

Customer Service Strategy 2008-10

November 2008



Better homes, better lives



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our vision is to provide efficient, responsive and relevant services wholly-focused on meeting people's needs and exceeding their expectations. We will achieve this by putting our customers, teams and people at the heart of everything we do. We will engage in a constant and ongoing dialogue with our customers, always seeking out new and innovative ways to engage with them so that we can best understand and respond to their needs. We will provide a consistently high quality, responsive service that is both accessible and flexible. We will work to achieve this through the most efficient means possible whether this is directly through our front line services or working with partners across Glasgow to drive forward the Customer Service strategy.

As GHA continues to strive to go "above and beyond" for all our customers, transforming social housing in Glasgow and putting our commitment to better homes and better lives at the heart of our mission, the bond between our organisation, our staff and our customers becomes ever more important. To make our customers' aspirations a reality we need their engagement which means we need their trust. We can only do this through making sure that every contact our customers have with us is positive and meets their needs. Seen in this context, the successful delivery of this Customer Service strategy becomes the bedrock of everything else we hope to achieve.

Delivering excellent customer service, first time, every time, is at the core of our business. GHA is now five years old and in that time we have achieved much for our customers but there is yet much more we can achieve. This Customer Service strategy sets out how we intend to deliver our vision for our customers and their communities through all our activities, from mainstream housing management into regeneration and through partnership working. An initial Customer Service strategy was approved by the Board in February 2008 but, reflecting lessons learnt over the last 6 months and the wider picture emerging from our overall strategic review, this new strategy refreshes the programmes of work and sets out what our customers can expect of us from now until 2010. The core of our vision remains the same and, as stated in the initial strategy, we remain committed to:

- Having a pattern of service delivery that is flexible and able to meet people's needs.
- Delivering high levels of customer satisfaction– and ensuring our ability to handle complex customer enquiries at the first point of contact.
- Enabling well-trained and motivated employees throughout the organisation to take ownership of customers' problems and act proactively, anticipating customers' needs across a range of services.
- A consistency of service using a variety of information communication technology (ICT) solutions – making it possible to handle and respond to enquiries through a range of channels and locations.
- Re-designing and streamlining business processes– reducing transaction times and improving efficiency, both internally and through partnership working.

We will deliver therefore delivery this strategy under five thematic headings:

- Understanding what our customers want
- Flexibility and accessibility
- Customer focused staff
- Consistently excellent services
- Efficiency of service.

OUR CUSTOMER SERVICE ETHOS

GHA is a registered social landlord established in 2003 to assume ownership of Glasgow City Council's housing stock via a large-scale voluntary transfer. We now have some 69,000 properties: around 60 per cent of the social rented sector in Glasgow which house approximately 95,000 tenants. Add to this 26,000 factored owners and a further 24,000 people on our waiting lists and GHA is a direct service provider to over one fifth of Glasgow's population.

We want to deliver the right services, at the right time to the right people. We want our customers to feel delighted by those services and valued throughout the process. We want to work together with a range of partners, working towards delivering a seamless set of services that contribute towards better lives for our customers. Above all, it is important to us that our efforts produce positive customer experiences every time.

We cannot achieve our objectives alone and therefore the foundation to our approach is working in partnership with others to tackle problems, deliver effective services, innovate, and add value to our resources. GHA will work in partnership with our tenants, owners, local committees and staff teams, Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), Glasgow City Council and other agencies to deliver a range of activities that will contribute to the creation of services and service standards that best meet the needs of our customer base. Being a strong partner in existing and new partnerships will become increasingly central to how we do our business and what we look to achieve for the city of Glasgow.

In this strategy we are bringing together both successful and emerging programmes to create a more focused, flexible and innovative approach to customer service that our staff can be proud to deliver.

OUR CUSTOMER SERVICE OUTCOMES

As a result of implementing this strategy, customers will receive consistently excellent services. We will know that we are successfully delivering this strategy because our customers will:

- Have a choice of ways to access services, such as the telephone, internet and face-to-face
- Receive excellent service from all their contacts with GHA and its network of LHOs, whichever method they choose
- Find enthusiastic, helpful and committed staff whenever they contact us
- Say that they don't get passed from pillar to post – a “one and done” approach
- Feel that they are respected, valued and that their views are taken into account
- Know that staff are accountable and take ownership of customer requests
- Have confidence that we understand our customers' needs and will deliver what we promise
- Recognise that we are driven by our commitments to the customer.

As well as feedback from our customers, our staff will know that we are successfully delivering this strategy because they will:

- Know that they make a positive difference
- Feel they are at the front of an organisation that is genuinely customer focused
- Know that they are respected and valued, and feel supported in every way
- Feel empowered to take ownership of customer enquiries
- Accept responsibility for the service they provide
- Know that there is a clear vision for the service, and strong and supportive leadership
- Feel there are opportunities for them to learn, develop and progress
- Hear praise and compliments about the work they do
- Be motivated and enthusiastic
- Know that they work in an open and honest environment

In order to ensure that we are constantly moving towards the outcomes set out in this strategy we will put in place a series of action plans against which our performance can be measured and reviewed. The update for our first Customer Service strategy from February 2008 is attached as an appendix and we will continue to provide six monthly updates to the Board.

NATIONAL AND LOCAL POLICY CONTEXT

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT DISCUSSION PAPER: FIRM FOUNDATIONS

Glasgow Housing Association welcomes this major review of housing policy in Scotland. We support the Scottish Government's aspirations for a healthier, safer, smarter, fairer wealthier and greener Scotland. We also support the Government's aim to deliver a better functioning housing system, with better quality and affordable housing, effective and customer focused service delivery and more choice. These aims are also key aspirations for GHA.

We have developed a range of a customer service excellence approaches to service delivery. These will provide a customer-led approach to service improvement, which focus on outcomes. Within this approach, we are about to deliver on a number of initiatives to improve customer services including the development of choice-based letting, a new letting standard and a review of the GHA rent structure by 2011. During 2008 we have conducted a fundamental review of our purpose, consulting tenants and stakeholders about the scope and shape of GHA in the future.

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT CUSTOMER FIRST PROGRAMME

As the largest social rented sector landlord in Scotland, GHA seeks to use the Scottish Governments' Customer First framework to modernise its housing services and deliver best value.

The Customer First programme recognises that customers have service needs that straddle local authority and organisation boundaries. Efficient government initiatives are encouraging public and social sector organisations to harness technology and modernise business practices, giving a clearer focus on meeting the needs of customers and maximising frontline customer service.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

GHA operates across the city and has housing stock and customers in a wide variety of locations, which serves Glasgow's diverse population. GHA is committed to providing fair and equal treatment for all its stakeholders, including tenants, and will not discriminate against any on the grounds of race, colour, ethnic or national origin, language, religion, belief, age, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, family circumstances, employment status, or disability. Indeed we will positively endeavour to achieve fair outcomes for all.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

We appreciate that we cannot work alone. Increasingly services are being delivered in partnership with other agencies. We aim to work closely with Glasgow City Council, the NHS Glasgow and Clyde Health Board, the Community Planning Partnership and Community Health and Social Care Partnerships, Strathclyde Police, Glasgow Sheriff Court, other RSLs and voluntary agencies to ensure that services are co-ordinated and complementary. In some locations we operate from shared offices.

Importantly, GHA delivers services through a range of other providers, particularly with regards to our capital investment and repairs programmes. Learning the lessons from the past, any new contract management arrangements will always reflect the centrality of the customer and their experience to how we judge the successful delivery of those services.

CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Reflecting our progress towards delivering excellent customer service in everything we do, GHA will seek external validation that we are meeting nationally recognised standards for customer service. To this end, in 2009 GHA will seek accreditation through Customer Service Excellence, previously known as Charter Mark, the UK Cabinet Office's standard for customer service.

OUR STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

When the original version of our Customer Service strategy was agreed by the Board in February 2008, it was the first in a number of strategic frameworks we have developed over the course of the year. As we are close to finalising our new overall purpose and direction for wider consultation, now is a welcome time to refresh that original document and ensure it is fully aligned to the emerging strategic context in GHA.

This Customer Service strategy is one of the cornerstones of GHA's new business strategy. As well as a key element in its own right, it will support all of the other key aspects of our business in a range of ways:

- All our activities, be they in housing management, regeneration or wider partnership working will be customer-centric, with staff relentlessly focused on improved outcomes for our customers
- Good customer service and engagement with our staff will often be the first step that our customers take towards wider involvement with the organisation. By promoting a positive experience for our customers, we can better involve them in wider empowerment
- We will maximise value by reducing duplication and waste through ensuring streamlined processes and by ensuring we avoid multiple contact from customers through getting it right first time.

This strategy complements and supports many of our other policies and strategies, specifically the following:

- Empowerment and Engagement strategy
- Regeneration strategy: sets out how we will improve the quality of life for our tenants and their communities
- Housing Support strategy: sets out how we will ensure that we have a range of affordable, good quality homes and support services that are appropriate to our customers needs, drawing together the previous Housing and Community Care strategy and Tenancy Sustainment strategy
- People Management strategy: sets out how we will align our staffs aspirations and development with the needs and aspirations of our customers
- Business Transformation strategy: sets out how we will develop our organisation's culture, structure and values so that it can best deliver on the needs and aspirations of our customers
- Equality and Diversity strategy: setting out our legal and moral responsibilities and intentions in ensuring equality of opportunity and access, and a high standard of service provision for all our customers.

OUR CUSTOMER SERVICE APPROACH

GHA has developed considerable experience in delivering customer service outcomes over the last five years. We have learned from what has worked, and could have worked better, from the track record of other RSLs in the city and beyond, and we have innovated and demonstrated good practice. However, we still have a lot to learn and a lot to do. We are committed to being a leader in customer service in the city and amongst our peers.

Our Customer Services strategy and the activities that flow from it will:

- Put customers at the heart of our service provision, and to listen and respond to them when planning changes
- Provide customers with convenient and easy access to information and services at times and locations convenient to them - whatever their ability, age, preferences or where they live
- Give customers the opportunity to ask for information or a service, report a repair, make a payment and give us their comments and complaints, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Carry out an end-to-end examination of a range of key business processes to make them less bureaucratic, simpler and more efficient and effective
- Deliver best value and efficient services by constantly looking for new and better ways of delivering our services, including the use of new technologies
- Ensure that quality assurance is built into processes so that work is done once, and done right
- Support and develop staff to have the flexibility to sort out complex problems and provide them with the tools they need to help them do their job
- Work with our partners, including the council, the police, the health service, Community Planning and other RSLs to deliver joint services and information.

For LHOs and services this means committing to:

- Providing services and transactions in a variety of ways, including the Customer Service Centre and the internet
- Ensuring that services are delivered in line with service commitments
- Ensuring all staff have an awareness and understanding of the GHA Customer Service strategy
- Keeping customers informed – especially when things go wrong
- Ensuring that customer care standards and performance targets are met
- Taking responsibility for and managing the whole process – from first contact to satisfactory conclusion, whoever actually contributes to the service provision.

GHA will seek to deliver actions under five key themes with the overall aim of achieving excellent customer service:

- Understanding what our customers want
- Flexibility and accessibility
- Customer focused staff
- Consistently excellent services
- Efficient services.

It is expected that future annual updates and reporting will continue to fully reflect emerging priorities from our customers, their representatives and wider community partnerships. It is acknowledged that a number of the identified actions are by their nature crosscutting and implementation may well impact on more than one of the themes.

UNDERSTANDING WHAT OUR CUSTOMERS WANT

AIM

To develop a shared understanding of what our customers and potential customers want so that we can better shape services around their needs and aspirations.

In order to provide excellent services to our customers that meet their needs and aspirations, we must first understand what these are. GHA has a diverse customer base, including tenants, owners, different ethnicities, the full spectrum of ages and family types and a range of vulnerable customers. We already carry out significant amounts of work to gauge customer views and opinions from these different groups and we will build on this so that we can design all future services improvements round all of our customers.

We will carry out customer profiling work to understand customer demand, requirements and expectations by different groups. This means analysing our customer information, identifying groups and making changes to meet those expectations.

We will undertake a snapshot stock-take to analyse how our customers contact us and how we deal with that contact, including the costs and performance. Understanding the cyclical nature of demand helps us to anticipate the level of customer requirements over time and helps us anticipate and manage the demand from our services. We will also analyse research and consultation carried out to date to identify who our customers are and why they contact us in the manner they do, and the latent demand for e-services.

We know that customers want to access all the services they need through one convenient point, rather than having to ring different telephone numbers, be redirected to other staff or travel between locations. We need to understand the “bundles” or “clusters” of services that customers will frequently want to access together. These can be driven by “life events” such as having a baby or moving home. We need to work across the network, and in partnership with other organisations, to meet the full range of requirements of our mutual customers.

By having a good understanding of our customers and working across the organisation and with our partners, we can target our communications to be appropriately focused and efficient. We will:

- Develop a customer services communication and consultation and feedback framework and action plan across the organisation
- Develop a GHA charter for customer services setting out the standards that customers can expect
- Produce a customer services handbook – a toolkit that will be a practical guide for engaging with customers.

CUSTOMER ACCOUNTS

An increasingly common approach across a range of industries to creating better services for customers is to create stronger links between the organisation and individuals. A pre-requisite for providing personalised services we need to be able to authenticate the identity of the customer and to make the link to their unique customer account, which includes their address. We will explore the best means of ensuring that we only give personal information to the right person and comply with data protection legislation (though, for example, Personal Identification Numbers PINs or pass words).

The address information opens up new opportunities for giving people information based on where they live. Linked to other information we have in databases we should be able to tell people about future investment work and access to local facilities.

It is crucial for us to listen to our customers if we are going to develop and deliver responsive services that meet their needs and expectations. Equally important is to hear what customers are saying and use the information obtained through consultations to change the way we plan and develop services, policies and procedures. We already consult with customers in many different ways and some very creative and innovative methods are currently being used. We will ensure that the outcomes of all the consultation we undertake are shared and passed on to staff at all levels.

WHAT OUR CUSTOMERS WANT

Most customers do not contact GHA on a regular basis. For these people the emphasis will be on “getting it right first time”. They will judge the organisation by that contact, so it is imperative that customers see that the service is professional and efficient. Even for these customers we will proactively seek out feedback from them, either through contacting them in regular customers satisfaction surveys or through a programme of tenant visits through which every tenant will receive a minimum of a visit every two years and ideally once a year.

Where people do contact us regularly, we need to find out why. It is likely that they will be the people entitled to a range of services such as benefit, support and repairs. By packaging these services together we can reduce the number of times they need to contact us and deal with their needs holistically rather than piecemeal - i.e. “Done in One” approach.

We know (from consultation) that our customers want to contact us in ways that are convenient to them - using an increasing number of delivery channels. We will ensure that we “build the right thing once and use it many times”.

GHA's approach to consultation is embedded within the Empowerment and Engagement strategy and sets out our commitment to consulting with our customers including principles for effective consultation and feedback. For each consultation we inform our customers, Registered Tenant Organisations and other stakeholders:

- How and when the final decision will be taken
- How the proposal will affect them
- How and within what timescales they can make their views known
- How they will receive feedback
- Who the contact officer dealing with the consultation is information on how and where to complain.

Undertaking an audit to establish how and where the GHA services and the network of LHOs are consulting will inform the framework. This will identify ways in which duplication can be reduced, gaps can be filled and which consultative exercises can be undertaken collectively. We will continue to seek customer views through:

- Customer access stock take
- Quality assurance feedback
- Corporate complaints, views and comments system
- Tenant satisfaction surveys
- Service specific research
- The tenants and owners panels
- Tenant conferences
- Focus groups and service workshops
- Road shows and open days
- Comment and suggestion cards
- Questionnaires in the Key magazine and LHO newsletters
- Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, which will capture ongoing feedback.

Consultation is not just limited to customers. We will consult with all stakeholders involved in service provision. This includes:

- Local housing organisations
- Registered Tenants Organisations
- Unions
- Staff
- Glasgow City Council
- Community Health and Care Partnerships
- Voluntary organisations that represent vulnerable groups.

We will continue to foster links with external agencies that have expertise in this field, such as the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) and the Scottish Consumer Council. We will create a framework that includes public performance reporting and a consultative process that is both inclusive and informative which can be endorsed by external scrutiny. As a result we will:

- Develop a shared understanding of what our customers want and what matters to them
- Connect to customers as a single organisation, regardless of the access point
- Join with other partner agencies to integrate and provide seamless services
- Maintain contact so that we hear and respond to the voice of our service users
- Measure and evaluate the overall effectiveness of our service to customers.

FLEXIBILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

AIM

To create a range of services that meet our customers' needs and is delivered to them at a time, a place and in manner which is most convenient to them.

The customer is never in the wrong place. It is beholden on us as a large organisation to ensure that our services are flexible enough to reach customers at a time a manner that is convenient to them and that all our customers can access these services no matter their own individual circumstances.

Customers' impressions of the levels of service they receive start to be shaped from the first moment the contact GHA and the LHO network. Each customer is an individual with different requirements, skills and expectations. Our challenge is to ensure that the first contact gives fast efficient access to services, however the customer chooses to approach the organisation.

We will promote the services we provide and the way we provide them. Good communications is vital. Whether we are communicating with our customers and partners we should strive to deliver high standards and be consistent in our approach. It is important to be socially inclusive and so we need to identify "hard to reach" groups and communicate clearly. In determining appropriate methods of communication and service delivery methods we will have regard to, race, disability, language and literacy skills of our customers. As part of this, all new initiatives will undergo an equalities impact assessment.

DELIVERY CHANNELS

To support this aim, a range of delivery channels will be required will be used that best meet our customers' needs. The channel mix will change over time with increased acceptance of electronic services and it is important to anticipate future changes. The key delivery channels are:

- Face to face
- Telephone service
- Self service (the customer accessing services by themselves)
- Through other organisations.

We need to recognise that it is necessary to spend time building publicity, reassurances about privacy and security, and access to sources of assistance.

Our aim will be to deliver seamless and consistent customer services through face-to-face, telephone and internet contact. We will make best use of staff and information technology to ensure that the majority of enquiries are resolved at the first point of contact for the convenience of our customers.

Face to face

Staff in LHOs will continue to be the main contact for customers visiting offices in person. Mobile technology is also being developed to enable staff to access the information they need to help customers in locations, which suit them. Frontline staff (including reception staff, customer service concierge and housing officers) need to be multi-skilled and trained to handle a wide range of types on enquiry.

We will develop an extended range of services, such as:

- Access to services and information electronically or customers via the internet
- Video conferencing to provide an effective means for specialist staff, such as welfare benefits officers, to conduct 'virtual interviews' with customers.

Self-service

Self-service is by far the most cost effective way of delivering services. One of our biggest challenges is to provide a service in a way that can be easily accessed over the internet (or the intranet for internal customers) and can offer a convenient 24 hour seven day a week service to our customers. Successful delivery through this medium means that the services provided are:

- Quick to access
- Easy to find on the website
- Personalised to meet customers' circumstances and needs
- Fully transactional providing current information from internal systems
- Accessible through home computers
- Available to people with disabilities.

The GHA website needs to be intuitive for customers to use. This means linking information around life events, such as getting a new tenancy or dealing with debt. The aim will be to enable tenants, owners and other customers to carry out a range of simple transactions using the internet, including making payments for rent and other services, downloading a housing application form and making a complaint.

The information on the GHA website will be enhanced by:

- Grouping topics and making links between content areas
- Improving the reliability, speed and security of the website
- Ensuring information is accessible and understandable for all customers.

Services, such as GHA homechoice, will be available on the intranet, allowing customers to express interest in properties available for let. This medium will be rolled out to other areas and services where possible. Self service channels reusing the web could also include kiosks and digital television in the future.

Self-service is best for fairly simple queries and transactions and can never completely take the place of talking to a real person when dealing with complex issues. However, it is possible to ask a series of questions, each influenced by the answers to the previous question, using electronic forms. This can guide customers through issues such as checking entitlement to benefits and reporting repairs. The Customer Service Centre and LHOs should be able to access web information in real time, this will enable customers to begin a query on the website and complete via a telephone or face-to-face contact.

Not all households have personal computers and this digital divide will be addressed in partnership with other agencies through;

- Internet access at LHO offices
- Internet within community centres and libraries
- Kiosks providing a range of information and services.

Through other organisations

Some customers with particular needs may prefer to access information through other organisations. We are developing 'third party' arrangements with a range of organisations such as the Scottish Refugee Council, Positive Action in Housing and the Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living. We will also seek to extend 'third party' arrangements to other advice organisations and community centres. We will expand the range of access for these organisations by creating a video conferencing facility in the Customer Service Centre to provide face to face access to customer advisors.

Specific examples of initiatives GHA is introducing for our customers that will demonstrate increased flexibility and accessibility for our customers include:

Smart cards

GHA already has smart cards for rent payment in a range of locations including Paypoint and post offices. However, we will explore the possibility of offering a wider range of services using smart card technology. They could also give access to self-service channels of service delivery when combined with security information (such as passwords or PINs).

Online Payments

This will allow customers to pay rent and other charges in ways that suit them - through all of the channels mentioned earlier. Payment engines enable customers to pay for services using different types of payment and across different access channels. It also enables more efficient back-office processing and reconciliation of payments. Having one system will lead to better tracking of customer transactions and providing 'real time' information such as customer balances. It will also be possible to see the transaction and any outstanding requests

CUSTOMER FOCUSED STAFF

AIM

To ensure that our staff are motivated and have the skills and behaviours to deliver excellent customer services every time.

Everyone in GHA either serves our customers or serves those who serve our customers. As such, our staff are our most important and valuable asset as we strive to transform the service we provide to our customers. We recognise and appreciate the contribution that our people make in delivering quality services.

The delivery of our Customer Service strategy will be down to the input and contribution from our people. Front line staff (including reception staff, customer service concierge and housing officers) need to be multi-skilled and trained to handle a wide range of types of enquiry. Well trained and motivated employees throughout the organisation will take ownership of customers' problems and act proactively, anticipating customers' needs across a range of services. Our people will be measured and rewarded on their delivery of excellent customer service which will assist us in moving to a truly customer focused organisation.

In order to achieve this we recognise that we must support and develop our people to have the flexibility to resolve complex problems and provide them with the tools they need to help them do their job.

Transforming services in this way will provide challenges for service managers in prioritising change around those areas that offer the most customer interfaces.

The impact on staff could be significant and will require strong leadership and change management skills to support this. GHA's newly formed Business Transformation team is committed to increasing the readiness and capacity of the people in GHA to achieve our goals. They will do this by proactively providing developmental and change management services across the organisation.

Two strategies will assist us in achieving these ambitious goals, our People strategy, and our Business Transformation strategy. In combination, they will:

- Ensure that our staff are kept informed and supported throughout the change process
- Develop a workforce plan identifying the current and future skills employees will need to deliver new and improved services and the number of people required
- Further develop the professional career paths available for customer service staff who have a specialist role in delivering frontline services
- Ensure staff are well motivated and equipped with the right skills and knowledge
- Develop a comprehensive customer excellence training programme
- Identify core competencies required for customer excellence and incorporate them into the recruitment and selection process and appraisal systems
- Identify targets to measure the effectiveness of training and use of resources
- Continue to develop a culture of customer service within GHA by allowing staff to take ownership of issues and enabling them to find solutions.

To demonstrate that we have reached the highest quality standard of customer service we will work towards GHA achieving Chartermark status.

Upon delivery of these strategies, our staff will:

- Know that they make a positive difference
- Feel they work for an organisation that is genuinely customer focused
- Know that they are respected, valued, and supported in every way
- Feel empowered to take ownership of customer enquiries
- Accept responsibility for the service they provide
- Know that there is a clear vision for the service, with strong and supportive leadership
- Feel that there are opportunities for them to learn, develop and progress
- Receive praise and compliments about the work they do
- Be motivated and enthusiastic
- Know that they work in an open and honest environment.

CONSISTENTLY EXCELLENT SERVICES

AIM

To delight our customers, first time and every time they contact the organisation, from every service point.

GHA will be clear with our customers what standards they can expect from us, irrespective of how or where they contact us. This will include services that we provide in partnership with other stakeholders. We will incorporate our service standards in a Customer Charter which will be publicised in all front line offices so that our customers will know what standards of service to expect, what to do if something goes wrong, and how to make contact. Our aim will be for our customers to be fully informed in order to hold us accountable for the standards we have set, helping us to know that we are delivering excellent services consistently.

Key considerations for our standards and how these are communicated are:

- Easy to access: customers should not be expected to know how we organise ourselves, whether services come from GHA Corporate, an LHO or our service centre, they just want access to the service they require
- Joined up: As service providers we are responsible for joining services together on behalf of customers to make it easier for them. This will mean services working together to understand how their processes are linked and the outcomes they provide for customers. Managing and sharing information with our public partners will help us to make our services more accessible
- Accessible: All customers need to be able to access services in their chosen way. As we move into new ways of providing services we have to ensure that we remove barriers and not create new ones – particularly for disabled people and minority groups with special needs
- Adapted to meet individual needs: A key requirement for improving access to services is to personalise service delivery to reflect each customers' individual needs.

CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE

The Customer Service Centre will provide a range of services to our customers and will contribute to a culture of consistent excellence. Telephone is currently the most popular way for customers to contact GHA and is likely to remain the preferred way for sometime. GHA and the network of LHO deal with thousands of calls each year. GHAM handles around 48,000 calls from homeowners, the repairs call centre currently handles around 480,000 calls per year and we anticipate that GHA homechoice will generate 70,000 calls per year.

GHA has established a Customer Service Centre which will provide a single 24 hour seven day service both for emergency and other services. The service will also include fax, email, instant messaging, text messaging, video conferencing and textphone. We will build publicity for the service and reassure customers about privacy and security, and access to sources of assistance.

Customer advisers in the Customer Service Centre will act as intermediaries and advocates for customers. Service provision will reflect the needs of customers. It will be based around customer life events rather than around service areas. Success will be measured by the end-to-end process being completed successfully, rather than individual services completing their 'bits' successfully.

The range of services offered by the Customer Service Centre will be reviewed and developed over time however our expectation is that the Customer Service Centre will be enabled to:

- Take payment for services as well as for the payment of accounts
- View transactions customers have entered on the web or other access channels
- View the complete records of customer transactions including correspondence and electronic customer files
- Track the progress of customer transactions from the initial contact through to their conclusion
- Be flexible in finding solutions for customers. Customers have different needs and advisers need to be able to respond to these and to work with the customer through to resolution of their issue
- Help customers with special requirements such as those requiring textphone mini com or translation services. Freephones and video conferencing will be used when this improves communication and to reduce social exclusion
- Use SMS text messaging if appropriate
- Create customer 'resolvers' who will advocate on behalf of the customer to ensure that complex enquiries are resolved.

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT (CRM)

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems will help us to understand our customers and provide high quality joined up and consistent services across a range of access channels. Staff are helped by scripted question and answer software to resolve a wide range of straight forward queries.

Recording a customer contact on the enquiry tracking system is only the start of the relationship with the customer. Customers expect to be told when they can expect the service to be delivered, to be able to change appointments and to be kept informed when we have to change the plans we have made with them. To allow this we will link the CRM software into the delivery of the service so that updates are fed back as needed.

CORPORATE KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

GHA holds a vast range of information and knowledge. Corporate knowledge management systems can gather manage and share information. We will join up the information that we hold across all the services. This needs to be understandable, accessible and meaningful to customers – and above all it needs to be organised in a way which is easy to use. This will be supported by a knowledge management framework that will set out the policies and procedures for accessing and maintaining data and information. This will allow information to be input once, stored securely and accessible to all.

EFFICIENT SERVICES

AIM

To ensure value for money in the way that we deliver services, minimising unnecessary contact with customers through making our processes more efficient and their customer journeys shorter.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

An effective organisation has clear targets, which enable it to recognise and build on success and address opportunities for improvements. A performance management framework leads into a cycle of change management and continual improvement. We need to analyse our performance and identify the changes we need to make. This will lead us to an ongoing cycle of continual improvement. This is about “getting better all the time” through a series of incremental changes. We will:

- Identify a shopping basket of indicators that will be used to report progress and performance in customer service
- Develop a reporting structure and process to report performance to the various stakeholders.

Some of the measures that will be put in place include:

- Satisfaction surveys
- Monitoring against performance targets
- Time taken to deal with enquiries
- Analysing trends in access channels
- Number of core services dealt with at the first point of contact.

Central to delivering improved performance, will be increased and better use of benchmarking. GHA is an active member of a number of external benchmarking clubs and this external approach has been extended to regular internal benchmarking workshops.

Future developments will include more widespread public performance reporting and benchmarking of services. Publication of a wide range of performance details on the internet will be introduced which will ensure that GHA services are much more transparent and will be provided in a way which is understandable accessible and relevant.

BUSINESS EXCELLENCE THROUGH SELF-ASSESSMENT

We have developed a self-assessment framework giving us a tool to embed and measure improvement in every part of the organisation. We have adapted standards provided by the Scottish Housing Regulator, the European Foundation for Quality Management, Customer Service Excellence and Investors in People to ensure that we take a holistic view of performance across the organisation.

Quality assurance mechanisms will be built into our performance management structure at both corporate and shared service levels. LHOs and staff will be encouraged to share good practice and seek to improve services.

We will use Customer Review teams – where tenants will carry out inspections, mystery shopping exercises and review letters and documents, to help assure service quality and customer service standards.

The way we plan and develop services is critical to improving customer services if the desired service levels and performance outcomes are to be met. This will require us to be more effective and efficient in the way we continue to develop and improve services but in a way which provides better value for money. This will undoubtedly be challenging and will require the GHA and services to:

- Manage and prioritise resources more efficiently
- Ensure that effective performance management systems are in place.
- Control costs and provide financial benefits.

VALUE FOR MONEY

GHA is committed to providing efficient services, which give value for money. The primary driver for investment in customer services will be to improve the quality and accessibility of services we provide to customers. We need to understand the current value of the services we are supplying and the potential to improve that value. We need to identify and access appropriate potential sources of investment (i.e. grants, funding /partnering). Wherever appropriate we should work within the council or with partner organisations to pool investments, share risks and reduce costs.

There must be clarity on what the investment will deliver for the organisation and customers and we must prioritise investment to meet these needs. In summary, we need to take a comprehensive and consistent business case based approach to investment.

To help us develop value for money processes we will carry out Business Process Re-engineering in order to reduce costs, remove process steps and avoid duplication. Already we are projecting significant savings in legal costs linked to newly implemented escalation processes. We will examine and quantify savings in the following areas:

- Saving money on customer requests for information through the move to self-service
- The move to online payments, direct debits and payments through the Customer Service Centre has the potential to release significant savings.

However, it is important that customer and business requirements drive IT developments rather than IT developments determining how services are delivered to customers. This requires IT to be customer-focused and develop close relationships with service areas dealing directly with customers.

APPROACH TO ACCESS CHANNELS

We need a co-coordinated and joined up approach for the development and use of access channels built around customer needs and not organisational structures. It means that we need to look at the end-to-end costs of delivering services to customers across multiple channels. A joined-up approach adds value for the customer and the organisation and delivers savings. It can also assist with issues such as fraud prevention, data protection and social inclusion.

IMPLEMENTATION

There are a number of elements of this strategy to be undertaken to achieve our vision. These will need to be delivered as part of a phased programme. Delivering the strategy will require us to base our actions on customers' requirements. Resources needed to complete the plans to transform service delivery will need to be prioritised.

The projects to deliver the strategy will be:

- Prioritised to meet our customer needs and thereafter according to the customer views and demand so that resources are used where they can make the most impact for customers
- Preference will be given to projects, which can show increased efficiency savings over others with similar customer impact
- Managed using effective programme and project management techniques to ensure that progress is made and interdependencies are managed
- Judged on their business case including baseline and forecast customer and cost measures
- Recorded so that everybody can see progress.

NEXT STEPS

- Gain Customer Service Excellence accreditation for the organisation, aligning the standards we deliver against externally verified standards.
- Deliver the outcomes from our 'People strategy' to embed cultural development of the Customer Service strategy.
- Deliver the quality assurance mechanisms that are built into the corporate structure and shared services.
- Develop continuous improvement of our understanding of customer needs through surveys and work with the tenants and homeowners panels.
- Undertake an audit of face-to face contact points, to create a single cultural and organisational 'face' for the customer.
- Communicate the levels of service that customers can expect through our Customer Service Charter and ensure these are being deployed consistently.
- Radically overhaul our complaints handling process to make it more accessible and responsive, ensuring that we are using complaints to identify and action service improvements.
- Build on the successful launch of the Customer Service Centre by incorporating new services into its operation.
- Deploy new and more efficient key business processes to reduce bureaucracy and make them more efficient.
- Professionalise the front-line, recognising the effort of staff through accreditation and core-skills training.
- Deliver a wide range of payment methods including phone, internet and chip and pin.

- Introduce new working practices, including mobile technology to free up time for face to face contact.
- Implement GHA homechoice – to enable customer involvement in choosing where they want to live.
- Develop best practice in information and advice to our tenants to Homepoint Standard.
- Deliver the GHA resource directory and the tenants handbook.
- Ensure access to services for all sections of the community by improving translation, interpreting and ensuring documents available in other languages, large print, Braille and audio-tape on request.
- Carry out an accessibility audit of our building and undertake to remove physical barriers to access, where possible.
- Deliver a rolling programme for customer review teams – where tenants will give qualitative feedback on the customer experience.
- Develop processes to ensure performance against the action plan, and ensure that we deliver our commitments.
- Continuous review of the Performance Management system that reflects the needs of our customers and business.
- Deliver improvement plans based on the organisation-wide ‘Self-Assessment’.
- Develop and measure a programme of tenant visits ensuring that each and every one of our tenants is visited at least once every two years and ideally once a year.
- Ensure that equality impact assessments are built into all new initiatives.

The next stage in the development of the Customer Services strategy will be to develop a more detailed action plan that sets out priority projects the responsibilities and timescales.

DEMONSTRATING OUTCOMES

Measuring progress against stated outcomes and objectives is vital to ensuring that our activities are effective and deliver real impacts to help improve customer service. There is already a Performance Management Framework in place and a range of mechanisms to review progress and identify good practice across the organisation. We will commit to reviewing these continuously to ensure they will together demonstrate excellent customer service outcomes and inform the ongoing development of our work.

The main focus of the combined evaluation framework will be to:

- Measure outcomes, using both qualitative and quantitative measures
- Assess that the projects and programmes deliver their objectives and targets
- Ensure external validation on of our progress and delivery against nationally and internationally recognised standards
- Draw on statistical information and comparisons gathered at a local or national level where appropriate.

Feedback from our tenants and service users will be at the heart of our evaluation approach and we will continue to develop a range of innovative means of better gathering customer feedback. It is crucial that our customers feedback is sought and, even more importantly, demonstrably used to identify areas for improvement that we then act upon. Completing this virtuous loop of improvement will involve feeding back to customers how we have used their feedback so that they recognise the improvements that they themselves have helped to create.

Better homes, better lives

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