



# **Specialist Housing Scrutiny Report**

**November 2021**

**Magnify Scrutiny Group  
On behalf of Tuntum Housing Association**



## **Contents:**

- 1. Who are we, and what do we do?**
- 2. Why resident involvement is important to Tuntum**
- 3. Why did we choose to review Specialist Housing?**
- 4. The aim of the review**
- 5. What we did and how we carried out our review**
- 6. Our key findings**
- 7. Conclusion**
- 8. Recommendations**

## **1. Who are we, and what do we do?**

We are Magnify, the resident Scrutiny Group for Tuntum Housing Association. We were formed in 2015 to make the voice of the resident heard. We are residents who volunteer our time to help Tuntum improve and best serve us. We are:

Mrs Barbara Douglas

Miss Dorothy Ellis

Mr Colin Gunter

We have completed several scrutiny reviews on things like Tuntum's website, the repairs service and Engage our tenant newsletter. Our reviews are presented to the CEO and board for consideration. They have led to significant changes in the way Tuntum works, like the changes to the website and the introduction of an online portal to log repairs and pay rent.

The main purpose of the group is to:

- Be a critical friend to Tuntum Housing Association.
- Take an independent look at Tuntum Housing Association's services, plans and performance.
- Assess and challenge Tuntum Housing Association's performance against expected standards.
- Hold the Board and management team to account for performance and standards.

## **2. Why resident involvement is important to Tuntum**

The values of Tuntum have always meant that there is a focus on listening to the resident's voice to drive the direction of the company.

In November 2020, the government published a [Social Housing White Paper –The Charter for Social Housing Residents](#). One of the aims of the charter is to champion the resident's voice by empowering them to hold their landlords to account and drive delivery of higher quality services that are focused on their needs.

By having Magnify in place, we have a group that can hold Tuntum to account and help to improve the service we receive as residents.

## **3. Why did we choose to review Specialist Housing?**

Tuntum Housing Association has an Independent Complaints Panel, a joint project run with six other housing providers, consisting of tenants from all seven housing providers. Tenants are appointed to resolve complaints by helping to mediate an outcome between the housing provider and the complainant. As part of an outcome, the Independent Complaints Panel may make recommendations to a provider's scrutiny panel.

Following a complaint being resolved by the Independent Complaints Panel in June 2021, we were informed that they had made the following recommendation:

"Tuntum Housing refers their Specialist Housing Service to the resident led Scrutiny Panel to explore its customer expectations and experiences, the repairs process, fire safety procedures and staff communication skills."

Tuntum Housing Association's Specialist Housing Service covers several schemes that are for young people facing homelessness, young single parents, and women

fleeing domestic violence. It is important that we support the people in need of this service as best we can.

#### **4. The aim of the review**

- ❖ Explore customer expectations and experiences.
- ❖ Review the repairs process.
- ❖ Review the fire safety procedures.
- ❖ Explore staff communication skills.
- ❖ Ensure we're offering the best service we can.

#### **5. What we did and how we carried out our review**

We decided to look at schemes that Tuntum's Specialist Housing Service manages, they were:

- 100 Derby Road - temporary accommodation for young people aged 16-24 who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- Karibu - temporary accommodation for over-18s, male and female, including refugees, who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- Imaani House - temporary accommodation for single women aged 16-34 who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

#### **Meeting tenants**

To carry out a review, Magnify wanted to fully understand the Specialist Housing Service. To help gain this understanding we were invited to an event in September 2021 at one of the scheme's, Imaani House, called [Starts at Home](#).

At the event, we met the residents of Imaani House and learned about their experiences before living at Imaani. We were told stories of how they came to be living at Imaani and their aspirations for the future.

We met a local councillor who was taking part in the event, Shuguftah Quddoos, who shared her experiences supporting the women living at Imaani. In Autumn 2020, she was asked by some residents to advocate for changes at the scheme on their behalf. Changes were made to Imaani to improve the lives of those living there.

We were told how all rooms at Imaani were refurbished to include new flooring and kitchenette areas. The communal kitchen had a new cooker along with a new large fridge so that residents had more space to store food and plan their meals. The communal lounge had a new TV in addition to a new dryer in the laundry room. Imaani has a large garden area, so to improve this, new garden furniture was purchased so that the residents can utilise.

### **Desktop review of documents**

It was a real insight into the lives of the people living in Specialist Housing schemes and helped us understand their experiences.

We were provided with template documents that would be completed:

- During the application process
- Upon signing up to move into a scheme
- Whilst as a resident of the scheme

Reviewing the paperwork gave us some understanding of the questions asked of those seeking a place at a scheme.

### **Meeting staff and tenants**

In October 2021, we spent time at Karibu meeting with members of staff. We were given a tour of the complex by Pauline, who had worked in Specialist Housing for over 20 years. We looked around the two kitchens and were talked through the type of accommodation. We also met with some residents on our tour who told us how they felt about living in Karibu.

Around ten years ago, the government provided 'Supporting People' funding to reduce homelessness by helping housing providers house people in need in temporary housing. Tuntum saw that whilst there were hostels for homeless people, there were none specifically for people who are black or from a minority ethnic background. So when the funding stopped, Tuntum decided to continue providing this service and find the funds for the support from within the organisation.

Rose, a Senior Accommodation Officer, explained to us that most people living at Karibu have previously been housed by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). They administer the support provided to eligible asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute. Asylum seekers can apply for accommodation and financial assistance, accommodation only or financial assistance only. Karibu is the next step for people seeking to live independently, by giving a little extra support to help them in their journey.

We asked about how the tenants support themselves financially. Rose told us that the majority of tenants in Specialist Housing have help in the form of Housing Benefit and Universal Credit. Part of the support the key workers provide is helping our tenants look for work to live financially independently.

Pauline talked to us about the support the tenants seeking refuge and asylum get from the Home Office, as we were concerned that the government should offer some support. The Home Office provide individuals with a biometric residence permit (BRP) which can be used to confirm a person's:

- Identity
- Right to study
- Rent property
- Work in the UK
- Right to any public services or benefits they're entitled to.

The BRP also gives holders 5 years' leave to remain in the UK. Prior to receiving the card, they are in NASS accommodation, where they have £33 per week to live on. Once they have recourse to public funds, they can apply to move to a scheme like one of our Specialist Housing schemes.

Refugees arrive in the East Midlands from a number of countries, for example; Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. Some people specifically request the area as they have friends or family who have started a life here that they want to be close to. Staff have to set expectations from the offset and explain how housing is allocated. In some areas, you have to have lived in the locality for some time before they can begin to bid for social housing.

We asked how staff communicate effectively with those tenants who cannot speak English. Rose talked about a translation service that Tuntum use called Big Word. Staff call the service and have the tenant present on the call and Big Word then translate for the tenant and the staff member to understand each other.

Syreeta, Specialist Housing Manager, spoke to us about how they communicate amongst the staff. The Specialist Housing Management team meet weekly and discuss any outstanding repairs at the schemes. When tenants have repairs that



need attention, they have two options: reporting the problem directly to the Tuntum Support and Resolution Team or talking to their key worker who will report the issue. Should there be any outstanding work, they walk over to Tuntum's office to meet the Support and Resolution Team, who help give them an idea on when work will be planned and completed for the tenants.

When tenants move into a Specialist Housing scheme, they receive a letter from their key worker introducing themselves and making an appointment for a key working session. Key working sessions are in place every 4 to 6 weeks depending on the tenant's preference. The purpose of the sessions is to aid the tenant's progression into living independently. The key worker supports how to move on from the temporary housing scheme, get into work, and support in living independently.

Tuntum also carries out regular welfare check telephone calls to check in with tenants. These can prove helpful should they have issues with things like registering with a local doctor, and were pertinent throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. They helped to prevent loneliness and support tenants in understanding government information.

Each month the key workers complete occupancy checks in all of the rooms to look out for health and safety hazards. This gives Tuntum the chance to prevent any potential health and safety-related incidents and provides assurance that they are mindful of looking after their tenants. They hold regular fire drills to ensure that all tenants are aware of the fire safety guidelines at the schemes and test all alarms regularly.

In the past, there was a communal phone for all tenants to use as and when they needed. We were concerned that it may be difficult for tenants to be able to afford a telephone of their own with limited funds. Rose explained that tenants were not using the phone as they all had mobile phones, so it was removed to open up the space in the lobby. However, if any tenant needed to call someone and they couldn't afford to

use their own phone, they are welcome to use the phones in the office. They can ensure they have some privacy in a small office to make any calls.

Syreeta talked to us about the service that the different schemes offer. Each scheme works to meet the needs of its tenants. At Karibu, the staff operate an open-door policy, so if a tenant knocks on the door, any of the accommodation officers will help them with their query.

To be able to move on to live independently, Nottingham City Council requires applicants for social housing that are living in one of our schemes to have in place a Move on Support Plan (MOSP). This plan is created in conjunction with the tenant's key worker. It is put in place to assist individuals in improving their life skills and be ready to sustain a tenancy independently or semi-independently. Staff will recommend further education courses and where needed encourage tenant's to gain a qualification in maths and English.

Tuntum also supports local University students seeking work placements in social work. Pauline talked to us about the many students she has supported in their studies, by helping them understand how they can support people to live independently.

Staff take part in regular training to ensure that they maintain their skills. The week after we visited Karibu, there was Communications Training planned with all staff.

Rose and Pauline talked about the positive outcomes of working with tenants. They have both helped people to move on to live independently and seen them develop their skills and knowledge. They often have tenants return to thank them for the support they were given whilst living at the schemes.

## **6. Our key findings**

- We completed a thorough review of the services the schemes offer and were pleased to be welcomed by all staff members.
- We found all the important information is readily available for all tenants.
- We think it would only take some minor changes to make the service a great one, and something Tuntum should be proud of.

## **7. Conclusion**

We were really impressed with Tuntum's Specialist Housing Service, the team and the support they offer people in need. We felt that the service set customer expectations and supported their experiences.

We are happy with the level of information covered in the forms that need to be completed at the start of a tenancy and upon moving in. We felt that they capture the information that is key to helping the staff members support the tenants and meeting their needs.

It looks as though Tuntum set clear expectations of their tenants. However, we would stress the importance of keeping good records. Details of tenant demographics and their economic status were not something that seemed easily accessible to staff. Still, it would be good to have to hand so Tuntum know whether they are meeting their goal of providing hostels for homeless people, specifically those from a BAME background.

The key working sessions sound valuable to tenants who need support and guidance. We felt that it looks to be sufficient as long as these are done regularly and quality checked.

When a repair is undertaken, it would be good if staff could be informed so that, should the tenant be unable to be present, the staff member on-site has all the information that needs to be communicated to the contractor.

We think the repairs service offered works best when tenants are communicated with well. A call to let you know when someone will be arriving or if there is a delay is always better than no communication at all.

We were impressed with the fire safety procedures at the Specialist Housing Schemes. All the relevant information is displayed on noticeboards in prominent positions at the schemes. If a tenant forgets, they can easily remind themselves what to do.

Communication is a really important aspect of the service that Tuntum offer, and it must be handled well. We believe all tenants should be treated as adults, and respect should be given in both directions.

The translation service, Big Word, seems like a great service for face-to-face interactions. However, we are worried that there are some types of communications that need to be in writing and signed, like the license agreement and forms relating to the MOSP. It would be a great idea if these could be translated into the languages that the tenants speak to fully understand everything they need to.

The service Tuntum offer is of great social value already, and we're really pleased that they decided to continue providing it despite the lack of funding to support them.

## 8. Recommendations

From our scrutiny review, we would like to recommend that Tuntum consider implementing the following:

- Look at getting all our forms translated into other languages, following a review of the demographics of their tenant base in Specialist Housing.
- Offer tenants the use of IT equipment to help with their day-to-day activities.
- Update the house rules book and provide the revised version to all tenants.
- House rules book has space to put information on support services like benefits, CV writing, and mental health support to empower the tenants to look after themselves.
- Help and advice could be provided when it comes to the use of the kitchen and laundry facilities.

We look forward to our findings being presented to senior management and the board, and feel positive that these recommendations will improve Tuntum's offer to their residents.