

Scrutiny Panel 3 – Customer Services

Core Questions – Head of Landlord Services

1. Please supply details how you evaluate whether customer services is providing value for money around:

The quality of the service and service delivery
Customer Satisfaction across the whole of the organisation
Cost and efficiency
Staff satisfaction of the process

The first point of contact for tenants is the contact centre or the one stop shop. Tenants report all their repairs to the Contact Centre.

We carry out surveys of tenants to find out how satisfied they are with the service provided. The last survey showed that when tenants contacted the Council, 82% found staff helpful. Sixty four percent said staff were able to deal with their problem. Sixty one per cent were satisfied with the outcome.

The Housing Revenue Account pays the following amount as its contribution towards the contact centre and one stop shop.

One Stop Shop	£203,446
Contact Centre	£337,222

These amounts are reviewed at the end of each year to check that the amount charged reflects the cost of providing the service.

Housing Managers and Repairs managers hold regular meetings with the Contact Centre and One Stop Shop Managers to discuss performance and issues that have arisen. This has led to improvements in repairs performance with both teams understanding the requirements of the other. Tenants also carry out mystery shopping of the one stop shop.

2. Please explain how you use current technology and social networking to drive services forward

We use text messaging to communicate with tenants about rent arrears and also to remind them of dates of tenant area meetings.

We are gradually rolling out mobile working devices for repairs operatives to replace paper job tickets. This will increase productivity and should, therefore, increase tenant satisfaction.

3. How do you encourage customers to access the internet to make contact with the Council?

Council's web site is promoted on all letters and other documents issued. For specific projects dedicated e mail boxes are set up – for example so that tenants can respond to consultation exercises.

4. Please explain the advice and services that you provide to customers who are unable to access the internet.

We have a tenants general handbook that is given to all tenants. We do the same with a separate repairs handbook. We also have a range of leaflets and advice packs – for example on what to do if you are in rent arrears.

We have revised the tenancy agreement so that it contains advice on tenants rights and what they can expect from the Council and this is covered in great detail.

All new tenants receive a comprehensive new tenants information pack containing the leaflets with comprehensive information on the service provided and how to access it.

5. In particular, in relation to those customers who have the most need for services, please explain how the services that organisation offers are advertised.

The handbook, which all tenants have, explains how to access support. For example, adaptations for tenants with a disability. Information is also on the web site.

6. Do you feel that the One Stop Shop at the Council makes the best use of the space available, and how would you rate comfort and accessibility?

Accessibility is good for people with a disability and the area is comfortable and inviting. The new layout makes much better use of space.

(a) What do you feel are the best features of the One Stop Shop and why?

It is light and airy and, therefore, welcoming. Also the self service areas.

(b) Please provide suggestions of where you feel improvements could be made?

Queues need to be reduced –particularly at peak times. Self service points are often not being used and it may be because customers are not aware what information they can obtain/queries they can resolve in this way.

A dedicated payment hot line for making payments over the phone now that the cash office has been closed would be useful.

Improved signage is required as is the ability to access more information

without queuing.

7. Do you feel that customers are comfortable entering the One Stop Shop. If not, please provide examples of why you feel this is the case.

Surveys have not shown that this is an issue or that customers feel uncomfortable in any way.

8. Please supply details of how customers can access the customer service facilities.

In person at the one stop shop
Over the phone to the contact centre
By email to the contact centre
By accessing information on the Council's web site

9. Is the organisation successfully identifying the level of the service that the customer requires?

We have a number of mechanisms in place to identify this. We carry out surveys of tenants asking standard questions about what tenants think of the service provided and what their priority areas for improvement are. Tenants also mystery shop and give feedback of the service they received. Groups of tenants also carry out audits into service areas and make observations and recommendations. Audits have been carried out into rent arrears, voids and repairs and are currently looking at how we deal with anti social behaviour. We also carry out service specific surveys to identify satisfaction levels. This has been done for cleaning and void properties – we are currently updating the latter with a survey.

We carry out consultation exercises on new policies – for example, depooling. We take the opportunity to also seek feedback and information on what tenants think of the level of service delivery.

10. Please advise which the most frequently used method of contacting customer services.

75% of contact has been by telephone
17% has been through the tenants going to the one stop shop

The most common reason for tenants contacting the Council was to report a repair (60%). The next most common reason was rent arrears at 11%.

11. How does the organisation prioritise emergency situations?

Legislation prioritises repairs and gives statutory response times for types of repairs. It defines what is emergency, urgent and routine. For other service areas, housing managers meet with contact centre staff to discuss and scripts and guidance notes are provided.

12. Please provide details of the training given to officers to help them to deal with distressed customers.

Housing staff receive training on how to deal with difficult situations and also how to deal with violence and aggression. The Institute of Housing and Shelter provide excellent courses in this area.

13. How are staff supported in cases where dealing with distressed customers have caused them levels of distress?

Staff have one to one meetings with line managers. The Council also provides a confidential counselling service which staff can access. There are also the Council's HR and health and safety procedures.

14. Please supply details of a lesson learnt process that is in place following contact with difficult customers.

Managers will debrief at team meetings following discussions with staff involved in any incident. If necessary, risk assessments will be revisited and mitigation measures re-assessed.

15. Please supply details of how you analyse complaints received and how complaints are dealt with.

The Council's corporate complaints process is the procedure used to deal with complaints with all complaints being registered on the CRM software and monitored in terms of response within target time. This is followed up by regular complaints review meetings where reasons for the complaints are discussed and any actions necessary are taken, particularly if any trends are identified.

16. Please provide your views on the benefits of a shared customer services facility.

The need to achieve efficiencies, value for money and reduced costs is a key driver and that is understood and accepted. However, there would need to be mechanisms in place to ensure that generic staff had sufficient knowledge and skills in repairs, rent arrears and tenancy management, which are specialist areas.

17. Please supply details of both allocated and unallocated reserves for customer services for your area?

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