

## **Curo Board Connect April 2023**

Jane Tabor – Group Chair (JT) welcomed the customers who had come to Board Connect, saying that Directors were very interested to hear about their experiences of interacting with Curo on a day to day basis.

Paul Harris (PH) advised the Board that customers had been asked what issues they would like to raise with Directors and four themes had emerged:

- Relationships with customers
- Communications
- Disability
- Contractors/Quality of Repairs

During the discussions the following issues and comments were shared:

### Relationships with customers

- What should Curo's role be in resolving matters on behalf of customers (e.g., displeasure with the Local Authority, parking issues)?
- Could Curo leverage its scale and influence to advocate on behalf of customers? We should be more vocal – emphasise that we understand and are there to listen.
- Curo should make clearer the relationship between Curo and B&NES e.g. where we have any input into home allocation and where we are simply complying with the requirements of Homesearch (the B&NES housing system).
- Curo should consider how we can support residents' associations where these have been formed by residents in specific areas or in response to an issue.
- It would be helpful to have a point of contact for the neighbourhood/area, rather than a general number to phone and a different person answering each time. This would not necessarily mean going back to old-style housing officers, but establishing more local connection/presence. Customers find having someone accountable for tackling a problem really helps, so they don't feel their issues are 'stuck in the ether' somewhere.
- Curo should acknowledge customer's views, be clear about what we can and can't do, and articulate this to customers.
- Curo could investigate putting in place systems to take care of the more routine 'stuff' and free up colleagues' time to focus on more community-building and softer skills.

### Communications

- Some recent letters have concerned customers – the wording implying there was more of an issue than there actually was e.g. a home condition survey appeared to possibly be very intrusive; others about gardens were confrontational in tone.
- Many colleagues seem to listen – but then nothing happens as a result. E.g., a policy to only replace like-for-like in new bathrooms leads to refusal to install a shower instead of a bath.
- We need to manage expectations better – e.g., not keep moving timelines for replacing kitchens and bathrooms.

- Curo should consider resident input into scheme design and regeneration planning.
- Customers felt that communication failures can cause a lot of additional waste and cost.
- Curo colleagues generally have a lovely customer-focused ethos – but contractors/sub-contractors don't usually have those same standards.

### Disability

- Directors were given an example of a wheelchair-bound customer in a sheltered bungalow which is not suitable for a wheelchair user. This means they get stuck into the doorways and this affects their independence.
- There is anecdotal evidence that some customers have been moved into homes with adaptations that they don't need (which then have to be removed) and concern was expressed about the cost/waste of this.
- Customers asked that we match the right customer to the right home and the meeting discussed the process of allocation and the adaptations which had to be made to the home pre-move in.
- Curo needs to work with the local authority to make sure that customers are being allocated properties which are suitable for their needs. There isn't a separate list of homes suitable for people with disabilities. Curo are aware of the shortcomings in B&NES Homesearch and are working to encourage them to rectify these issues. There is also a need to really understand how accessible our 'accessible' homes actually are and what is right for whom.
- Customer perceptions of Curo systems mean that they feel it is difficult to get to know us and that not all colleagues have access to the same information/knowledge (e.g., of homes suitable for people with disabilities).
- It was acknowledged that Curo can do some 'fixes' but can't always resolve fundamental issues with the fabric of the building.
- This all goes back to the housing crisis; specialised housing hasn't kept up with the times and the changing needs of older people.
- Curo needs to empower colleagues 'on the ground' to recognise these issues and make reasonable adjustments to address customers' needs (recognising that customers' needs will change over time).
- We should consider different policies for sheltered/supported housing, which acknowledges they are more likely to need adaptations than general needs properties.

### Contractors/Quality of Repairs

- There are a lot of difficulties with external contractors/sub-contractors: e.g. missed appointments, takes longer, etc.
- Most contractors/surveyors are pleasant in the home, but sometimes ineffective.
- Contractors often say Curo haven't given them the right information. E.g., things raised as inspections rather than fixes. It was acknowledged that this may not always be true, but there is a suspicion that our systems and processes may be hindering this. Contractors blaming Curo feeds into customers' mistrust of Curo.
- Repeated visits are emotionally draining – and can be costly if customers have to take holiday or forego work to be home for the contractors.

In summary some additional comments were shared:

- There are some fabulous people at Curo, who listen, are respectful of customers and try to get things done.
- The customers were very happy to have been given the security of a Curo Home.
- However, lots of things that can be improved.
- Directors expressed their sadness at some of the stories they had heard. They agreed that they should hear about the difficult issues and thanked customers for sharing openly, to give them the chance to consider these things and improve Curo.
- Directors expressed the desire to be more proactive in hearing from customers, in order to inform discussions and their decisions, particularly where this means making difficult trade-offs.

JT again thanked customers for coming to an early meeting. She acknowledged the good ideas and positive feedback and that there was much food for thought for Directors as they looked to improve Curo. She hoped that this would encourage them to participate in other forums we have for customer feedback.