products which have little fragrance

Chesterfield Borough Council have an environmental product purchasing agreement, which means only certain products can be used by the communal cleaners, however fragrance is something which has been identified as important by both focus group attendees and respondents within phase one of the consultation.

'Very noticeable' that scented cleaning products are no longer used'

One attendee spoke of someone

'Using incense to try and cover the smell in the communal cleaning areas,' because it doesn't smell pleasant.

Whilst having an environmental product purchasing agreement in place, attendees feel

'If you walk in and it smells nice, your brain tells you it is clean'

Based on fragrance being identified as a key factor to tenants, leaseholders, and private residents, it is requested that environmental products which have fragrance are explored as part of the review. Also, further information should be shared with tenants, leaseholders and private tenants regarding the environmental product purchasing agreement.

New flooring

Several attendees have recently had their blocks refurbished which has included new flooring being laid. Some attendees commented that the

'Standard of cleaning has changed,' and believe '*this is to do with the new floor surface being difficult to clean'*

Discussions were had about how to manage issues with the new flooring, as this is also presenting challenges for the cleaning team and environmental services are 'struggling to find a solution.'

An attendee asked if housing management/cleaning team can work together to try different solutions? E.g., scrubbing brush, brush with scrubber pad to be introduced as part of the quarterly inspections.

Housing management confirmed that they will:

- Continue to look for a solution and will ask the assets team to visit to look at the issue.
- Speak to flooring manufacturers / Fortem's for guidance on what might be best to use on the floor – would a steam cleaner work?

'Cleaning has changed, it used to be amazing. The flooring has been changed and now there are issues, the new flooring holds the dirt'

Environmental services explained the '*new flooring is causing issues for the cleaning team tod*' and '*destroying mops*'. They have a motorised scrubber, but this is '*time consuming*.'

Identified block will be used as a trial and housing management will explore how to involve asset management.

'The flooring is causing huge issues; you can see what's old and ingrained dirt and what isn't.'

Work forces

Attendees spoke of instances where refurbishment work or repairs are being completed and the workforce leaving a mess behind which then has to be cleaned by the cleaners, which they shouldn't have to do.

Biohazards and what tenants should do in these instances

During one of the focus groups an attendee spoke of an isolated incident during the COVID Pandemic where there was blood on the handrails and door entry handles. They mentioned this to the cleaners when they arrived as the person was also concerned about the safety of the cleaners. This was not removed, and environmental services apologised and explained that some staff were redeployed during Covid so may not have been clear on how to deal with the issue. Environmental services advised that they have a specific team who deal with bio-hazard-type issues and in situations like this the advice to tenants, leaseholders and private tenants would be to contact the housing management team with any issues, and they will raise accordingly.

'Tenants should be letting the council know about incidents e.g. that could impact others and Chesterfield Borough Council staff'

Agreement that a piece of comms. work to help tenants identify what to do/who to contact about biohazards, certain types of waste would be helpful.

Communication

As part of the communal cleaning review, it was important to look at communication with tenants, leaseholders, and where applicable private tenants in relation to communal cleaning. Through the consultation we are aware that people did not feel informed about what was included within the cleaning schedule or how frequently cleaning activities should be completed.

'Communication is key'

Attendees at the focus group spoke of the importance of good communication and knowing who to contact if needing to raise an issue.

'People don't listen to the people on the ground'

It is also important we communicate on how the communal cleaning service is performing.

'Acknowledging that issues are being addressed and not ignored'

Attendees discussed wanting information about how the service charge of £2.51 per week for communal cleaning is spent.

Performance information for tenants should

'Include a breakdown of where your £2.51 service charge has gone'

There are noticeboards in the blocks of flats, however the housing service acknowledge that some of these are in a state of disarray, and this is an issue which is being explored further including the costs associated with bringing them up to a standard.

Through discussion at the focus groups, it was agreed that quarterly updates would be provided to tenants, leaseholders and private tenants about performance and what issues had arisen and actions taken to address this.

'Tenants should be kept updated of next steps/progress and actions taken, positives and negatives and what you're working on'

The information and how this is presented will be discussed further and may include using social media for 'You said, we did' posts and posting videos and information on the website. It was also suggested that contact details for the housing management service are included on any information which is published.

'Celebrate the successes and feedback from what has been found and is being focused on.'

An attendee commented about people who only use phones to access online content and how we need to ensure anything we develop can be viewed on a mobile phone.

'Information needs to be available on phones for younger people'

Attendees expressed they feel it would also be beneficial for feedback forms to be available and collated to inform service improvement.

'Feedback forms for tenants to share particular concerns'

This is something for the housing management service to consider, although people are now provided with contact details for the housing management service, so feedback could be captured in this way and passed on to the cleaning team and acted upon where needed.

Complimentary feedback received from one tenant about general communication received from the housing service

'It's bang on, fantastic!'

Attendees discussed having a useful contacts list which could be sent out with the annual rent letter or when carrying out annual gas servicing. This was felt to be beneficial, and it was suggested that environment officers can deliver these.

'Communication is very important to me'

Tenant responsibilities

Although the cleaning service are responsible for delivering on the cleaning contract and completing all activities within the schedule, attendees also spoke about the role tenants, leaseholders and private tenants have when it comes to looking after the communal areas. Discussions were had about the need to inform people living in the blocks of flats about their responsibilities.

Some key issues were identified as a particular issue:

- Dog urine not being cleaned up
- Bin bag spillages when being carried to the bin areas not being cleaned up
- Items and debris being left in the stairwells

An attendee expressed they love where they live but wants others to have the same pride.

Attendees also feel it is:

'Important to manage expectations,' 'acknowledge that things do need to improve' and that 'part of this is the tenant, leaseholder and private residents' responsibility too.'

It was agreed that a tenant responsibilities information sheet (specific to the communal areas) would be developed and as well as taking the information from the tenancy agreement which identifies these would also include the additional points raised by attendees during the sessions. The formats of this information would include a short video for social media and information provided on the website within the housing section.

A discussion was had about how to report concerns and that this information should be included in the tenant responsibilities.

An attendee suggested the idea of

'Tenant champions for their local area so people can come and work together.'

This is something which could be investigated and with the view to creating a tenant inspector role which could feed into the quarterly reviews with the housing management team in the future.

Summary and recommendations

The focus groups highlighted many of the key areas, which had been identified via the survey of tenants, leaseholders, and private tenants. It also identified other key areas which the survey had not, including the concerns about the impact the new flooring is having both for the cleaning team and those that live in refurbished blocks.

Below is a list of recommendations for consideration from the consultation:

- The identified actions which are already being implemented to continue
- Clearer communication regarding biohazards and what tenants, leaseholders and private tenants need to do to be publicised
- Information regarding the public cleaning record and the revised cleaning schedule to be shared with tenants, leaseholders, and private tenants
- Yearly / bi yearly deep clean of communal areas
- Summary information to be developed for the cleaners regarding the new flooring and cleaning guide
- Housing management and assets team to explore the continued use of the new flooring and whether it is fit for purpose
- Quarterly reporting to tenants, leaseholders, and private tenants through a range of communication methods including videos and findings from spot checks and reviews
- Explore the possibility of having tenant inspectors
- Create a tenant, leaseholder, and private tenant responsibilities information sheet
- To consider ways in which hot water may be introduced where possible through the annual reviews of the service
- To consider gathering views of tenants and leaseholders through a short survey as part of the annual contract review
- Information on bin stores and what the cleaning service are responsible for.

This report will be shared with attendees, the housing management service, and environmental services to look at how the recommendations can be implemented.

Final thought

We wanted to give the final word in this report to one of our leaseholders who contributed to the report and stated:

'We are very much encouraged by the way you are dealing with these matters and hope that good standards that you are focused on will become the norm, along with the necessary proper monitoring and supervision.'

Chesterfield Borough Council would like to express gratitude to tenants, leaseholders and private tenants who have taken the time to share their views on the communal cleaning service.