

CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

Report of the Director of Housing and Customer Service

1. SUMMARY

This strategy has been updated and now incorporates our strategies for customer access and marketing and communication. A separate strategy for website development and maximising electronic access to services will be presented in November 2010.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Board is requested to approve the attached strategy.

3. MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 The draft Customer Service Strategy is attached at Appendix 1.
- 3.2 The Local Housing Boards considered the attached draft strategy on 9 September 2010 and 16 September 2010. As a result of those discussions amendments have been made to the strategy, in particular to encourage two-way communication with our customers.
- 3.3 The proposals update our vision, goals and aspirations in relation to our customers and how they access our services.
- 3.4 We want to ensure that we continue to delivery excellent customer services through a period of change. The proposals are to develop ways to make it easier, quicker and more convenient for customers to contact us and to provide access to services in a variety of ways through cost effective channels. This will include a review of our local office opening hours, the introduction of SMS and continued development of our website and self-service options for all areas of our service.
- 3.5 Many of the proposals within the strategy are ongoing, examples of this are investment in new IT and an extension of mobile working solutions. Detailed milestones for the strategy are consolidated in the Delivery and Business Plan, Service Plans and Delivering Efficiencies in Corporate and Transactional Services (DECATS) Improvement Targets. Progress is monitored through the Value for Money Working Party and Senior Management Team. Further reports on key areas such as review of local offices will be brought back to the Local Housing Boards and main Board with full implications for approval prior to implementation.

3.6 We expect that customers will see improvements in the level of service they receive in the following ways:

- A greater number of enquiries resolved at the first point of contact
- Easier to contact us, at times and in ways that suit the customer
- A consistently excellent service delivered by a customer focussed organisation.

4. CONSULTATION IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The strategy has been developed through discussion with the Customer Service Process Improvement Team.

4.2 Further consultation will follow as individual projects are progressed. This will take place through Housing Focus Groups and Special Interest Groups.

5. FINANCIAL AND BUSINESS PLAN IMPLICATIONS

Implementing this strategy will result in significant expenditure, particularly with the implementation of new IT. Detailed costs will be identified and monitored within the DECATS and Business Transformation documents.

6. EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

All developments within the strategy will be subject to Equalities Impact Assessment prior to implementation.

7. HEALTH & SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

Health and Safety risk assessments will be carried out prior to implementation of new working practises.

8. POLICY REVIEW IMPLICATIONS

This is a key policy of Derby Homes and is included in the Key Policy Review Schedule. In accordance with minute 10/51 this policy will be reviewed no later than 3 years from the date of this meeting.

The areas listed below have no implications directly arising from this report

- Legal and Confidentiality
- Personnel
- Environmental
- Risk

If Board members or others would like to discuss this report ahead of the meeting please contact the author, or the Chief Executive, phil.davies@derbyhomes.org - Tel 01332 711010

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Background Information: None

Supporting Information: Item A11 LHBN Report 9 September 2010 and Item A10 LHBS Report 16 September 2010



Derby Homes Customer Service Strategy

To provide the people of Derby with the best housing service in the country

1. Introduction

Derby Homes is an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) that manages, maintains and improves the housing of Derby City Council. It was set up in 2002 by the Council as an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) and is the largest provider of social housing in Derby with just under 14,000 properties.

The organisation has an excellent national reputation. In 2002, Derby Homes was inspected by the Audit Commission and was awarded the highest rating of three stars for excellent services. Following re-inspection in February 2006, the organisation retained its 3-star status. Derby Homes has also achieved and retained a number of other significant awards including Customer Service Excellence, Investor in People, ISO9001, Positive About Disabled People and RoSPA Gold for commitment to health and safety.

2. Purpose of this strategy

The purpose of this strategy is to describe the vision, goals and aspirations of Derby Homes in relation to our Customers and how they access the services we offer. The Strategy is key to ensuring that Derby Homes' customers have access to services and information beyond traditional office hours and also enables Derby Homes to deliver services more cost effectively.

We want to ensure we are consistently delivering excellent customer services. This strategy sets out our vision for the future development of our customer services and outlines the improvements that we need to make to ensure that we achieve this.

We will build upon earlier work which includes our agreed Customer Care standards and a comprehensive service review carried out in 2005. The review resulted in the rationalisation of our housing offices and cash collection services enabling us to provide a more efficient service to our customers by freeing up housing staff to enable them to spend more time out on estates and by providing our Enquiry Centre to allow our contact hours to be extended.

The strategy has been developed around customers' needs and aspirations, gathered through ongoing consultation and details how this customer insight will be translated into service improvements. This plan will develop ways to make it easier and quicker and more convenient for customers to contact us and to provide access to services in a variety of ways through cost effective channels.

The strategy is built around key priorities accompanied by a detailed action plan. Each of the priorities is listed below with a summary and a selection of the actions for each priority highlighted. The full action plan together with details on how the actions will impact upon our customers can be found in the DECATS Action Plan.

3. Proposal

3.1 A Customer focused workforce fully equipped and empowered to consistently provide excellent services.

We will ensure that our staff have the right attitude, behaviours, experience, skills and equipment to enable them to deliver excellent customer services. We will review our standards with Customers every two years. We will continue to develop a culture where going the extra mile is standard and initiative taking is encouraged, learning development plays a leading role in delivering this priority.

Key Actions:

- Recruitment panels will include customers to ensure this is a priority in the recruitment process
- Provide a framework of learning and development that builds upon the skills of our staff
- Working with our training provider we will incorporate any changes into the compulsory Customer Service training.
- Ensure that Staff attend Customer Service training on a two year rolling programme
- Our service standards in our customer charter will be monitored by our managers, tenant inspectors and performance team in order to ensure we are meeting our targets.
- We will consult with customers and staff regularly and be accountable by providing feedback on our performance.
- We will continually review our work processes to create services that meet customer needs and performance targets.

3.2 We will provide accessible services that our customers can utilise at a time and in a way that suits them.

We will enable customers to communicate with Derby Homes by providing a range of options. We will embed Customer Service Excellence within the Organisation. Customer expectations continue to rise and we will use the Customer Experience system to promote and ensure we meet these expectations. We will encourage and promote the most cost efficient means of service delivery. We will use marketing and communication to ensure our customers are aware of our services.

Key Actions

- Customers will be able to contact Derby Homes by the internet, email, text, telephone, minicom and letter 24 hours a day 7 days per week.
- We will ensure that our local housing offices are fully accessible and we will carry out home visits for customers that request this
- We will co-locate with other agencies and will actively encourage joined up services.

- We will implement software that allows us to record all customer contact on a comprehensive database.
- We will continue to improve our customer feedback system that enables us to listen to and co-ordinate the views of all our customers.
- We will involve our customers in continually reviewing and improving the service they receive through Focus Groups, Process Improvement Teams and other groups
- We will work with the Derby Association of Community Partners (DACP) and Scrutiny Panels to involve them in feeding back on our services.
- The role of the Enquiry Centre will continue to be developed to deal with all enquiries without the need to transfer calls. The Enquiry Centre will be open 8 till 8 Monday to Friday and on Saturday mornings. Customers will also be able to contact a specialist officer or arrange a home visit through the Enquiry Centre.
- We will use our website, press releases, public events, newsletter, leaflets and posters to ensure customers are aware of the services we provide

3.3 We will invest in efficient and effective processes and technology that will enable us to provide excellent customer services.

This priority focuses on enabling our workforce to deliver excellent customer services through the provision of new technology.

Like any modern organisation we make extensive use of IT to support our staff in delivering excellent services to customers. Increasingly, we are also using IT to allow our customers to get the information they want electronically, and to communicate with us directly – especially over the internet.

Key Actions

- We will continue to develop ways to make it easier and quicker for customers to contact us and to provide access to services through a variety of ways.
- The website will continue to be developed with our customers. Customers will be able to contact the organisation through the website and a list of Frequently Asked Questions will enable customers to find key pieces of information easily.
- The website will provide access to on line services, such as rent payment, registering of complaints and customer feedback, reporting of repairs, accessing of rent statements and other important information about tenancy issues. The website will also provide information on performance and the services we offer.
- We will ensure that our website contains accurate and up to date information and will make signpost customers to enable them to find the most up to date information.
- We will continually improve our customer satisfaction surveys including looking at new ways of surveying our customers, such as by SMS text and e-mail.
- We will continually review the ways in which we communicate with our customers and will look for the most efficient ways of doing this. We will offer

options to opt out of hard copy materials in favour of electronic versions of leaflets etc.

- We will continually improve our range of tenant involvement opportunities and look for ways of getting customers involved through other means such as on line forums and interactive voting on our website.

3.4 We will use customer insight to continuously improve and develop our services.

Customer insight is about knowing who are customers are, understanding their behaviours, needs and preferences then using this information effectively to enable us to deliver excellent customer services.

This priority concentrates on the collection of demographic information and how we will utilise this information to tailor our services accordingly. We need to move towards being pro-active in responding to customer need rather than re-active. It also looks out how we will encourage and utilise feedback to continuously improve our services. It recognises that Derby is a diverse city with many communities and we need to reflect this in our work

Key Actions

- We will increase the amount of detailed demographic information which we hold on our tenants and leaseholders.
- We will use the information that we gather to identify customers who may be interested in or benefit from additional services.
- All customers will have equal access to our services. By recognising different needs we will make the necessary arrangements to ensure people with physical disabilities can access our services and remove any language barriers that could restrict access.
- There will be comprehensive equalities monitoring across all service areas and Equalities Schemes covering race, age disability, sexual orientation, religion and gender.
- We will complete Equality Impact Assessments for all key service and new policy areas to ensure customer and diversity impacts are identified and addressed.
- We will ensure our workforce reflects the customers we serve

3.5 We will reward good customers and neighbours

Good tenants reduce the costs of the service by looking after their homes, paying their rent on time, keeping appointments, being good neighbours and supporting their neighbourhood and community.

This priority aims to provide tenants with incentives to be good customers and neighbours.

Key Actions

- We will promote good neighbour contracts amongst tenants in flats and on estates.
- We will hold a range of competitions each year, for example, to reward good rent payers, best gardens, customers who adopt the website self service system, and customers who keep appointments.
- We will work with new tenants and with vulnerable tenants to ensure they are good customers and neighbours.
- We will ensure that customers who add costs to the service are required to pay for these, such as through recharging for any damage to properties.
- We will work with the Council to ensure we do not re-house former tenants who have failed to pay rent or other costs or who have been bad neighbours.

4. How we will monitor our progress

The milestones for this strategy are consolidated in the Delivery and Business Plan, Service Plans and the DECAT Improvement Targets. We will report our progress through the Value for Money Working Party and Senior Management Team.

We will promote and report on new services through the website and other publications.

5. Implications

Implementing this strategy will result in significant expenditure. Detailed costs are identified in the DECATS and Business transformation documents. New IT and mobile working equipment is expensive. We will operate within Derby Homes financial plans which give a priority to modernising our services.

Where appropriate and in consultation with our customers and stakeholders we offset cost against savings in other areas resulting from improved processes and revised operational practices.

This could include:-

- Increasing the amount of rent collected by using our new systems to provide more accessible payment channels to customers;
- Reducing current service costs across our service areas by pooling resources to provide a shared customer facing function through co-location
- Freeing up highly trained specialist staff from dealing with basic queries to focus on more value added areas by utilising self service options through the website

6. Outcomes for tenants/leaseholders

We expect that over the course of the next three years our customers will see a marked difference in the level of service that they receive in the following ways:

- A greater percentage of our customers will have their enquiry resolved at the first point of contact.
- It will be even easier to contact us at times and in ways that suit the customer's individual needs and preferences.
- When customers contact us they will experience a consistently excellent service delivered by a customer focused organisation.

7. Equality and Diversity

Through the strategy we aim to options for every customer to access to our services in a way that best suits their individual needs and preferences.

We will direct and encourage customers to use more cost effective methods of accessing our services such as website, SMS, telephone, direct debits.

A more comprehensive understanding of what our customer's needs and preferences is enabling us to identify and pro-actively remove any barriers that might exist.

We will also provide greater choice through increased and improved access channels enabling all of our customers to contact our organisation in a way and time that best suits their individual needs.

An Equality and Impact Assessment will be carried out on this strategy.

Customer Use targets

Customer access routes targets:

	Current %	% By April 2012	% By April 2015
Telephone Contact Enquiry Centre	60	65	60
Other Telephone Contacts	0.5	1	1
Letter	1	1	1
Email	2	3	5
SMS	0	5	10
Visits to offices	35	20	10
Website self service	1.5	5	13

Cash Collection use targets

	Current %	% By April 2012	% By April 2015
Post Office/Corner Shop	30	35	20
Council House / Local Office	20	5	0
Direct Debit	8	12	20
Telephone	1	3	10
Website	1	5	10
HB Nothing to pay	40	40	40

These figures will be monitored annually.