

MEETING	Six Town Housing Board
DATE	11 th November 2009
SUBJECT	Customer Access Strategy
STATUS	FOR PUBLICATION
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Purpose

Our overall aim is to achieve excellent customer access and customer satisfaction. To do this we need to put the customer at the heart of what we do, get customer service right first time every time, at first point of contact and put any mistakes right quickly.

Customers want to be able to access our services in a straightforward and direct way. They expect a range and quality of services to be the same irrespective of where they live in Bury. This strategy is about serving existing and future customers better and reaching and serving more people, in more ways than ever before.

We want people to recognise and value the excellent services we provide. They need to be confident that services are good value for money and to feel that their voice is heard.

We need to demonstrate that we use our limited resources effectively and efficiently and that we engage customers to inform and help us focus on priorities. We believe that by putting our customers and staff first, we will enable Six Town Housing to become an outstanding organisation and an employer of first choice.

Customers can access our service in a variety of ways at a time and place that suits them. According to our latest status survey the overwhelming majority of customers contact us by telephone (84.4%)

Method of contact	%
Telephone	84.4
Visited office	11.5
In writing	0.5
Email	1.5
Internet	0
Other	1.5
Can't remember	0.6

After listening to our customers we have worked on improving access to our services. We have recently updated our website to make it more user friendly, introduced a text

messaging service and also a self service kiosk in our reception area for customers to offer further options for customers to access our services.

The Customer Access Strategy outlines our vision and key aims to ensure frontline services are even more accessible, excellent and meet the diverse needs of our customers.

Link to Strategic Objectives

- This strategy will contribute to achieving strategic priority seven, to provide excellent services to all our customers, demonstrated by achieving and sustaining high levels of customer satisfaction across all service areas

Key Points

The key points of the strategy are:

- To maximise accessibility and offer more choice through a variety of access channels
- To offer a high quality service that is reliable, flexible and responsive
- To offer value for money by greater cost effectiveness
- To know who our customers are and tailor our services to meet their needs

Recommendation

Board Members are asked to:

Consider and approve the proposed Customer Access Strategy.

Consider and approve the proposed Customer Access Strategy action plan

Risk Management		
Impact: Medium	Probability: Low	Risk Rating: Low

Financial Implications (including Value for Money / Efficiency Agenda)

There are no specific additional financial implications. Any costs generated from the implementation of the access strategy should be built into individual service improvement plans. Failure to introduce the Customer Access Strategy could result in us not sharing with staff and customers our vision and plans on future access to Six Town Housing services.

Impact on Customers

- Greater involvement in the design, review, and evaluation of services
- Greater choice and convenience
- Better customer service and provision of information
- Resolution of queries at the first point of contact
- Joined up services
- Services accessible to all

Service User Consultation Undertaken

Customers have been consulted on the Customer Access Strategy in a variety of ways.

A consultation document and questionnaire was circulated to the following groups of customers

- BADDAC
- TRACC
- Homeview/BMEview/Youngview
- Customers with email addresses on Simdell system
- Customers who attended 2008 annual tenant and leaseholder conference
- All website visitors

A customer workshop was facilitated to discuss the findings of the access strategy consultation. Customers were able to help create and shape an action plan to deliver the customer access strategy.

Customers highest priorities relating to accessing our services were identified.

- Easy access to services
- Professional and knowledgeable staff at 1st point of contact
- Answer the call at first call without putting you through to anyone
- Putting the customer first
- More use of internet for customers who use it
- One number
- Good communication
- Officers having full background knowledge when follow up calls are made
- Better management of neighbour nuisance and antisocial behaviour
- Repairs

- Access at anytime of day

According to the consultation with our customers the standard of customer service was already very good and no big changes were necessary, this was the view held by all attendees at the customer workshop

The system of call backs and messages from the contact centre does not always work and it was suggested that more capable IT systems could perhaps help rectify this.

It was acknowledged that not all enquiries can be dealt with at the first point of contact and in some instances where this was the case it was felt that the problems were not dealt with at all.

Sometimes customers would like to speak to the same officer/advisor who they had spoken to previously and this should be an option. Again a more sophisticated IT system could help with tracking who had been helping the customer previously.

Customers agreed with our vision for customer access and contributed to creating the key aims within the access strategy

Equality and Diversity Implications

This strategy aims to have a positive impact on our customers regardless of their ethnic or social grouping.

An equality impact assessment was completed in relation to this strategy

TRACKING/PROCESS

EMT	WORKING GROUP	COMMITTEE
12th October 2009		
BOARD	COUNCIL	TRACC
11th November 2009		27th November 2008

1. Introduction:

Delivering customer excellence is central to everything we do and this is reflected in our vision, strategic priorities, values and service standards. We have sought to embed this culture throughout the organisation using a number of methods and initiatives. These include:

- The integration of the HIA and Repairs and Maintenance Service to ensure a consistent, seamless service is offered to our customers;
- The development of a Customer Excellence Charter and Communication Toolkit developed in consultation with customers;
- The development of a corporate approach to measuring customer satisfaction through the use of Vision Management System (VMS);
- A customer focused staff training and development programme, which includes a number of mandatory elements e.g. customer care, equality and diversity and induction;
- Call handling monitoring to ensure consistent advice and high customer care standards are delivered; and
- The introduction of a new customer complaints procedure, database and training to improve performance and facilitate better learning.

We offer a flexible frontline service to our customers who are able to access services on-line, by letter and e-mail, using text messaging facilities, face to face, self serve kiosk, and over the telephone through our Customer Contact Centre and Repairs Help Desk. A freepost address is available to customers who wish to correspond with us in writing.

Our customers are also able to access the service through the Council's Customer Information Points and a community-led centre where freephone facilities are available. Repairs can be requested 24 hours a day, 365 days a year using a freephone telephone number. Customer can report repairs via e-mail, face-to-face and by letter.

Our website contains a wealth of information about the services we provide and includes on-line facilities for customers to view their rent account, download forms, make a complaint and calculate their eligibility for Housing Benefit. Customers can also bid for properties on-line through a link to the Council's website.

We have developed a new suite of service standards in consultation with customers.

A range of customer literature is available including a revised tenants' handbook, quarterly rent statements and our customer newsletter, News from Six, which is overseen by a customer-led editorial team.

Our staff are motivated, well trained and customer focused. This is demonstrated in the annual tenants' survey 2008/09 which shows that our customers believe our staff are helpful (88%) and able to deal with their enquiry (80%). The level of customers who are satisfied with the final outcome of their enquiry has increased to 72.5%. Overall customer satisfaction in the survey 2007/08 was 78%, this has significantly increased to 85.7% in 2008/09.

Housemark benchmarking information show Six Town Housing in the upper quartile regarding overall satisfaction with services provided by Six Town Housing.

We have introduced VMS to better understand benchmark and make use of customer satisfaction information in a consistent way across service areas. Satisfaction is analysed by diversity strands to identify any issues affecting specific customer groups. An annual programme has been created. The findings from these surveys have been used to help us improve the service we provide.

2. Conclusion

The delivery of the Customer Access Strategy fully supports and will help us achieve our vision for customer access in the coming years. This will take shape by building on the key principles of the strategy:

1. Maximising accessibility and offering more choice
2. High quality front line services
3. Offering value for money
4. Best fit – by knowing our customers

By working on these key principles and acting on customer feedback, customer satisfaction should continue on an upward trend.

3. Recommendations:

To consider and approve the proposed Customer Access Strategy.

To consider and approve the proposed Customer Access Strategy action plan