

for Best External Contract

**managing**

PROPERTYCARE

proud member of

housingplus
together for the right reasons

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Background

"Our relationship with Property Care is like no other. The operatives are as much part of our team as they are of theirs, everyone knows them by their first names and they do all they can to help in any situation. It's brilliant." Karen Williams, Chief Officer, Bushbury Hill TMO.

Property Care provides an integrated care and repair service to Bushbury Hill TMO, reporting to our Management Board. It is more than a contractor, playing a real interest in the sustainability of our estate.

- Being part of a social housing group, Property Care understands the pressures and demands we face both from our residents and from our regulators.
- Through Property Care, we have been able to offer an apprenticeship to a local youngster and next year we will take on another.
- Property Care has supplied a dedicated team to Bushbury Hill so that a relationship of trust and commitment has been built up between the tenants and the operatives.
- As a result of working with Property Care, we now offer a repairs phone line, a 2-hour appointment slot, post-job satisfaction surveys and a wealth of detailed performance information to share with our Board.
- 78% of tenants think the service is excellent or better than expected.
- 99% of appointments are kept.

Innovative service

Bushbury Hill is an estate of just 879 properties, needing around 2,500 repairs and 40 voids per year. Our residents want sound, solid, reliable, right-first-time repairs carried out by polite and friendly local workers who care about craftsmanship, value for money and the community they are working in. Our Management Board wants to see high customer satisfaction with jobs that are right first time, appointments that are kept and costs that are low.

Property Care provides all of this and are a real pleasure to deal with.

Property Care had been providing a service for 25% of our repairs work. We liked the way they worked and so when we started looking for a contractor to take on the whole estate we knew they would be in the frame.

We wanted to work with people who would put themselves out for us despite our small size; an organisation that would really care, not just one that said they did.

Our biggest practical issue had been the inability to offer appointments. This resulted in a lot of 'no access' calls which were costly and inefficient, and drove down satisfaction levels. Our residents wanted modern services. They wanted a repairs phone line and an appointment system. They wanted local operatives they could chat to and who would understand them. Not too much to ask, but too much for some larger organisations to supply.

Property Care set up a dedicated free phone. This is staffed by their own experienced Customer Service Officers, but is answered as Bushbury Repairs. They will take the caller through a diagnostic questionnaire and then book an appointment. Importantly the appointment is offered to suit the caller and not to make an impression on their own targets.

Appointments are offered in a 2-hour time slot and the repair is sent straight to an appropriately-skilled operative working in the area. Because Property Care have provided a dedicated team for us, an emergency or even an urgent call can sometimes be dealt with in minutes.

Completion of a repair generates an immediate customer satisfaction survey, the results of which come to us, rather than to Property Care. This means that Property Care cannot massage the results and we get accurate feedback from our residents.

We can now monitor the work closely and, in the unlikely event of a negative response we will pay a personal call. Where this has happened the problem is usually totally unconnected to the repair and the tenant wants to complain about, for example, the bins not being emptied.

When our Almo started its Decent Homes Programme our tenants found themselves facing the possibility of having more than one contractor in their home at the same time. We were able to sit down with Property Care and work out protocols which made everyone's lives easier and it worked really well, with a dedicated officer to liaise between Property Care, the Almo's contractors and our tenants.

It is the personal touch which is really different for us and this year, with Property Care's help, we have been able to take this one step further with the recruitment of our first apprentice. While we pay the salary, the Property Care team provide all of the hands-on training and liaise with the local college. Something we could not do ourselves.

The benefits

Because Property Care is part of a housing association itself, they understand the pressures we face. While a stand-alone contractor may take you for a pint and sympathise, they work with us to develop practical ways to meet performance targets and the high expectations of our tenants. Their culture of Customer Focus has enabled us to reduce costs and improve speed and productivity, leading to really high customer satisfaction. With Property Care we have been able to:

- Develop a relationship based on trust and transparency;
- Provide our tenants with simple procedures that can be continuously monitored, correcting or tweaking when necessary;
- Establish a dedicated phone line so that tenants' calls are answered as Bushbury Repairs;
- Link our website to Property Care systems so that repairs reported online go directly to them and are dealt with promptly;
- Provide our Board with detailed reports that are produced in a way which best suits them; and
- Provide our tenants with a planned improvement programme and detailed information about the choices involved.

All of this means we are able to keep a firm control on time, resources and money and our tenant satisfaction levels show that they are happy too.

They are confident that:

- They have a dedicated repairs line which is open 8 till late;
- They can book an appointment for a 2-hour time slot at their own convenience and know that it will be kept;
- The job will be right first time;
- The operatives will be cheerful, polite and explain what they are going to do and how long it will take them.
- A pre-inspection will only happen if there is a major budgetary implication; and
- They can complete a customer satisfaction survey as soon as a job is done and their comments will be taken notice of.

There's a major benefit for the wider community too. This is an area of high unemployment and we want our youngsters to gain skills and experience that will help them in a highly competitive job market. This year one local lad has started a rigorous four-year training programme with extensive college study time and hands-on experience working on a day-to-day basis with Property Care's highly skilled mentoring team.

By drawing the workforce from the local community there is likely to be great loyalty, commitment and care – giving benefits to both us and to Property Care themselves. We hope to fund another apprenticeship to start next year.

Financial costs and cashable benefits

Through the use of Property Care's sophisticated technology we are able to closely manage our expenditure. When there are savings or underspend we can work with them and our tenants to look at planned programmes.

As the managing agent, we report our KPIs back to the local authority and we know ours are amongst the best in the city.

Property Care costs are low and as a not for profit organisation they pass them on to us.

We now expect to be able to keep improving and work with Property Care to bring new services in when our tenants want them.

An example to others

Here at Bushbury Hill we don't see why all contractors can't work like this; but we know from our networking that not everyone does. Property Care have proved their willingness to adapt to specific situations and to put themselves out for us. Their values – Customer Focus, Learning, Passion and Trust – aren't just on paper they live them.

For more information: Contact Karen Williams, Bushbury Hill on 01902 551 632 or Frank O'Rawe, Property Care on 01785 312 300.

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