

Customer Scrutiny Panel November 2019

Summary Report

Customer Experience of Homeowner Services

Acknowledgements

The Customer Scrutiny Panel (CSP) would like to thank the Home Ownership and Governance teams for their time to contribute and support this review.

Thank you to the Communications Team for their help with developing the online survey and communications.

Support and guidance from the Operations Director and Assistant Director of Customer Services has significantly helped to shape the review findings and recommendations

A special thank you to the Chief Executive for giving time to have an interview with CSP members.

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1. Executive summary

- 1.1 This Review of the customer experience within the Homeowner Service seeks to understand and evaluate the management, and operational service delivery against homeowner's service satisfaction and aspirations.
- 1.2 As a key local social housing provider mhs homes is committed to 'Be a great landlord' achieving high service performance levels for all services including the homeownership Service. The service overall is meeting the needs of homeowners but customer satisfaction levels indicate that there are opportunities to improve.
- 1.3 It is acknowledged that the last review of services and to homeowners in April 2019 had limited scope. Supported by Campbell Tickell, it focused on internal business arrangements with limited consideration of customer experience. At that time 17 recommendations were put forward and will form an integral part of the future service improvement plan. This review has accepted the desktop findings reported.
- 1.4 The scope of the review was agreed in July 2019 which placed greater emphasis on customer experience with reality checking activities undertaken from August 2019 to September 2019.
- 1.5 The key findings indicate that the service will benefit from changes in operating structure, resources and communication methods to meet the increasing number and high expectations of homeowners.
- 1.6 A total of 17 service improvements are explored in further detail later in this report, including key changes covering:
 1. Management making operating decisions based on the current corporate service deal
 2. Ensuring the culture and values of mhs is the driver for service improvement
 3. Reviewing team member resources, roles and responsibility
 4. Accepting existing recommendations highlighted in the April 2019 Homeownership service Review
 5. Considering team building and role development for those delivering services to support homeowners
 6. Demonstrating learning from feedback and making changes to prevent repeated mistakes
 7. Working more positively with other teams eliminating silo working
 8. Updating and developing new policies and procedures to ensure that working practices are relevant and consistent
 9. Reducing the level of complaints concerning service charges, communal repairs, enable problem solving through self-serve and access to information and support
 10. Changing the focus from a reactive to a responsive service to improve customer experience and enhance the overall perception of mhs homes
 11. Use of dedicated homeowner software/ technology to maximise accuracy and timeliness of information provided

12. Capacity building the team so that knowledge and skills are spread reducing the impact of staff changes- risk assessment needs to be used to inform future decision- making.
 13. Continue to encourage digital use by homeowners with training to enable higher levels of take up
 14. Consider developing standards for subletting landlords so all homes and blocks are maintained to a high standard
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- 1.7 Overall the recommendations are focused on enhancing an effective homeownership service, which benefits from bespoke technology, adequate resources, and access to support offered by other services.
 - 1.8 Homeowners have welcomed the opportunity to have their voice heard and shape improvement to the services they receive. Feedback indicates that mhs homes are perceived by the majority as being a landlord that cares, with staff that are passionate about the work. They feel that having an mhs home has positively changed their lives giving many the opportunity to begin a life of homeownership.
 - 1.9 The work of the CSP is improvement-focused and this report complements, adds value and aids improvement with its recommendations. The feedback given should be seen as critical friends, not assessors or inspectors but are supportive of mhs ambition and values.
 - 1.10 Working with homeowners on this review has resulted in increasing the profile and work of the CSP, engaged with underrepresented customers and attracted new potential members.
 - 1.11 We would like to thank everyone that has participated with this review and helping us to support homeowners to have an even better service in the future.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The CSP interviewed internal stakeholders in mhs who have a direct link or interest in homeownership. This included the homeownership team, key senior managers and directors.
- 2.2 This review focused on testing and validating customer insight through a range of activities including:
- a) Focus Groups – 13
 - b) Interviews with residents and staff - 10
 - c) Questionnaires - 13
 - d) Online survey - 68
 - e) Personal experiences of CSP homeowner members - 3
- 2.3 Sixty-eight (68) respondents completed the online survey of which; half were leaseholders and half shared owners. This represents about 7-8% of the total mhs homeowners but is still a significant sample size to provide acceptable feedback. The feedback has informed our findings detailed in this report.
- 2.4 The CSP has not tested any operational processes as part of their review but focused on feedback from homeowners to provide qualitative insight.
- 2.5 Our review focused of the homeowners' perspective on:
- How do I as a homeowner feel about the service delivered to me
 - What could be done differently to improve my level of satisfaction
 - How easy is it to report, get completed, and quality of communal repairs
 - Can I find information that I need about owning my home
 - Is it easy to contact the service
 - Would I recommend mhs as a landlord
 - Do I feel that services represent value for money
 - Are potential and new homeowners given enough information to fully understand the implications and responsibilities of being a homeowner?
 - What changes would increase satisfaction levels.
- 2.6 From a business perspective we have focused on:
- Corporate commitment to shaping and developing the service
 - What impact has increased homes under management had on service delivery
 - What is it like to work on the front line
 - Has technology a greater role to play to support service delivery
 - Are homeowner satisfaction results telling the right story
 - Are procedures and policies current and working

3. Key findings

3.1 MHS and the homeowner service do good things

- 3.1.1 This review recognises that the homeownership service has some specialist activities linked to leases, but the actual process for reporting and getting work completed is no more complex than services delivered for general needs tenants.

3.1.2 Positive feedback about mhs homes as an employer and landlord through this review included:

- A commitment to encourage future improved consultation and feedback opportunities for homeowners to have a voice
- There are good examples of communal repairs being completed well and problems resolved.
- Homeowners can go online to book a communal repair and check their account at a time that suits them.
- The homeownership team was open and transparent with their feedback to the CSP reflecting their commitment to service improvement opportunities.
- Recent homeowners (last 3 years) demonstrated higher levels of customer satisfaction based on any issues around their home having been resolved quickly.
- Considered locally as a good employer regarding job security, company benefits and a welcoming work environment.
- The organisation has a great ethos demonstrated by its commitment to provide affordable, quality homes to help combat the local housing crisis
- Operatives in vans look smart and professional which reflects the overall image portrayed by the business
- Polite staff demonstrating high levels of customer service, once you are able to reach them
- Is proactive in dealing with anti-social behavior affecting the lives of both homeowners and tenants
- Rent is affordable alongside mortgage making homeownership a viable option
- Design and good build quality of new build properties were highly praised offering value for money
- A sense of community is built into the design of blocks with consideration to green areas and play areas accessible for children considered excellent
- Homes are energy efficient which keeps running costs down
- Dedicated residents' parking as part of the design highly welcomed

3.2 Corporate view of the service

3.2.1 The service is currently facing a number of pressures around resources, the way the service is delivered and supported across the business. Key points are around:

- a) The dedicated team is very experienced and each has specific roles with limited generic working. This restricts the capacity to deliver services to homeowners. When staff are not in the office it results in queries being left as other colleagues are unable to assist, which causes delays and frustration to the homeowners who they feel that they are not receiving the same timely service that is offered to tenants.
- b) There is a natural reluctance between staff in other teams to help deal with homeowners' enquiries due to the perception that it is specialist work. However, many of the queries are for communal repairs and building maintenance etc. Low level issues are starting to be dealt with by the Customer Case Team but this is limited until the team have recruited and trained new staff. It is hoped that by sharing routine enquiries that this

would have a positive impact on the team, allowing them to concentrate on the high level issues around leases and service charges.

- c) Silo working has developed and this is hindering the opportunity to maximise the sharing of knowledge and responsibility. Having only one staff member dealing with service charge calculations and billing means that there is no cover and a risk to the service should that dedicated resource leave or be on extended sick leave. Resilience needs to be increased to support business continuity.
- d) There is an acceptance that there are a number of different leases used and much of this is historic. However, the business should be focusing on bringing a consistency to the type of leases used for new developments.
- e) Having the optimum staff levels is important to keep charges to homeowners at an acceptable level. It was suggested that using retired experienced leaseholder staff during peak periods could be a cost effective option for consideration.
- f) To help reduce the level of routine enquiries from homeowners, it may be helpful to offer inductions to new homeowners to give them an understanding of their responsibilities. It was evident from the online survey and focus groups that this would be welcomed. Many reported being so keen to buy and move in that they did not look at the wider picture of what being a homeowner means. It may also help build new homeowner relationships with mhs.
- g) The business is striving to develop mixed communities with no labeling. Through the review it was clear that some homeowners believe that tenants get everything for free and that they are subsidizing tenants, so a better understanding of how services are paid for may help to address these misconceptions.
- h) The business is following a digital approach to allowing homeowners to access the service and manage their accounts online. We understand and appreciate that this is the way forward but not enough support has been offered to the over 65 population to learn about technology and have help to set themselves up to use these services. In many organisations there are resident volunteer digital champions to help others and maybe this could be considered for both tenants and homeowners. This would help the business understand why some people are not digital users and the barriers that need to be removed. This is supported by feedback received at our Focus Groups.
- i) Tenancy Services such as caretakers and repairs teams could be providing support to homeowners' in the form of general home and estate information. As a result homeowners are referred back to the homeownership team. This may be a missed opportunity to help integrate homeowners into their communities where they live. Another approach could be to provide more information on the website around grass cutting and caretakers etc. Maybe have a Q&A page dealing with the frequent queries and latest news.

- j) The business does not carry out enough 'Tell us what you think' surveys with homeowners to provide opportunities for feedback. We would recommend that an annual survey takes place and that the feedback is used to help improve the service and experience of homeowners. In addition to an annual survey, it would be beneficial to undertake quarterly 'mini' surveys which are topic specific and could be aligned to the work programme of the CSP as part of continuous improvement.
- k) Invisible management was a term used by homeowners but we understand that management do go on walkabouts to estates once a quarter. However, maybe to address the issue these walkabouts could be held on a Saturday or in the summer in the evenings as most homeowners are working full time. Promotion of these walkabouts on the website and putting up signs in the estates to be visited and communication via email. Make it more of a community engagement opportunity. Perhaps send a letter and/or email after the visit to residents to say what you saw and what you are doing to remedy any issues picked up and provide an opportunity to comment on anything missed. This would further increase the visibility of the work that does happen resulting in increased community engagement.
- l) Resolve issues raised by homeowners in a timely manner as delays adversely affect the reputation of the organisation. Many of the issues shared with the CSP were simple and more around a lack of understanding of how services are delivered which members of the CSP explained. It was reported that it can take up to 3 weeks to get a response to an email and this is clearly unacceptable. Emails should be acknowledged automatically and homeowners made aware of the expected response time to answer email queries. It was felt that homeowners are expected to respond to mhs quicker than the other way around especially where money is owed.
- m) There will always be a percentage of more vulnerable and elderly homeowners that want to speak to an officer either on the phone or face to face. By looking at your profile data, it may identify those that need a different approach to communication. There maybe those with sight impairments and mobility issues that prevent them from being able to use a keyboard etc. Use your profile data to tailor the service to the needs of the customer.
- n) Some staff reported that succession planning and training could be enhanced. The fear is that crisis management is the way forward and this leaves those delivering the service feeling vulnerable for the future. There is a need to involve and take everyone on the journey and listen to concerns raised. They recognise that Directors are leading on shaping the service for the future.
- o) Workload is increasing not only with new homes but also with re-sales and staircasing. As homeowners are becoming more mobile by moving home for work etc. the number of re-sales is showing an upward trend, alongside those that are increasing their percentage of ownership. These are concerns that need to be given consideration when looking at the future structure

and resources for the team to deliver the extra capacity required. Expansion of the service capacity will give further resilience.

- p) There is an understanding that a new sales manager will be starting but there is no clarity about the role with the team and what impact it will have on their work and roles.
- q) The team would welcome involvement with the recruitment process of new team members.
- r) Feedback from many homeowners was that they did not understand their responsibilities and raised issues around sinking funds, concerns that contributions for grass cutting are geared all around the housing allowance. More information on the website could easily address these issues.
- s) There were statements made by staff that policies and procedures need refreshing or actually being written. It would be advantageous to look at conducting business process reviews to identify waste and highlight best practice.
- t) The website is considered as not being user friendly/informative for homeowners needs. The CSP suggests recruiting a group of homeowners to help select information required. Some information is restricted to an account holder which excludes those considering homeownership being able to research their future responsibilities until they have actually purchased.
- u) There is a high expectation from homeowners that issues in their homes should be resolved instantly and delays are unfairly blamed on staff. There is a lack of understanding of the role of the developer and a feeling that mhs are responsible for everything in the block. This captures the level of dissatisfaction within the service that is adding stress and anxiety. Improved information around handling defects would be welcomed from both customer and staff perspective, giving a better understanding to all.
- v) Staff stated that they often worked beyond their contracted hours in order to fulfill workloads. They recognise that they cannot find time for home visits to see homeowners in their homes to address issues, which further distances the relationship between the mhs homes and the homeowner.
- w) The issue of having a homeownership panel to improve consultation has been tried and like many other housing providers had been dropped as it was attended by very few people. However, it is clear that homeowners want to engage and the CSP would suggest holding a focus group style meeting maybe at a couple of different sites annually to test the value in this approach. It means there is no formal chair and the issues on the agenda are controlled by the service so does not become a place to deal with personal issues which can be dealt with outside of the meeting.
- x) Accuracy of information being sent out is important and when mistakes happen around for example billing for communal repairs especially this leads to unnecessary high volume of calls to the service. The current spreadsheet calculations do not show historic charges, which is probably

where the issue lies so exception reporting cannot be used automatically. It was stated that 75%-80% of homeowners do not make contact but 5% take up a lot of time. The association should look at the profile of those regularly seeking support and see if there are ways to actually reduce their need for contact. However, a high number of respondents had never heard of the homeownership team and did not know what they did.

- y) When asked what would make a difference, staff stated a number of changes such as;
- i) having an apprentice
 - ii) introduction of new technology and processes
 - iii) having better links to development
 - iv) stronger working with customer service team
 - v) a website with the information required

3.3. Technology, digital strategy and access to information

3.3.1 One main operating problem identified was around the reliance of excel spreadsheets to record and calculate service charges. This method would have been effective before the number of homes managed by the service increased. It also gives high room for error.

3.3.2 A bespoke package should be procured to reduce the time taken to complete service charge calculations, giving advice and eliminate human error. In order to deliver a quality reliable service, you need to invest in the right technology to allow staff to be effective in their roles which has many variables due to the different leases.

3.3.3 An integrated approach is required to ensure all information is contained within a single system removing the potential for missing information and reducing the need to manually replicate information into the different databases. This will support effective retention schedules which complies with General Data Protection Regulations 2018 (GDPR)

3.3.4 As the number of homes increases this new software will be cost effective and save resources. It was also noted that only one team member was able to convert and merge the data which is a potential risk to the business.

3.3.5 There is quite rightly a drive towards digital inclusion but we heard concerns from the older population that they felt unable to use the internet and even the call center could be too complicated and difficult to reach the desired team. Perhaps consider offering a named contact for those that are elderly and others who have indicated that they need help accessing services. This would allow better accessibility with harder to reach customers who may feel isolated.

3.3.6 Due to the newly set up customer call centre they are currently struggling to manage the incoming calls and have high levels of dropped calls. Homeowners want to contact the homeownership team directly because when they call the call centre they are immediately told that they need to speak to the team, who are often unavailable which causes further frustrations and is linked to the capacity of the homeownership team. We

understand and appreciate that the call centre issue is being addressed with work in progress.

3.3.7 There were concerns raised that out of office messages are inconsistent and that homeowners have no idea when they will get a response due to the lack of published service standards online and in homeowner manuals. This highlights the importance of communication where the information on the internet is limited and help from other colleagues is lacking.

3.3.8 There is a feeling that the website is directed for tenants and had little functionality for homeowners. There were many suggestions such as making the website more user friendly, allowing self-service through frequently asked questions and web chat facility which can be quick and provide the ability to complete the required request online. Approximately 45% of shared owners have set up an online 'My Account' to date. When asked why homeowners were not keen to leave messages on my account it was felt that there would be no audit trail to prove that they had contacted, therefore there is room to improve by way of relaunch of 'MyAccount', its functionality and service to restore confidence and see uptake of more digital services.

3.3.9 When homeowners were asked for suggestions, it was common that they wanted easier access to information about a wide range of things;

- Status of communal repairs on the website or 'MyAccount' to avoid duplication
- Web chat out of hours
- Pre-sale information about homeowner responsibilities

Some respondents at the time of purchase did not realise that mhs was the landlord until after the purchase and they received a bill.

3.3.10 Having access to up to date repair information is critical to homeowners and can lead to more harmony such as being able to know what communal repairs have been reported, when work will be done and the cost of the work. There was a suggestion to put up communal repair requests received on notice boards so that it prevents duplicate reporting, better customer service and more effective management of expectations.

3.3.11 Homeowners were asked in the online questionnaire to give feedback on information on the website. Results showed that 52% could not find what they were looking for. The feedback was not conclusive about what they felt was missing but there was a feeling that most information is for tenants only. It may be helpful as mentioned to get a group of willing homeowners to review the website content and feed into improvements to be made. Comments about information would be liked included, period of lease remaining, updates about works, names of people to contact, log of repairs currently being undertaken for the block, clearer explanations using less jargon, information about purchasing more shares and how to sell a shared ownership home.

3.3.12 There is support for the use of technology and accessing digital services, but all homeowners' main wish list is for responses to emails, solving

queries, text responses for repairs, live chat or relevant information on-line for leaseholders.

4. Performance issues affecting customer satisfaction

4.1. Performance of the Homeownership service is continually under review and scrutiny because it is such a critical service that impacts on homeowner's lives, wellbeing and behaviours.

4.2. Failure to complete repairs to a good standard, in a timely manner and provide excellent customer experience has a knock on affect directly and indirectly on other Homeownership services, including tenancy management, estate services, complaints and tolerance of levels of ASB.

4.3 The focus groups with homeowners highlighted that, communal repairs to their blocks, the communal areas cleanliness and the way their neighbourhood is maintained affects their overall perception of the service as a whole.

4.4 The review noted the following key points made by staff and homeowners

- If problems were dealt with promptly as they arise, it would save the customer having no other option but to bombard staff with repeated emails.
- Inadequate resources within the current structure to respond to requests from homeowners in a timely manner as continually fire fighting to keep up with urgent work. Staff are aware where they are failing which is demoralising as they have no capacity to always deal with issues especially at times when bills and statements are issued, which often trigger many calls and complaints due to accuracy.
- Manage expectations by following up with communications promptly, acknowledging receipt and providing agreed timescales for response, have service standards so all are aware of their priorities.
- There were questions raised about fire safety especially after Grenfell. Homeowners advised that they used to get letters asking them to provide their gas safety certificate, but now there is no reminder so they don't bother sending in. There must be a proper process of making sure everyone has a gas safety certificate to ensure that safety is being maintained.
- There was concern regarding fire doors with some stating that they do not have fire doors. The CSP explained the situation that there is a national issue regarding obtaining the right doors and a shortage of supply. This information needs to be shared so that all understand the situation and the procedures to follow in case of a fire. Better communication with all residents and homeowners of progress being made by mhs.
- Elderly homeowners are struggling to manage repairs in their homes and are naturally more cautious about contacting contractors directly. There were requests about potential of subscribing to a mhs repair service or handyman scheme. It was felt that many elderly homeowners are

isolated and suggestions made about annual home visit by mhs to check that they and their home are okay. Elderly customers are usually in older properties which may have safety implications such as wiring etc. The CSP felt this was an area which needed to be explored further, accepting that people are living longer but welcome independence in their home also. A reasonable charge would have to be made for any service offered.

- Issues around how homeowners may be perceived negatively by mhs for raising problems such as; noise, late night parties, anti-social behavior and difficult neighbours. One leaseholder explained that despite keeping logs of incidents and sending in to mhs there has been no response and felt unable to take it further. Others stressed that they did not complain because they were afraid that it would go against them and affect any future sale of the property and a reduced valuation.
- Many homeowners do not understand the issue around insurance and are reluctant to claim against their insurance. Better information is needed to address this issue; whilst this may not directly be the responsibility of mhs it can cause unnecessary work by dealing with such queries.
- There are no performance targets outside of the legal requirements detailed in law. Targets should be set to measure performance and ensure that learning from what is done not so well helps to shape the service.

5. Complaints and issues

- 5.1 The official complaints data does not indicate that there are high levels of formal complaints around the service. Year to date records show that 38 complaints have been received with many being resolved at the point of request for support/help made. It appears that homeowners are more reluctant or don't know about the corporate complaint process. There is lack of clarity about raising requests and complaints. An example whereby a homeowner said they had made many complaints and received no response. By looking into this further, it was found that whilst direct contact had been made, no formal complaint had been recorded, despite the nature of the contact. There is a need to have thresholds whereby the right to make a complaint is clearly given to any customer should they wish to follow that separate procedure. It is not the intention to see more complaints received, but ensure that customers' right to raise a complaint through a clear, documented process is available to all.
- 5.4 Grass cutting regime is not adequate according to some homeowners and it appears that some areas are receiving a less equitable service than others. Some stated that the grass had only been cut 3 times, whereas others stated that the grass was cut more frequently. Grass cutting concerns may be better addressed using the length of grass as the measure and not frequency because during dry summers fewer cuts are required. Furthermore, clearly service standards should be published so homeowners know the minimum expectations and any variances in advance.
- 5.5 Snagging problems in properties have not been remedied for in excess of 12 months. Concerns expressed that they do not always know whom to

contact to resolve these issues. Information should be available on the website and homeowners perhaps guided to report issues to mhs so that they can then be monitored and passed to the developer.

- 5.6 Window cleaning in communal areas is inconsistent and there is no understanding of whose responsibility it is. Perhaps this is an issue that should be included in the new home welcome pack and previously suggested service standards.
- 5.7 We had a number of people complain that their home is plagued by damp and that they have not been able to get ventilation issues resolved leaving them with the only option to sell and move. This appears to be more of a problem in older homes and advice should be given on prevention and remedies not only to tenants but homeowners also.
- 5.8 The on-line survey highlighted that there was a direct correlation between age of property and number of issues that homeowners have. The issues were around cost of works and in many cases the age profile of homeowners. Older homeowners living on pensions are fearful about additional bills arriving. MHS has confirmed that they offer a range of opportunities to pay for repairs/improvements but at our focus group it was clear that many feared they would get to the stage of being evicted, as they could not pay. It is not that homeowners do not agree with the works to be completed but the cost. This is a national problem not unique to mhs and many are asset rich but cash poor.
- 5.9 When asked if a homeowner would purchase another home from mhs, 64% stated that they would not. The mitigating reasons included:
- poor customer service,
 - leases are not favorable to the homeowner
 - high monthly service charge
 - issues around costs related to stair casing
 - having to claim on their property insurance when reason for claim is caused by a tenant
 - poor insulation against noise
 - service charges have increased by 40%
 - inaccurate charges sent
 - poor communication
 - No opportunity to feedback.

Many of the negatives will be addressed through the planned service review which should improve the experience and perception of mhs.

- 5.10 Communal day-to-day repairs are considered as being poorly completed with as many as 65% stating they were poor and very poor (31% and 34% respectively). One homeowner commented that the only way to get something done was to contact the CEO. Other comments included estate caretakers do not care and less likely to listen to a request from a homeowner as a tenant.
- 5.11 Many homeowners felt that it was left to them to report communal repairs because they feel that tenants don't care about where they live, as they

don't the same vested interest in maintaining the building and grounds to a good standard.

5.12 70% of respondents stated that repairs were not completed within agreed timescales but many stated that they did not know what the service standard timescale for completion was. This reinforces the need to manage expectations and give timescales so that there is an understanding that communal repairs have a different priority to responsive repairs unless they are a health and safety issue, which could be a danger to life or security.

5.13 Rechargeable costs are always an issue for homeowners. 52% stated that rechargeable costs were not in line with estimates given. The main issue is that inadequate detail is provided to support costs.

5.14 The main responses from when homeowners were asked what they least liked about their mhs home were:

- That future maintenance costs are unknown
- That mhs is the landlord
- Noise from other flats
- Poor customer service
- Maintenance is not to a high standard
- Upkeep of communal area and grounds maintenance
- High cost of service charges
- Other blocks are shabby and spoil the area
- Loft hatch is poorly designed

5 Operating Concerns – improving customer experience

6.1 It is clear that when we measure customer experience that should focus on a specific time frame only so that historical experiences do not influence the results.

6.2 Feedback and proposals included:

- That if they had been told at the time of purchase all the implications of being a homeowner they would have been better prepared especially around lease extension costs.
- Few consider that the culture at mhs will not change and that they are uncaring and do not listen to homeowners
- Responding in a timely manner and politely
- Provide guidelines about being a leaseholder/tenant and make it block centric so we can all know what to expect and do.
- Quicker phone answering as callers can wait up to 30 minutes to get through
- Tell us when things will get done by, and keep us updated
- Promptness, accuracy, honesty, communication and easier access to the right person are key requirements to improve customer experience

7. Communication

7.1 Many of the concerns raised by homeowners' are linked to communication. There is a perception that response times are poor. Staff openly stated that

they are failing to meet expectations with demand higher than the capacity, so they are unable to provide the level of service that they aspire to. We recognise that this issue is being addressed and that improvements will be experienced over the next six months.

- 7.2 Clearly it is better, the more that homeowners that can be encouraged to use My Account', digital services and email. Our survey indicated that 15% use My Account, 36% email and 34% use the phone to make contact and report communal repairs. The comments provided indicate that many who have used email have not received a response and had to chase up a number of times before something happened.
- 7.3 Smart working and getting things right first time are known to be key to delivering a high quality service that meets customers' needs and represents value for money. Respondents indicated that 71% have not had their queries resolved first time. Many stated it took months to get a solution and not being kept updated on progress with requests may account for the negative score.
- 7.4 When asked how easy it is to communicate with the homeownership team it was split, with 53% found it hard or very hard, whilst 45% found it very easy or easy. Comments were given at our focus groups giving excellent team members compliments and this must not be lost. It is clear that the quality of service is not directly linked to the individual good staff not delivering a positive outcome but the fact that there is high demand and inadequate resources which has been identified. It is anticipated that improvements will come with the soon to be full established customer call center with works effectively fielding routine calls.

8. Table of recommendations

No	Issue	Recommendation	Priority to homeowners	Priority to the business
1	Resources – there is a view that staff resources need reviewing	A full review of role, responsibilities and work of the homeownership team is carried out jointly working with the team members and management -	H	H
2	Review and develop policies and procedures	Look at all procedures and update and create new ones to ensure that all procedures are properly recorded	M	H
3	Use of spreadsheets for recording and calculation of services charges	Invest in a bespoke leaseholder software package that will ensure accuracy and accurate billing of service charges.	H	H

No	Issue	Recommendation	Priority to homeowners	Priority to the business
		Ensure that the information can be linked to 'My Account'.		
4	Many of the contacts for advice and support are around homeowners not being clear about their responsibilities	Consider offering an induction meeting for all new homeowners, offer a focus group to all about understanding life as a homeowner and create a video that can go on the website that is accessible to those prospective buyers and current members	H	M
5	No consistent standard lease for new build properties	Agree a standard lease to be used for all new homes	H	H
6.	Not using complaints to improve performance	Create a learning log that records all outcomes from complaints and use to update procedures and training. Regularly review and link with customer experience, making changes where required as incidents happen.	H	H
7.	Communal repairs not completed on time and of good standard, failing to keep homeowners informed	Use the website to keep tenants and leaseholders updated on communal repairs- consider notices in blocks notifying everyone what has been reported to prevent duplicate calls	H	M
8	Perception that there is a lack of succession planning to help develop staff and prepare for retirement.	Have a clear plan and ensure that the teams are actively involved with the planning and delivery. Regularly update the team so that concerns do not	L	H

No	Issue	Recommendation	Priority to homeowners	Priority to the business
9.	Digital training	<p>To increase use of technology and digital services, develop resident champions who are digitally trained to be able to help those in need.</p> <p>Look to link residents with Estate Champions and libraries and sign posting to reception in the office. Should run soft re-launch of 'MyAccount'</p>	H	M
10	Opportunity to purchase repairs service for homeowners	<p>Look to offer access to purchase services from the repairs service to homeowners that cannot manage repairs themselves. This can be also developed into a more commercial offer selling services.</p>	L	L
11	No communication standards known	<p>Develop service standards so that expectations are managed and use automated email acknowledgements etc.</p>	H	H
12	Website – review information provided	<p>Access to information needs reviewing and it is suggested that a working group of homeowners are used to ensure that the information provided is appropriate and develop frequently asked questions that will assist</p>	H	H
13	Lack of opportunity for homeowners to	<p>Annual survey of all Homeowners but make sure that</p>	H	H

	engage and be consulted	learning outcomes are publicised on the website Rollout quarterly mini questionnaires tailored to key topics of the CSP to continually learn. For example, feedback from new homeowners to welcome them.		
No	Issue	Recommendation	Priority to homeowners	Priority to the business
14	Engagement and feedback opportunities	Annual Focus Group for homeowners	M	M
15	Varying perception of mhs by homeowners and who their primary customer is	Develop the correct language and branding for all customer types to recognise and resonate with. Rebuild trust and confidence.	H	H
16	Compliance of safety in the home	Review processes associated with gas certificates for homeowners, compliance of emergency lighting and fire doors	H	H
17	Missing opportunities to have wider organization impact	Work closely with partners such as local authority, suppliers to achieve corporate social responsibility, on matters such as climate change and social value.	M	M

9. Conclusion

This review has confirmed that homeowners love their home and 80% do not feel the need to contact the service. However, there are a number that are feeling less valued and concerned about the level and quality of service provided.

Many of the issues around accessing the service and getting issues resolved are a direct result that current procedures are outdated, resources limited, silo working, lack of investment in technology and reliance on manual input. Staff all came across as professional, compassionate to deliver a good service, feel that they don't have the face to face contact with their customers as there is no time. The

changes to the service must be made working with those that deliver the service as they understand the problems and want solutions. However, it is important to look at the service from a process perspective and not based on individuals so that it is future proof.

This CSP look forward to supporting the business to make the changes and will be appointing two scrutiny monitors from the CSP to monitor improvements and carry out mystery shopping to ensure that future changes are embedded and working.