

Ascham Homes

Customer Care Strategy 2009-2012

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Good customer care is the foundation on which to provide quality homes in a thriving community. The purpose of this strategy is to ensure that we deliver high quality, professional standards of customer service. We seek to create a customer-focused service that sees things from a user perspective and which learns from customer feedback and to achieve very high resident satisfaction through service improvement. Our general approach to customer care is based on frameworks, such as: government policy on improving public services and the key lines of enquiry for housing inspection produced by the Audit Commission.
- 1.2 The issues arising from a rapidly developing statutory framework around discrimination on grounds of ethnic origin, age, faith, gender, disability and sexual orientation are being actively addressed through the Diversity Strategy and the success of this work is dependant, to a large extent, on achieving the objectives set out in this Strategy.
- 1.3 The company has developed a set of policy principles to underpin its approach to caring for its customers and these will help to guide its work. We have devised a focussed set of success measures and outcomes to help us understand how well we are doing in delivering better customer care.
- 1.4 The Action Plan sets out a comprehensive approach to customer care beginning with leadership from the Board and the Executive Management Team. It includes the wide range of issues to be considered in ensuring good access to the service, such as the availability and structure of the service and the service offer set out in the Resident Compact, service standards and the Resident Handbook.
- 1.5 Improved customer satisfaction is key to the success of Ascham Homes and the overall approach to monitoring and learning from customer feedback and improving services is contained within this Strategy. Ascham Homes is keen to manage the relationship with its customers well and the Action Plan includes the monitoring and review of a range of measures including complaint handling, obtaining customer feedback and mystery shopping.

- 1.6 It is also about the most important asset the company has, its staff and rewarding the can do attitude of outstanding staff through employee recognition schemes for example.
- 1.7 The Refocus programme will look at whether resources and staff structures for customer services are fit for purpose and provide efficient and value for money services. The new responsive repairs contract is being procured in 2011 and, as this service area accounts for a significant proportion of the Customer Services teams' work it is important that there is a thorough options appraisal of structures so that they deliver the best possible customer care, efficiency and value for money.
- 1.8 The Tenant Services Authority service standards come into force from April 2010. They are the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard, the Home standard, the Tenancy standard, the Neighbourhood and Community standard, the Value for Money standard, and the Governance and Viability standard.

Detail: TSA Tenant Involvement and Empowerment service standard April 2010

Registered providers must design and deliver housing services that tenants can access easily. Tenants must be offered choices over the services they receive, and be treated with fairness and respect in relation to all the standards, registered providers must consider equality issues and the diversity of their tenants, including tenants with additional support needs. Registered providers must understand their tenants' needs and use this information to design and deliver housing services and communicate with tenants.

The above standards wholly reflect Ascham Homes existing customer care and diversity priorities. The standards are supplemented by more detailed local standards for customer care and diversity/equality. Achievement against these is reported to Committee twice yearly.

2 Key customer care objectives for 2009-12

Customer care is a cross-cutting activity with close links to the Resident Engagement, Diversity and Communications strategies. The major customer care-specific objectives for Ascham Homes in the next three years are to:

- achieve the Customer Service Excellence Award

- achieve or exceed the key success measures for example improving the overall level of satisfaction, reducing 'avoidable contact', and improving the speed and quality of responses to enquiries
- embed customer care competencies in the workforce through further training and roll out of the competency framework
- purchase a customer relationship management IT system
- implement national Tenant Services Authority service standards on the 1st April 2010 and implement local service standards on 1 April 2011
- re-tender the responsive repairs service in 2011, this key service area encompasses a large proportion of the work of the Customer Services team and is the most important 'driver' of overall satisfaction
- improve our communication with residents about lessons learned and how we have improved services as a result of consultation and feedback
- maintain a good awareness of our costs, efficiencies and performance and how this compares to our peers

3 Policy statement

2.1 The following policy principles underpin our approach to customer care:

- Ascham Homes is committed to embed the delivery of equality and the removal of barriers to it into the design and delivery of services
Source: Ascham Homes Diversity Strategy.
- The customer care service offer will be set out in the service standard and Resident Handbook; tenants and leaseholders will know the choices available to them and what they might reasonably expect when we provide a service
- services will be accessible and it will be easy for tenants and leaseholders to get hold of information about services.
- tenants and leaseholders will have a positive experience when they contact the company, even if we are unable to satisfy their individual demand for a particular service.
- complaints and compliments help us to learn what customers like and don't like about the service.
- monitoring the impact of our contact with customers and managing our performance with customers will help us to change in response to their priorities and needs.
- our staff will have the right tools - access to training, policies, procedures and practice notes - to enable them to please our customers.

4 Value for money and efficiency

It is important that expenditure on customer services achieves value for

money and an efficient service. There will be a focus on:

- reducing inputs for the same outputs – putting in fewer resources to get the same result
- reducing prices for the same outputs – paying less for inputs to get the same result
- achieving more outputs or improved quality for the same inputs – getting better results from the same resources
- achieving proportionally more outputs or improved quality compared with the extra resources that are used

Ascham Homes will benchmark customer services quality, performance and cost indicators and strive to remain in the forefront of best practice and achieve top quartile performance in comparison with peers.

Detail: Examples of industry standard benchmarking measures

- % of tenants who contacted landlord in last 12 months and felt their landlord was able to deal with problem
- call centre costs compared to costs of operation

And provide an annual account to Committee and Board of how VfM is being achieved and efficiency improved.

5 Performance and service improvement

5.1 Performance measures for customer services and customer care help the company to manage the timeliness and quality of customer contact. To ensure that services are efficient and continually improved Ascham Homes will monitor the key performance indicators at Appendix 3 which include:

- complaints responded to within timescale
- calls to responded within timescale
- letters, Councillor and MP enquiries responded to within timescale
- overall customer satisfaction with Ascham Homes (STATUS survey)
- satisfaction with the helpfulness of the landlord (STATUS satisfaction survey)
- the level of 'avoidable contact'
- satisfaction with value for money for rent (STATUS survey)
- percentage of actions within the Customer Services and Customer Care Action Plan completed within timescale

5.2 Targets will be set annually by:

- reviewing the performance of the previous year
- benchmarking the performance of other ALMOs
- taking into account projected LBWF funding

Ascham Homes will seek continuous improvement in customer services and customer care through:

- 360 degree appraisal of staff and competency based job descriptions
- development of procedures to better manage processes
- mystery shopping customer services processes

The definition of the key performance indicators for customer services will be based on the current HouseMark definition.

5,3 The following outcomes will help us to judge the success of our approach:

- increases in customer satisfaction to among the best in London
- equally high levels of satisfaction among our diverse tenant and leaseholder customers.
- achievement of key success measures.
- access to independent advice and advocacy services for people who need expert help to access choice.
- changes to policies and procedures as a result of tenant and leaseholder feedback.
- favourable comparison with benchmarking partners in terms of satisfaction and service cost.
- the Board and our partners will be clear that we are delivering successful outcomes.
- Ascham Homes will have sufficient capacity to meet the demands of a modern customer environment.

6 Risk

6.1 The key risk is around our capacity to deliver the actions within the timescales indicated. To diminish this risk the Board and the Executive Management Team must sign up to the target dates and ensure managers support the actions. A dedicated Policy Manager and Policy Assistant have been tasked with project-managing the Strategy, and the Customer Care Working Group led by the Director of Property and Investment acts as a staff, LBWF and customer forum for service improvement.

6.2 There is the risk that new processes will not be embedded; to diminish this risk staff must receive a regular stream of news about implementation of the strategy and advice and guidance on their role within it. In addition new processes should be implemented systematically and customer care targets and standards must form part of service plans and personal appraisals.

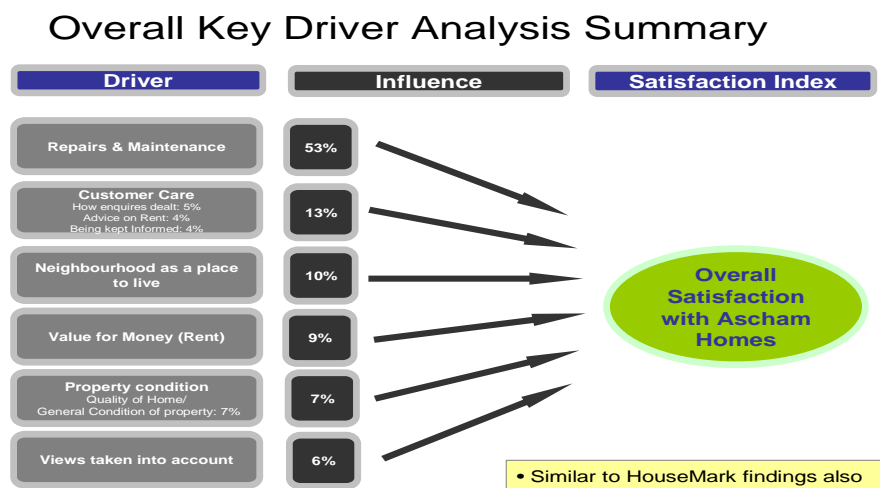
7 Customer satisfaction.

7.1 The Summary of 2005, 2006, 2008 Key Tenant Survey (STATUS) and

local large scale survey 2009 Results at Appendix 4 sets out trends in customer satisfaction and it can be seen that overall satisfaction has increased by 10.7% between 2008 and 2009. It is important that this base is improved in the coming years. The percentage of customers that think that their rent provides good value for money has increased by 7.4%. However satisfaction with the helpfulness of the landlord reduced by 4.7%, this could be related to staff turnover in 2009/10; the range of actions with the Action plan set out how this indicator will be improved.

8 Drivers of customer satisfaction.

8.1 The following illustration shows that the second most important 'driver' of customer satisfaction is customer care, it has a significant influence over customers' overall satisfaction. It is clear therefore that weight should be given to this service area when considering competing service improvement priorities.



8.2 The most important driver is the repairs service and the most important factor is the time taken before work is carried out. Customer services staff have an important role to keep tenants informed about progress and waiting times for repairs to be completed. It is a priority that tenants and leaseholders will have a positive experience when they contact the company, even if we are unable to satisfy their individual demand for a particular service.

8.3 The way that enquiries are dealt with is a significant driver of satisfaction, and the Action plan contains a wide range of actions to improve this service area.

8.4 The focus in the coming years will be on the following key drivers of customer satisfaction:

- time taken before work is completed
- how enquiries are dealt with and
- keeping tenants informed about their enquiry

Progress will be monitored through the Customer Care and Customer Service Action plan, Property and Investment Senior Management team, and annual satisfaction surveys.

9 Review of the strategy

- 9.1 This strategy will be reviewed every three years by the Policy and Development Committee.