

Review of Sign Up Process – report of Customer Voice

About Customer Voice

A group of tenants and leaseholders who weekly to scrutinise and recommend improvements to the services Derby Homes delivers to its customers.

Shirley Green – Chair and tenant
Win Buchan – Leaseholder
Lyn Gadsby – Vice Chair Leaseholder
Patricia Bhurton – Tenant
Lesley Buxton-Kay – Tenant
Heather White – Tenant
Kevin Ellaway – Tenant
Matthew Fowler – Tenant
Bernice Diminico - Tenant

Overview of project

We decided to look at the Sign Up process as we were unable to review Homefinder due to the change in the system and following our two reviews of voids we felt it was the next logical step. We have had meetings with Senior Management and Officers. Members have shadowed staff to gain as much knowledge as possible about the process our customers go through when signing up to a new property.

Member shadowed six EV's and two sign ups during the review of this project.

We have also reviewed customer surveys, spoken with customers and met with the Youth Panel to get a representative view about their experience. We have found the project to be much bigger than first anticipated and far more complex.

What we did

Process

Our first step to an insight into Sign Ups was a meeting held with Housing Services Manager and Housing Management Trainer, who has attended three meetings with us. We were provided with information and documentation about the sign up process staff go through with our customers. We were given a sample of documentation relevant to us which was one third of the documentation required.

Post Let surveys

Having reviewed a considerable number of post let surveys we found that approximately 10% of customers were not aware of the services Derby Homes could offer should a tenant start struggling with any aspect of their tenancy.

Youth Panel

Lyn and Bernice visited the Derby Homes Youth Panel on Monday 29th April to ask them to speak to their parents about the Sign-up process. We wanted to establish if any of them could remember or had experienced a sign up process and if so what their thoughts were. We put a survey together for the panel to take home and asked them to complete with their parents to try and gain some feedback.

A member of the Youth Panel can remember moving some years ago and that workmen were in their property for up to three months following their move which made it not feel like 'home' for a long time.

The Youth Panel generally felt there were not enough activities of interest to them in the areas in which they live and felt there should be more

As a result of this meeting, the following have been put into place:

- The Youth Panel are made aware of activities through through social media and their new Instagram page
- Derby Homes are promoting activities on Social Media, through Housing staff and the Youth Panel
- Customer Voice have a link to the DACP and are aware of a new activity that is happening in Mackworth which is one of the areas where the Youth Panel felt no activities were happening. This has been reported back to the Youth Panel.

Shadowing


Five members have shadowed staff carrying out both EV's and sign ups. Based on these visits our feedback and recommendations are detailed below. Initially there was a problem receiving notification of the appointments so we could carry out the shadowing. Thankfully this was rectified before the end of our research.

During all visits staff were very welcoming, professional and accommodating to both ourselves and the customer.

Recommendations and follow up

The following pages are the Customer Voice recommendations we wish to make to the sign up process following our observations.

The Customer Voice would like to be updated on the progress in 6 months' time to the Operational Board.

No	Recommendation	Reason for recommendation
1.	Staff who carry out Sign Ups specifically mention the Tenancy Sustainment, Intensive Housing management, handyman service and other appropriate services available to customers should they start to struggle with aspects of their tenancy. They may not require or be eligible for any of these services at present but may require them at some stage.	This recommendation has been made following our review of a batch of random surveys which indicated customers were not aware of the other services available to them. At Sign-up customers are focused on getting the keys to the property and not the services we offer. We think there needs to be a mechanism for informing all customers about the services they can access.
2.	Starter tenants feel vulnerable and are unwilling to say things are wrong. They are worried about potentially losing their property. We feel some work needs to be carried out to ensure customers understand that we value their opinion and can only improve our services if they inform us.	We felt that customers were reluctant to provide true feedback on their post let survey. Customers should be made aware that this happens in private lettings and all Housing Associations/council properties. It could be explained that 'it is common practice for us to visit at month three to check you are settling in and have no problems'.
3.	Derby Homes to provide all customers with a meter box key for easy access to the meter boxes for reading meters. 	Further to our Sign Up shadowing and some of our own personal Sign Up experiences, we have noticed that no meter cupboard keys are given to customers. As a company Derby Homes could source some meter cupboard keys to give to new customers for ease of access to the meter. We believe that this service is in line with the Customer First Strategy. Not all customers have access to transport to go to a shop to purchase a key.
4.	If a property has a prepayment meter, Derby Homes to provide customers with the pre-payment card/key to simplify matters.	The recommendation here comes from personal experiences and the Sign-ups we have attended. If a property has a card meter installed, it is very inconvenient for a customer to have to go to the shop twice just to get energy on at the property. If the previous tenant does not leave the current prepayment card/key for the meter then a new customer will have to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Find a suitable outlet - Visit the shop to ask for a prepayment key - They are then advised to take the key and put it in the meter to register it - They are required to go back to the shop to top up the card - They will then put the meter key in the meter box and it will put the credit on the meter

5.	Post let surveys to be simplified, reworded and carried out over the phone by a staff member who has not carried out the viewing or Sign Up in order to ensure honest feedback. This survey to be incorporated into the online account for all tenants to complete.	See appendix 3.
6.	All staff to have refresher training relating to Sign Up every twelve months to ensure consistency. Emails notifying staff of amendments to procedures and policies should be clearly headed 'amendment'.	After speaking with a Patch Manager about the ongoing training they receive about the processes and procedures that are in place, it was clear that further ongoing support is required. At the moment the teams get an email with heading 'Amendment' but it is not clear what the amendment is without reading the whole document. Housing staff have large workloads and don't have the time to reread a whole policy/procedure. Instead it would be more beneficial for the email to outline the change and also to hold regular refresher training on an annual basis to ensure all staff are following the process and to share good practice.
7.	All keys to properties to be labelled. No redundant keys to be supplied.	From personal experience and shadowing that has been carried out, it has been noted that on occasions 'bunch's' of keys are handed to the incoming tenant. These keys have not been checked to ensure they are relevant to the property and are not labelled. I.e. Front door, bin store etc.
8.	Minimise paperwork provided to the customer at both EV's and Sign Ups. Staff to provide customers with a Tenancy Agreement and Document checklist at an EV and no more. All Sign Up paperwork to be reviewed, and minimised so that less is given to customers at Sign Up.	From personal experience, speaking to staff and shadowing that has been carried out, it has been noted on EV's and Sign Up's that customers receive a large amount of paperwork and this can be overwhelming to tenants new to Derby Homes. Feedback from staff was that the paperwork requires at least a day's work to complete, including prior to the appointment, during and follow up. We understand some paperwork is statutory but feel other items should be minimised.
9.	No Sign Ups on a Friday afternoon unless they were secure transfers. Gas uncapping would not be feasible and paperwork will need to be done.	Following a meeting with a patch manager it was suggested that if Sign Ups were to happen on a Friday it should only happen on a morning and not in the afternoon. There is a lot of paperwork to complete in the office following the sign-up which needs to be completed in one go and not left over the

		<p>weekend for Monday morning.</p> <p>From personal experience, if a Sign Up happens on a Friday afternoon there is not enough time to get the gas uncapped that day, meaning it is left until Monday and the customer potentially without heating or cooking facilities.</p>
10.	At an EV or before the viewing is arranged, staff should ensure that customers have been made aware of their options so the expectation is set early on.	<p>On the first Escorted Viewing, we found that the customer had unrealistic expectations based on 'hear say'. He was adamant he could get free white goods, carpets and a furniture pack. He did not understand that as a homeless applicant he had one offer only, although the officer told him this three times.</p>