

Home Housing Group Short Notice Inspection & Action Plan

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Summary and Recommendation:

Attached as Appendix 1 is the report of the Audit Commission's Short Notice Inspection of Home Housing Group. Attached as Appendix 2 is the Home Housing Group's Action Plan in response to the report. Members are requested to note the report and consider how the progress of the Action Plan in Copeland is to be monitored.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) commissions the Audit Commission (AC) to undertake short notice inspections (SNIs) of Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). Although both agencies are to be abolished, the regulatory functions of the TSA will revert to the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) and there will be a future for inspections.
- 1.2 The Home Group were inspected on 26 – 30 April, 2010, and the report was published in September 2010. The scope of the inspection covered the Home Group nationally and was focused on three services:
 - responsive repairs
 - gas services
 - resident involvement
- 1.3 The AC also assessed how the Home Group performed the above services in terms of: access and customer care:
 - diversity:
 - value for money

2 Inspection Report

- 2.1 In all except one service the report judged that weaknesses outweighed strengths. The exception was resident involvement, where strengths and weaknesses were in balance.
- 2.2 There were 29 recommendations grouped under 6 headings in the first part of the report, which examined the merits of the service at the time the inspection was undertaken in April 2010. These are in pages 6 to 20.

- 2.3 Unlike Local Authority inspections, the AC allows time for the RSL to prepare an action plan in response to the first judgement in the report. The second judgement, on the prospects for improvement, is deferred until the RSL has produced an action plan in response to the recommendations.
- 2.4 The Home Group therefore consulted its residents on the original findings of the report and produced an Action Plan to implement its recommendations. 29 actions are listed under the 6 headings used by the AC and are shown on pages 1 to 37 of the Action Plan.
- 2.5 On the basis of the Action Plan and the evidence of the inspection the Audit Commission assessed the Home Group as having promising prospects for improvement when its final report was published in September 2010.

3 Monitoring Progress

- 3.1 The inspection report and action plan covered the whole of Home Group's national operation. Members are asked to consider how best to ensure local reporting of the progress made to implement the action plan.
- 3.2 The Head of Housing & Community Services (NW) has offered to provide the Panel with copies of the periodic monitoring reports the Home Group make to their residents.

3 FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOURCES OF FINANCE)

- 5.1 There are no financial and human resource implications arising for the Council from this report.

6. IMPACT ON THE CORPORATE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

- 6.1 This report and recommendations are consistent with the corporate objective for 2010/11 of "working with our registered social landlords and closely monitoring their performance and plans for the benefit of those who rent their homes."

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Short Notice Inspection of Home Housing Group (Audit Commission, September 2010)
Appendix 2 - Action Plan (Home Housing Group, 2010).

Short Notice

Inspection

Short notice inspection of responsive repairs, gas services and resident involvement

Home Group Limited

September 2010



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Housing association inspections

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively and delivers high quality local services for the public.

Audit Commission housing inspections are completed on the performance of a number of bodies and services. These include local authority housing departments, arms length management organisations and housing associations.

The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) is the regulator of social housing. Under new powers in the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008, the TSA will commission inspections from the Audit Commission to assess performance against elements of the regulatory standards. During summer 2010, a public consultation will be undertaken to identify the how inspections against the regulatory standards should be carried out and what they should incorporate.

In the interim period inspections will be commissioned by the TSA. The Audit Commission will continue to use elements of the existing key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) that are relevant to the regulatory standards during this period.

The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing.

Short notice inspections (SNIs) have been developed to encourage improvements in the performance of housing associations (HAs) in delivering services to their customers. They focus on the outcomes for residents and work on the basis that associations will concentrate on improving services rather than preparing for an inspection, which could happen at any time.

The scope of each inspection of a housing association, undertaken by the Audit Commission has been determined by the TSA. We are committed to working in partnership with the TSA to improve the performance and efficiency across the social housing sector. Our shared objectives are to ensure that services are provided for the diverse range of customers in their areas of operation, high standards of customer services and access, and value for money for both customers and the taxpayer.

The Association

- 1 Home Group Limited is a national organisation working in 232 local authority areas. It owns or manages 35,500 general needs properties, 3,000 sheltered properties, 5,000 supported housing properties and 2,500 leased properties. The group is overseen by a board; the governance arrangements are changing to remove the divisional boards that were part of the governance structure in England. Home employs 3,782 staff; it had a turnover of £304 million in 2009/10 and the spending on general needs housing services was £109.6 million. The organisation is divided into management units including Stonham which is England's largest provider of housing with support, and Nashayman which specialises in providing housing and services to BME communities. General needs and sheltered housing has been divided up into four regions, North East, North West, Central and South. These are being re-grouped in 2010/11 to form just North and South.

The scope of the inspection

- 2 The scope of this inspection focused on three of Home's management areas, the North West, the North East and the South and does not include housing with support or leasehold housing. The scope includes the following service areas, which have been identified in consultation with the Tenant Services Authority:
 - responsive repairs (Home standard);
 - gas services (Home standard); and
 - resident involvement (Tenant involvement and empowerment standard).
- 3 The inspection also included an assessment of how Home Group Limited is addressing three cross-cutting themes within the services included in the inspection's scope: access and customer care (Tenant involvement and empowerment standard), diversity (Tenant involvement and empowerment standard) and value for money (Value for money standard). The inspection was carried out by three teams of inspectors who visited the regions in the South, North East and North West.
- 4 We would like to thank the staff of Home Group Limited who made us welcome and met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Dates of inspection: 26 to 30 April 2010.

Summary of our findings

- 5 We have assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the service areas included in the scope of the inspection. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Table 1 Assessment

| How good is the service? | Assessment |
|---|---|
| • Access and customer care ⁱ | Weaknesses outweigh strengths |
| • Diversity | Weaknesses outweigh strengths |
| • Value for money | Weaknesses outweigh strengths |
| • Responsive repairs | Weaknesses outweigh strengths |
| • Gas services | Weaknesses outweigh strengths |
| • Resident involvement | Strengths and weaknesses are in balance |

- 6 We asked Home Group to consult with its customers on the findings of our original report on the strengths and weaknesses of the service areas we inspected; and on the preparation of an action plan to implement our recommendations. Following receipt of that action plan this final report has been published to include our assessment of the Association's prospects for improvement.
- 7 We have assessed Home Group Limited as having promising prospects for improvement' for the service areas included in the scope of the inspection. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and the short notice inspection action plan agreed with customers. These are summarised below.

Table 2 Assessment of prospects for improvement

| Prospects for Improvement ⁱⁱ | Assessment |
|---|---|
| Track record of improvement | Strengths and weaknesses are balanced |
| How well is performance managed | Strengths outweigh weaknesses |
| Is there capacity to improve | Strengths significantly outweigh weaknesses |

ⁱ Access and customer care, diversity and value for money are assessed in relation to the service areas inspected only.

ⁱⁱ In the relation to the service areas inspected

How good is the service?

Access and customer care (tenant involvement and empowerment standard) in the service areas inspected

- 8 We found weaknesses outweigh strengths in this area.
- 9 There are a number of weaknesses.
 - Service standards are not clear, measurable or reported on. Many tenants and frontline staff are unaware of the standards, which are not measured or reported on. Performance information for tenants is inaccurate and hard to understand. Tenants have not had enough opportunity to agree standards for service delivery and hold the association to account on its performance.
 - Tenant satisfaction is low. The last STATUSⁱⁱⁱ survey in late 2009 shows that 75 per cent of general needs tenants are satisfied with the overall service. This is in line with the worst 25 per cent of associations nationally and below the average of 82 per cent.
 - Information about accessing services is not clear or comprehensive. The website has limited information and the tenants' handbook is out-of-date. Tenants do not value the national newsletters although they like the local ones. Tenants do not benefit from enough accessible and relevant information.
 - Telephone answering is poor in some areas and not properly monitored in others. Too many calls are not answered, monitoring of call handling is not comprehensive and Home does not adjust staffing levels to cope with busy or quiet times. The service is hard to access if the phones are not answered quickly.
 - Service monitoring is lacking. Home visits are offered but a lack of advertised and monitored standards and a lack of mobile technology limit their effectiveness. Similarly responses to letters and emails are not monitored. Home does not know which parts of its service are failing to meet tenants' requirements.
 - Home does not deal with tenant complaints effectively. Some replies are late and they do not always respond fully to the points raised. Home does not have a robust approach to learning from complaints and does not advertise or always apply its own compensation policy. Home does not resolve complaints promptly and fairly.
 - Correspondence is not always written in plain English. Some tenants have low levels of literacy and will not understand all of the letters about gas servicing. If tenants do not understand what Home is saying they will be less likely to engage and cooperate with what is asked of them.

ⁱⁱⁱ Standardised Tenant Satisfaction Survey

How good is the service?

10 There are some strengths.

- Home responds positively and effectively to tenants' needs in times of crisis. When tenants were faced with floods and significant snowfall, staff provided valuable help and continued to deliver services despite the obstacles.
- Staff are tenant focused. Ninety two per cent of all staff have received customer care training in the last six months. The North East repair contractors' workforce has also received this training. Tenants benefit from the positive and polite approach adopted by most staff.
- Tenants can access some services by text messaging. This is useful for people with limited time and cheaper than calling. However, Home lacks fully automated texting systems that can inform tenants that a repair operative is on the way.

Diversity (tenant involvement and empowerment standard) in the service areas inspected

11 We found weaknesses outweigh strengths in this area.

12 There are a number of weaknesses.

- Home lacks comprehensive information to plan and provide services for the specific needs of tenants. Home has only partial customer profile information on half of its tenants. Home cannot demonstrate it understands the different needs of its tenants.
- Staff do not regularly use available information to tailor services to tenants needs. Although there are examples of individual tailoring where needs have been responded to well, this is not consistent. Tenants cannot rely on staff acting proactively to provide services that take into account their known needs.
- Staff are not helped to respond consistently to the needs of vulnerable tenants who ring for repairs. By leaving it to individual staff initiative, vulnerable tenants are not receiving the enhanced services they need.
- Home does not communicate well with tenants who do not speak English. The translation service is not well advertised and written material often does not advise that translations are available. Even where records show that tenants need communication in another language this isn't routinely done, however individual requests are met.
- Home does not monitor tenant satisfaction by diversity strand to see if some sections of the community are more satisfied than others. Services may not meet tenant needs and expectations.
- Out of 57 offices used by tenants, 17 fail to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act^{iv}. Some offices have a limited range of service information and lack facilities and adequate signs to help find them. Failing to meet standards set out by Disability Discrimination Act restricts access for disabled people.

^{iv} The Disability Discrimination Acts (DDA) 1995 and 2005 aim to end discrimination against disabled people and require that public buildings should be made accessible for people with disabilities.

- Home has not addressed barriers to accessing the services. Home has not assessed whether the recommendations from the equality impact assessment^v of responsive repairs has been carried out and it has not carried out equality impact assessments on gas safety or resident involvement. Potential barriers to tenants with different needs are not being identified and addressed.
- Support services for vulnerable tenants are underdeveloped. Home lacks ways of providing support in some local areas. Vulnerable tenants are not all getting the support they need to access services, develop independence and sustain their tenancies.
- Home does not know if involved tenants are representative of the communities they represent. It does not monitor the diversity profile of involved tenants other than for the newly formed national panel. The views of some sections of the community are not well represented to Home.
- Home does not provide enough training to address diverse needs. Staff and contractors are in a good position to spot abuse of vulnerable members of households; however, Home does not train them on safeguarding. Not all staff have received the minimum training in diversity. Tenants' needs are not always addressed because of lack of training.
- The approach to addressing diverse needs is weak. Home does not work with minority groups to develop strategies and has no equality scheme in place. Home's diversity strategy does not identify weaknesses or set out actions to improve service delivery. Without a robust strategic approach Home will not develop services well to respond to the diverse needs of tenants.

13 There are some strengths.

- Home has a corporate commitment to improve the approach to diversity. The commitment to tailor services to individual need is repeated through Home's corporate strategy. Structures reflect that commitment with a champion, a strategy group and a new external advisory group and 70 equality and diversity ambassadors. The focus on diversity helps encourages an appropriate culture for staff to respond to diverse needs where they are able to.
- Home has developed some useful tools on diversity. These tools help staff understand and address diversity issues, which is improving Homes ability to deliver appropriate services.
- A door knocking exercise successfully helps vulnerable tenants. In 2009 staff visited 400 tenants focusing on those who did not contact Home much. This enabled Home to identify tenants who needed better services or support although Home did not record these outcomes.
- Some local areas show a commitment to and understanding of diversity, with staff taking local initiatives to tailor services. However, these approaches are not systematic or comprehensive. Tenants benefit from local actions to address their specific needs.

^v Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) assess the impact of policies and practice on different groups within the community.

How good is the service?

Value for money (value for money standard) in the service areas inspected^{vi}

14 We found weaknesses outweigh strengths in this area.

15 There are a number of weaknesses.

- The repair services are not value for money. The 2007/08 cost benchmarking exercise showed that comparing the cost for each property for maintenance, the South was the 23rd most expensive out of 26 organisations, the North West was 35th out of 37. Both performance and customer satisfaction (as assessed in the responsive repairs section) are low. Since the 2007/08 comparisons the average cost for each property for responsive repairs in the three regions increased by 10 per cent, so the comparison is unlikely to have improved.
- Gas servicing is variable in both cost and quality. Contracts vary in what they provide; some are two-star^{vii} others are three-star and most include the cost for installation, repair and testing smoke and carbon monoxide alarms. The average cost for each property varies from £91 in the South to £126 in the North East. Some are poor value for money such as a small two-star contract costing £150 a property. While the service in the South is low cost, performance is poor, reducing the value for money.
- Home has failed to carry out any value for money exercise on its resident involvement services. Resources can easily be wasted on resident involvement without a focus on costs, outcomes and how they compare with other organisations.
- The strategic approach to achieving value for money is not comprehensive. Home lacks an overarching value for money strategy and it is not clear how the housing services efficiency saving target in the 2009/10 business plan was set or what measures support it. The value for money impact assessment 2009 lacks critical analysis and contains no recommendations for improvement. Opportunities to find all possible actions to improve value for money are being missed.
- Home lacks service based plans to improve value for money. It does not understand the relationship between cost and quality of the repair, gas servicing and resident involvement services to strategically target improvement. Home does not realise all available opportunities to improve value for money.
- Home does not use benchmarking information to prioritise action to improve value for money. Performance and budget reports lack external cost comparison indicators and staff do not know how the cost or quality of their services compare. This reduces Home's ability to focus on where efficiencies are required.

^{vi} In assessing value for money we are looking at two questions: 'How do costs compare?' and 'How is value for money managed?'

^{vii} Two star gas contracts cover annual gas servicing and the labour cost of repairs but not the parts. Three star contracts cover annual servicing and the labour and parts for repairs but not replacing the appliance if it cannot be fixed.

- Tenant influence over the value for money and budgeting setting process is limited. Without tenant influence over spending priorities and efficiency plans, Home is not prioritising tenants concerns for the use of resources.
- Some inefficient working practices persist. The ratio of emergency to urgent to routine repairs for 2009/10 is not good at 21:32:47 and worse in the South at 25:36:40. A higher proportion of emergency and urgent repairs increases overall costs.

16 There are a number of strengths.

- Home has a positive corporate commitment to value for money. It recognises that services are not good value for money and is taking effective steps to address this. This commitment is reflected in the corporate strategy, the seven Customer Promises for 2010/11, individual staff targets and an ambitious £50 million savings target planned over five years. Some £16 million or one third of the five year target was met in the first year in 2009/10. This was a positive achievement against a demanding target. Home has taken some important steps to address the weakness in value for money and has planned more.
- Home manages procurement well saving £10 million over the past three years and annualised^{viii} savings of £4 million in 2009/10, 1.4 per cent of the overall budget and 2.5 per cent of the responsive repairs and gas servicing budgets. Effective procurement has cut costs and increased quality.
- Procurement has improved quality as well as reducing costs. The new North West gas servicing contract saved £300,000 or £19 for each property while improving the service from a two to a three-star service improving customer service and saving further costs for parts. The responsive repairs contracts in the South are based on a cost for each property. This modern approach improves efficiency and customer service as the contractor has the incentive to carry out all possible repairs at a single address when called out, saving the tenant inconvenient multiple visits.
- Home has made efficiency savings. For example setting up a 20 person contracts team in the North East, moving operatives to a salary structure, fitting vans with mobile tracking devices and piloting the use of handheld computers for operatives. However, improvements are piecemeal rather than following strategic value for money reviews.
- Effective improvements in back office functions have freed up resources. Rationalisation has reduced back-office costs by 14 per cent in the last two years. These savings enable Home to spend more resources on front-line services.
- Effective budget disciplines remove efficiency savings from the budget where the savings were made. This ensures that Home spends savings on agreed priorities.

^{viii} The savings were only worth £3 million in the 2009/10 financial year but as some started part of the way through the year the full annual benefit of the savings will only be realised in 2010/11

How good is the service?

- The ratio of spending between planned and responsive repairs is satisfactory. This is efficient as repairs are cheaper to do when planned.
- Home has a good record for leveraging in external resources. Over £4 million a year in extra resources is having a positive impact on the services being inspected.

Responsive repairs (Home standard)

17 We found weaknesses outweigh strengths in this area.

18 There are a number of weaknesses.

- The repairs appointment system lacks customer focus. The advertised appointment system is just morning or afternoon, although in practice, there is some flexibility in the North East and South. In the North West only 47 per cent of tenants get an appointment when ordering a repair against a target of 90 per cent.
- Repairs are not completed within timescales. Only 93.3 per cent of repairs were completed in target time in 2009/10, which is well below the national average. Performance on repairs completions in the South Region is particularly poor at 83 per cent and lowers overall Group performance.
- Satisfaction with repairs is low. The STATUS survey in late 2009 shows that 69.8 per cent of tenants are satisfied with the responsive repairs service, which compares with the worst 25 per cent of registered providers nationally. Local surveys show higher satisfaction rates while some tenants expressed dissatisfaction to us.
- The collection rate for rechargeable repairs is weak. Home only collects 2 per cent of what it charges. This reduces resources available for services and provides no incentive for tenants to avoid neglecting or damaging the property.
- Home does not measure or report on repairs completed right first time. This important measure is valued by tenants and Home cannot improve performance well or be accountable to tenants on this without measuring and reporting it.

19 There are some strengths.

- Home makes it easy for tenants to report repairs accurately. Staff and tenants have access to diagnostic tools. Tenants told us the systems work well and make reporting a repair easy.
- Operatives are flexible about carrying out extra repairs. In the South and North West, operatives will usually carry out other relevant repairs that the tenant asks them to while they are in the property. This is convenient for tenants and more efficient.

Gas servicing (Home standard)

20 We found weaknesses outweigh strengths in this area.

21 There are a number of weaknesses.

- Gas servicing performance is inconsistent and weak. At the time of the inspection only 99.3 per cent of all relevant properties had an up-to-date safety certificate. Performance at the end March 2010 was worse at 98 per cent and in the South at the end of February it was 88 per cent. This does not meet legal requirements and puts tenants' safety at risk.
- Overdue safety checks are not dealt with well. At the end of March 2010 125 properties or 0.35 per cent of those due for service were overdue by three months or more with one property overdue by over two years. This links to Home having ineffective legal action to gain access to properties to carry out the gas checks and servicing.
- The importance of gas servicing is not well publicised and appointments are incorrectly advertised. Without promoting the services well it will be difficult to engage tenants and improve performance.
- The approach to customer satisfaction surveying is inconsistent. In the North East satisfaction is high at 100 per cent with 96 per cent very satisfied. In the other regions it is not measured or too recently to have an impact. Home is not able to address tenants concerns about the service if it does not find out what they are.
- Home does not make risk assessments to improve the service. It knows that some tenants always give access quickly and easily and others require a lot of chasing up. However, Home does not start the difficult ones earlier nor does it alter the approach based on previous experience of what works to get access for individuals. Resources are not being used in the most efficient manner making the service more expensive and performance lower than it could be.
- Home does not have integrated computer systems with its contractors. Too much information is manually input. In the North East a separate spreadsheet is used to monitor outstanding cases while integration is strong in the South. Opportunities to improve efficiency and accuracy are being lost.

22 There are a number of strengths.

- Home has some flexibility around appointments. Tenants can request appointments in the evenings and on Saturday mornings, although this is not advertised.

How good is the service?

- The process of gaining access is reasonably efficient. The need for a service is flagged on the computer system before the service is due to ensure that access is arranged if tenants telephone. Housing staff are involved in arranging appointments where appropriate. Devices such as gas limiters^{ix} are used where tenants have not given access in the past. This reduces the resources taken to chase up tenants who are not responding to requests for an appointment.
- Home makes good use of annual gas servicing visit to check other items. Most homes have smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors. These are checked at the same time as the gas and installed if they are not there. In the North East the contractors check electrics, immersion heaters and water tanks too. This is efficient for the landlord, convenient for the tenant and improves safety.
- Appropriate quality checks are carried out with some regional variation. An external assessor carries out independent checks of 10 per cent of the work. The gas databases are cross referenced with the stock databases to ensure no properties are missing. However this was only done recently in the South highlighting problems. Effective checks ensure the quality of the service.

Resident involvement (tenant involvement and empowerment standard)

23 We found strengths and weaknesses in balance in this area.

24 There are a number of strengths.

- Tenants have opportunities to influence overall priorities. Tenants influenced the new corporate strategy and use the outcomes from STATUS surveys to comment on priorities. Tenants review the work of local service improvement groups and decide on the priorities for groups for the following year. Overall priorities for the organisation are aligned with tenants' priorities.
- Tenants are involved in developing and improving services. We found many examples of positive change influenced by tenants through service improvement groups, which look at how services are delivered locally.
 - In the North East this led to carbon monoxide detectors in all Home properties, changes in the in-house team working hours and the introduction of early evening appointment slots.
 - Tenants in the North West were positive about their repairs improvement group. Outcomes included telephoning tenants before the operative visits their property to make sure it is still convenient for them to call.
 - The South has ten service improvement groups. Outcomes include the ending of a large repairs contract, text reminders for appointments and the offer of appointment times when repairs are reported. The groups have environmental improvement budgets, which have improved landscaping and security.

^{ix} Gas limiters are devices that make noises and cut the gas off for short periods once the safety certificate has expired. They are reset as part of the annual gas servicing and can be used to encourage tenants to make appointments.

- Consultation at a local and neighbourhood level is positive with some weaknesses.
 - Staff in the North East have used various different ways to reach a wide range of tenants. For example, they have stood at bus-stops to talk to people as they have waited for buses and set up information stands outside shops. This enabled them to collect views from 300 customers who would not have otherwise engaged with the organisation.
 - In the North West, estate and local groups are supported well by the local office and staff help tenants bid for external funding to deliver local priorities. However, Home has not consulted tenants on the opening hours of local offices, which tenants find inconvenient, on the closure of area offices, on the withdrawal of repairs satisfaction letters or on which properties are included in programmes of repair improvements.
- Home is increasing the capacity of tenants. It has trained tenant representatives in procurement, so they have the understanding and skills needed to participate effectively in service evaluation. It has intensively trained a team of 11 resident quality inspectors to Chartered Institute of Housing level two certificate in housing. Home puts in resources to develop involvement opportunities for young people and local communities.
- Home has successfully involved tenants in procurement. All procurement panels involve tenants and have led to improvements in services for tenants as shown above under value for money. Contracts are responsive to the needs of tenants.
- Home has started to collect comprehensive information about the views of tenants. It has recently introduced a system of 900 monthly independent customer satisfaction phone surveys to gather views. These are initially for repairs but Home will apply them flexibly to cover other services in the future. Home can alter services to match tenant priorities if it knows what tenants think of services.

25 There are a number of weaknesses.

- Few tenants are satisfied that Home takes their views into account. The 2009 STATUS survey showed that 55.4 per cent of general needs tenants are satisfied, which is only slightly better than the worst performing associations nationally.
- Tenant influence on the approach to resident involvement at a corporate level is limited and staff are not clear what is going on. Home has not consulted on an overarching strategy to support resident involvement and has lacked a national body for tenant involvement until recently and the new national panel has only met once. Tenants and staff are not sure what is going on with resident involvement because of recent changes. No mechanism exists for tenants to feed their views to the national panel. Most tenants have no opportunity to influence how resident involvement works beyond the level of their own neighbourhood and the momentum for expanding tenant influence is reduced by lack of clarity.

How good is the service?

- Communication between the leadership of Home and the regions is not working consistently on resident involvement. The leadership believe that staff in the North are still actively involved in developing new involvement structures such as local estate based issue groups. Staff in the North told us that while they still maintain existing groups they are not involved in any development and they have been told not to give out leaflets on how to get involved. Without effective communication and clear leadership resident involvement activities are less likely to be successful.
- Service scrutiny by tenants is not embedded or effective. In 2009/10 Home carried out 12 audits with tenants involved. However, there is no evidence of the tenants having any impact on the results of the audits. Where tenants made complaints about services these were classified as wrong or to be looked into.
- Work to involve hard to reach groups is limited. Home has few examples where BME or disabled tenants are involved. It has not used the database of tenants interested in involvement to gather the views of tenants who are less represented. Tenant involvement is not representative of all types of tenants.
- Home does not regularly inform tenants how their involvement has influenced services. The assessments of projects do not say how involvement changes services and what those changes are. The 'you said, we did' section on the website is not specific enough for tenants to see what has changed through involvement. If tenants are not given feedback on what influence their involvement has had, they are less likely to be involved in the future.
- New involvement structures have not worked well for tenants in Copeland and the North West. Home has not managed to get any representation from any tenants in Copeland or the whole of the North West on to the national panel, which is causing a sense of grievance.
- The leadership lack a clear view of outcomes from resident involvement. Strategic documents focus on how Home wishes to increase engagement with tenants not on what Home wants to achieve through engagement. Home has a potentially positive activity called 'thin file day', in which staff knock on doors to collect views and see if any service needs are not being met. However, the report on this focuses on the process and does not mention any outcomes. Without understanding what it wants to achieve from resident involvement, Home will get less out of tenants' efforts to be involved.

Recommendations

26 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, organisations need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the organisation. In addition, we identify the approximate costs^x and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context, the inspection team recommends that the organisation shares the findings of this report with tenants and board members; and takes action to address all weaknesses identified in the report. Associations forming part of a group structure should share the lessons and findings of the report amongst the wider group. The inspection team makes the following recommendations.

Recommendation

R1 Provide a high performance in annual gas servicing by:

- ensuring that Home consistently services all gas appliances it owns annually in line with the law.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- greater safety for tenants; and
- compliance with the law.

Implementing this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be carried out immediately.

^x Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

Recommendations

Recommendation

- R2** In consultation with tenants and reviewing best practice elsewhere, improve customer care and access to services by:
- producing measurable service standards;
 - reporting to tenants on service performance and performance against standards and how this compares with other providers;
 - improving the website to provide more information and to be more interactive;
 - monitoring and improving call handling performance;
 - completing the review of complaints to ensure a consistent and high quality of response that addresses all issues raised and learns from them;
 - ensuring all buildings used by tenants to access services comply with the Disability Discrimination Act; and
 - writing letters in plain English.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- greater accountability to tenants; and
- increased ease for tenants to access services.

Implementing this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be carried out by June 2011.

Recommendation

R3 In consultation with tenants, improve outcomes for tenants who have diverse needs by:

- providing training and guidance to enable staff to contribute effectively to safeguarding, to use translation and communication services and to tailor services to individual needs;
- breaking down satisfaction surveys and tenants views by diversity strands to find out if services are meeting the needs of all tenants and taking the appropriate action where necessary;
- ensuring that all equality impact assessments are undertaken and monitored to see if actions are carried out and have the desired impact;
- ensuring that protocols and other suitable arrangements are in place in all areas that enable staff to have sufficient access to support for vulnerable tenants;
- completing the collection of profile information on tenants and using the information to provide tailored services;
- collecting the diversity profile of involved tenants and taking action to involve tenants from sections of the community who are not well represented; and
- working with minority, marginalised and disadvantaged groups of tenants to improve the approach and plans for improving services to diverse tenants.

The expected benefit of this recommendation is:

- services that better meet the diverse needs of tenants.

Implementing this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be carried out by June 2011.

Recommendation

R4 In consultation with tenants, improve the value for money of services by:

- developing an overarching strategy and implementation plan for value for money;
- taking action to strengthen services and improve value by developing an understanding of the relationship between cost and quality in individual service areas, based on cost analysis and benchmarking of cost and quality;
- developing service level plans for improving value for money; and
- involving tenants, staff and other relevant stakeholders in prioritising the use of resources.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- improved value for money; and
- an increase of resources to service areas important to tenants.

Implementing this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be carried out by June 2011.

Recommendations

Recommendation

- R5** In consultation with tenants, improve the responsive repairs and gas service by:
- developing a more flexible and consistent appointment system for repairs and gas servicing available at first point of contact;
 - improving the publicity around the importance of gas servicing and the ordering and appointments for gas servicing and responsive repairs;
 - improving contract and performance monitoring and communication processes to ensure that repairs and gas servicing are done on time, at the appointed time, in one visit where possible;
 - collecting information on why tenants are satisfied and dissatisfied with services and addressing the issues to improve satisfaction;
 - reviewing gas access procedures particularly around legal action and risk assessment of access to improve performance and deliver efficiencies; and
 - moving towards better computer integration with contractors and operatives to improve communication with tenants and provide a more flexible and efficient service.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- a faster and more convenient service for tenants;
- improved tenant satisfaction with the services; and
- more efficient services.

Implementing this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be carried out by June 2011.

Recommendation

- R6** In consultation with tenants, improve resident involvement by:
- providing systems for tenants to feed their views upwards and downwards in tenant involvement structures;
 - improving planning and communication so all parties know what is planned and what is happening in the development of resident involvement activities and structures;
 - informing tenants what Home is doing or is not doing in response to views put forward by tenants; and
 - developing a clear strategy for resident involvement that sets out the overall objectives and ensures that activities are relevant to tenants' and Home's objectives.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- greater influence by tenants on Home's priorities and services; and
- greater clarity for tenants on what Home is trying to achieve with resident involvement and how it will achieve it.

Implementing this recommendation will have medium impact with low costs. This should be carried out by December 2010.

What prospects are there that the services inspected will improve?

What is the track record in delivering improvement in the areas inspected?

27 We found strengths and weaknesses in balance in this area.

28 There are a number of strengths.

- Home is increasing the amount of profile information it has on tenants. It has collected information on half of tenants in a year which is good progress. Available information is improving and starting to be used to tailor services.
- Performance on gas servicing and repairs completed on time has improved but from a low base. Performance remained weak at the time of the inspection.
- Customer satisfaction is improving but remains low. Overall satisfaction, satisfaction with maintenance and with views being taken into account have all improved between the 2007 and 2009 STATUS survey. However, the improvement is from a low base and performance remains weak.
- Customers have more ways to be involved with Home and have influenced changes. In most areas the opportunities have increased with new service improvement groups being set up resulting in positive improvements in services. However, in the North West opportunities have reduced and since the inspection Home has focused its efforts to address this.
- Home has effectively implemented changes leading to improvements. It has reorganised the back office functions like finance, human resources and IT, making them consistent across the regions and more efficient and effective. Front line services are better supported.
- Value for money is improving. In 2009/10 effective procurement has saved £626,000 or 2.5 per cent of the budget in the areas of responsive repairs and gas servicing. Efficiency savings in back office jobs have reduced spending by £2.1 million or 14 per cent in two years. This frees up resources to spend on other priorities.

29 There are a number of weaknesses.

- Home was not making progress in the key repairs areas of meeting repairs appointments and completing repairs right first time at the time of the inspection. These are important performance areas for tenants.
- Home is behind most other landlords in producing comprehensive, monitored service standards in consultation with tenants. Existing standards are limited, not well publicised and not reported on.

What prospects are there that the services inspected will improve?

- Home has not made adequate progress on improving the response to complaints. Responses during the inspection were neither prompt nor comprehensive although Home has since set up a new complaints system with the aim of improving responses and delivery of service standards. A strong complaints system can help improve services.
- The value for money of the responsive repairs service is not improving fast enough. Costs are high compared to other organisations, getting more expensive and the overall quality is not consistent.
- Not all value for money plans for the year were implemented. In 2009/10 Home planned to develop unit cost measures to improve activity based costing and planned to establish a system to assess benchmarking cost data. However, this work was not done. The lack of understanding of costs and comparisons makes it harder to direct resources effectively and produce efficiency savings.

How well is performance managed in the areas inspected?

30 We found strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area.

31 There are a number of strengths.

- Home has a clear overall vision to guide the service. It has a well thought out corporate strategy which tenants have influenced. This links to regional and service strategies. This will help the organisation make improvements in priority areas.
- Home's leadership is strong with the new Executive team supported by a cohesive Board. Together they provide clear strategic direction and have made some difficult decisions where needed.
- The leadership has strong ambitions for service improvement. Recognising weak service performance in recent years the Board and Executive team have developed and driven an extensive transformation programme.
- The transformation programme is well thought out and financed. With extensive project management and expert help, Home plans to invest £70 million in revenue and capital costs in a wide ranging transformation programme with that will be tested by tenants as it progresses. The ambitious programme is more likely to succeed due to extensive preparation and investment.
- Plans to rationalise stock are focused on improving customers' experience. Home plans to divest itself of large numbers of properties in areas where it believes other landlords with greater concentrations of stock can provide a better service. This contraction to areas where Home has a strong presence will make it more cost effective to provide good quality services and enable better local engagement.
- The new leadership is self aware about the organisation's weaknesses and is open to discussing them. This open culture has not fully permeated down yet. Front line staff and middle managers are keen to see changes and improvements but are less aware of the organisation's weaknesses and more defensive. The culture at the top sets a new tone for the rest of the organisation and will help it make improvements.

What prospects are there that the services inspected will improve?

- Home has addressed the recommendations of this report effectively with a comprehensive well structured action plan drawn up in full consultation with tenants. This forms a robust plan to deliver the improvements needed.
- The leadership is making progress with some key issues. Poor performance is being dealt with, internal communications are well regarded by staff and a robust risk assessment process is in place.
- Home is introducing new improved performance measures and targets for 2010/11 which will be collected on a new single, consistent monitoring system and will link with targets in plans. Plans to merge geographic regions can also improve the current inconsistency in some areas of service and together these measures will help drive up performance.
- Home has detailed and ambitious plans to make significant savings in the future. Following significant investment, the transformation programme aims to break even in 2011/12 and to produce a recurring benefit of £33 million a year from then on. This has the potential to provide significant resources to improve services.

32 There are a number of weaknesses.

- Not all strategies are robust. The diversity strategy lacks analysis of issues and priorities for improvement, the strategic approach to access and customer services is under developed and where interim plans exist they lack SMART^{xi} targets.
- Home has developed high level strategies but interim plans for 2010/11 were still in development in April 2010. Transformational plans are being developed in parallel with interim plans to improve existing services. This is leading to late staff targets for the year and budgets have not been aligned with plans.
- Staff have lacked a road map to show them how and when things will change. They are aware of and support the approach of introducing transformational change. At the time of the inspection staff did not know what was happening, when it might happen or when they would be told. Management shared with us details of their communication plan which involved informing staff once key questions had been addressed. Staff have since been informed but the earlier uncertainty has been difficult for staff and had potential to impact on service delivery.
- Involved residents do not know what is going on with transformation and are not clear about involvement structures. The newly implemented structures have not bedded in yet and are not fully understood. It is difficult for tenants to make positive inputs into plans and improvements without clarity on either plans or the structures that will give them influence.
- Existing plans are not informed by robust benchmarking. Staff do not know how their services compare, costs comparisons are out of date and comparison data is not used in performance reports or to influence services. Plans are in place to address this.

^{xi} SMART: specific, measurable, agreed, realistic and time-bound. This usually refers to targets in improvement plans.

What prospects are there that the services inspected will improve?

- Contractor monitoring and management has not been consistent due to regional structures previously in place. Some relevant contracts lacked variance reporting, challenge and resident input into monitoring. Some repairs contractors were not paid on time and found it difficult to find the person responsible for authorising payments. Work flow was inconsistent and some works orders were poorly specified. Since the inspection Home has implemented a new national structure and clearer remit to manage contractor performance as well as source goods and services.
- Learning from practice is mixed. The process of learning from complaints, learning between contractors and in-house teams, learning between regions and from internal data systems is underdeveloped. The organisation is learning from various other organisations in and out of the sector but lacks a planned and systematic approach to this. A systematic approach to learning from Home's own practices and from examining outcomes for customers would have improved services more.

Do the areas inspected have capacity to improve?

33 We found strengths significantly outweigh weaknesses in this area.

34 There are a number of strengths.

- The new executive team brings new expertise to the organisation. Five of the seven members are new in the last 18 months. Some come from outside of the sector bringing in a fresh perspective. They have made reasonable progress in the past year.
- Home has a solid base for building improvements. It has centralised functions that were, until recently, scattered and semi autonomous. By strengthening and unifying back office functions and making them more efficient, Home is in a good position to roll out change in a consistent manner.
- Training opportunities are good. Staff are positive about the training they receive. The gaps on diversity are being addressed and Home makes good use of computer based training and live interactive presentations over the computer networks. Home trained all managers on a course that won the regional sector wide CIPD^{xii} developing people award. Well trained staff and effective managers working in a consistent way help deliver improvements and a strong service.
- IT is adequate at present but the platforms are getting stronger and developed plans are in place for significant improvement. A new CRM^{xiii} system, new phone systems, mobile working technology and a significantly improved website are some of the changes planned for 2010/11.

^{xii} CIPD - Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development is the main trade body for HR

^{xiii} CRM - Contact relationship management software records contact with customers so that staff can follow the issues a customer has been raising and what services have been delivered.

What prospects are there that the services inspected will improve?

- Staff morale is positive. Staff are in a difficult position facing the uncertainty of major change with little information on what that change might be. They are bearing up well with a positive approach and average levels of morale in their staff survey. A positive approach by staff helps change to be successful and improves customer service.
- Home benefits from strong HR management. Staff receive regular one to one meetings and competency based appraisals. The arrangements have been reviewed with staff focus groups and desktop assessments of appraisals and objective setting to ensure they are robust. Staff are well supported.
- Finances are robust and well managed. Managers are trained to manage their budgets and deliver value for money. Budgets are properly monitored and finances well controlled. Effective procurement and efficiency improvements are delivering extra resources to invest in services. Home is successful at bringing in external resources as set out above under value for money.
- Relationships with contractors are positive. Home has ended unsuccessful contracts and now mainly works well with gas and responsive repairs contractors. These positive relationships promote better services.

35 There are few weaknesses.

- Existing systems remain a block to improvement. The telephone systems do not enable proper call monitoring, the HR staff training database does not record what training staff have received locally and not all staff know how to make best use of the systems they have. While plans exist to address these issues they remain a barrier to improvement.

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Short Notice
Inspection
Action Plan





“ Any improvement surely has got to be better for some tenants, I myself cannot find fault as I have always been satisfied. As for information sent to us from Home I think it is very good. ”



**R1 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:
PROVIDE A HIGH PERFORMANCE IN ANNUAL GAS SERVICING**
Audit Commission Target Date: Immediately

R1. Ensure that Home consistently services all gas appliances it owns annually in line with the law.

Responsible: Jim Preston – Director of Maintenance Services | Executive Sponsor - Rosemary Du Rose

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we've achieved this? |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| Customers are safer in their homes because gas appliances in all Home properties are serviced once a year. | Establish a Gas Policy to deal effectively with “no access” properties. | Customer sign off - July 2010 (completed). Board sign off - September 2010. | We have already increased the number of homes with a certificate, from 97.97% at the end of March, to 99.65% at the end of July (124 properties without a valid certificate). | We know the actions we have taken are working when: 100% of properties have a safety certificate (by September 2010). |
| | Update procedures for colleagues and develop a toolkit to support these new procedures: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communicate new procedures• Embed new procedures through individual objectives. | Develop toolkit by the end of July (completed). Updated procedures roll out - August 2010. | The National Customer Panel approved draft policy on 17th June 2010, wording in policy strengthened as a result of customer feedback. Customer Service Improvement Group in South considered and commented on letters to customers within procedure and the letters were changed as a direct result of feedback (June 2010). | |
| | Introduce detailed monitoring plan of “no access” properties and action taken to be monitored at Director level. | Completed and to be monitored monthly. | Legal services researched best practice in sector and made recommendations on all available powers. New monthly monitoring form in place for “no access”. | |

Costs/Resources required

Additional legal costs will be incurred with earlier legal action taken and additional possession proceedings commenced and enforced. Legal action carried out in house at approx cost of £15 per case. We have prioritised £5,000 of existing resources to fund legal interventions where needed.

How customers will have a say: The National Customer Panel improved the policy by ensuring that it was clearly worded and took account of customers' and clients' needs. The Customer Service Improvement Group ensured that communications on gas servicing to customers and clients were clearly worded in order to increase first time access for gas servicing.

“ This plan will not make my life better as there wasn't a problem in the first place. I do not have any complaints! ”

R2 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

CONSULT WITH CUSTOMERS AND REVIEW BEST PRACTICE ELSEWHERE TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER CARE AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

Audit Commission Target Date: Immediately

R2.1 Produce measurable service standards.

Responsible: Donna Middleton – Head of Customer Contact Centre | Executive Sponsor - Rosemary Du Rose

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we've achieved this? |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| Customers will be able to hold us accountable for service delivery; because they will understand the quality of service they can expect, can see how well we are performing, and have opportunities to hold us accountable. | Introduce a Service Level Agreement framework with measureable service standards for all access channels as part of the Customer Relationship Management and website delivery. | Service Level Agreement framework principles to be defined by October 2010. | Budget agreed. Customer and client consultation undertaken. Content management design drafted for executive sign off. | We know the actions we have taken are working when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 85% of customers and clients that are satisfied or very satisfied with Home's customer and client service (by March 2011) • Results against service standards published by October 2010, ongoing measurement against standards. |
| | Use the service standard measures to effectively review and monitor processes. | September 2010 and ongoing. | Included in Customer Relationship Management scope, information in Transformation project plan. | |
| | Improve website to improve self service options and allow customers to easily access our service standards data and performance information. | Website re-launch Phase 1 September 2010, Phase 2 definition November 2010. | | |
| | Introduce a standard suite of letters and templates delivered via Customer Relationship Management to be used by front, middle and back office. | May 2011. | | |

Costs/Resources required

We have budgeted around £1m within the transformation programme to procure and configure Customer Relationship Management to support improvements in the standards of customer care we provide to customers.

How customers will have a say: The National Customer Panel will be involved in helping to define our service standards. Customers will be consulted on our new service standards through customer satisfaction surveys, Local Panels, One to One interviews, Involving you Steering Group, the customer newsletter, the website, focus groups and local office visits.

“ I hope this new action plan works, it still needs a little work on it but it’s a thought plan this time. ”

**R2 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:
CONSULT WITH CUSTOMERS AND REVIEW BEST PRACTICE ELSEWHERE TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER CARE AND ACCESS TO SERVICES**

Audit Commission Target Date: June 2011

R2.2 Report to customers on service performance and performance against standards and how this compares with other providers.

Responsible: Stuart Lawson - Head of Performance Reporting | Executive Sponsor - Peter Stott

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we’ve achieved this? |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| Customers will know how good Home’s services are by comparing performance with agreed standards and other housing associations. | Publish an annual report to customers which includes a self assessment of our performance against Tenant Services Authority standards; involvement of customers in scrutinising performance; and benchmarking using Housemark. | Annual report published on website by 1st October 2010 – immediately followed by hard copy to customers. | Initial information published on website 31st May 2010. A project team has been established to lead production of the annual report. Customers have helped to review Home’s performance against the Tenant Services Authority standards and are helping to design the annual report. | We know the actions we have taken are working when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 85% of customers and clients that are satisfied or very satisfied with Home’s customer and client service (by March 2011). |
| | Develop specific section of the website to provide current performance information, to be readily accessible from front page and updated on monthly basis. Include current performance measures against targets. | May 2010 and ongoing. | | |
| | Include comparison with other providers. | 1st October 2010. | | |
| | Publish a quarterly performance bulletin on the website and intranet. | August 2010 and ongoing. | | |
| | Make performance information available so that this can be included in relevant communications with customers. | 1st October 2010. | | |

Costs/Resources required

We estimate the costs of publishing the annual report to be £42,000. These costs have been identified through the implementation project and included in budgets.

How customers will have a say: The National Customer Panel will help ensure that the annual report to customers is clear about Home’s performance in terms of its own standards and those of comparable organisations. Customers will help us shape the style and content of the annual report through focus groups and the National Customer Panel to ensure that this information is clear and understandable. Customers will be able to feedback views on performance through the website and a variety of channels.

“ No one has ever checked to see if a repair has been done correctly. ”

**R2 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:
CONSULT WITH CUSTOMERS AND REVIEW BEST PRACTICE ELSEWHERE TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER CARE AND ACCESS TO SERVICES**

Audit Commission Target Date: June 2011

R2.3 Improve the website to provide more information and to be more interactive.

Responsible: Mark Fletcher – Director, Communications | Executive Sponsor - Mark Henderson

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we've achieved this? |
|--|--|-----------------|--|---|
| Customers will be able to access Home Group services and information 24 hours a day and be able to use the web as a key channel for interacting with Home. | Improve the layout of the website so that it is more easy to navigate. | September 2010. | Current website has been restructured, most of copy has been re-written, additional information has been added. Customers have been consulted on the structure, content of the website, and digital needs through call listening, group meetings, travelling with repairs operatives, online and postal survey. | We know the actions we have taken are working when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We increase the number of unique visits to our website by 10% compared to the same month in previous years • We increase the number of repairs reported on the web to 789 per month. |
| | Set up news streams so that content reflects customers' needs and desire for local news. | September 2010. | | |
| | Enable customers to express views on all pages. | September 2010. | | |
| | Ensure that front page is current and responsive. | September 2010. | | |
| | Improve transactional nature of the website. | November 2010. | | |

Costs/Resources required

We have a budget of around £140,000 within the transformation programme to support improvements to the website, including improving information provision and transactional functionality.

How customers will have a say: Customers have been consulted on the look and feel of the website and on the content they would want to be available. Customers have also been able to express views on the content, look and feel throughout the period of web redevelopment.



R2 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:
**CONSULT WITH CUSTOMERS AND REVIEW BEST PRACTICE ELSEWHERE TO IMPROVE
 CUSTOMER CARE AND ACCESS TO SERVICES**

Audit Commission Target Date: June 2011

R2.4 Monitor and improve call handling performance.

Responsible: Donna Middleton – Head of Customer Service Centre | Executive Sponsor - Rosemary Du Rose



| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we've achieved this? | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Customers will receive improved services when they contact us, whatever channel they choose with improved call handling; speedy response times; a greater focus on providing positive solutions to their issues; and quicker and more consistent responses at first point of contact. | Create a customer service centre to deliver a single access point for telephony for customer service through integrated technology and customer relationship management systems: | | | | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete initial design work; • Phase 1 of migration of services to service centre. | August 2010. May 2011. | Head of Customer contact centre recruited and two team leaders are in place. Supplier for Customer Relationship Management system identified, cool off period complete. Processes identified and re-engineered at a high level. | We know the actions we have taken are working when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We consistently answer 100% of calls within 30 seconds inline with the National Customer Panel requirements; and • 85% of customers and clients say they are satisfied/very satisfied with Home's customer and client service (by March 2011). | |
| | Analyse business data to make real time changes to optimise speed and quality of call answering: | | | | External company engaged for outsourcing of technical integration. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put in place reporting and performance indicator mechanisms; and • Embed reporting requirements and Service Level Agreements in out of hours contract. | July 2010 (completed). August 2010. | Team leader roles in place. Training modules and call structures produced. Interim reporting in place. 'To Be' reporting and key performance suite defined. | | |
| | Deliver improved capacity to handle call volumes by rationalising current local numbers; using appropriate integrated technology; and messaging facilities. | | Team leader role in place across all regions July 2010 (completed). | | Technical changes agreed and signed off with ICT, outsource company engaged. Resource budget agreed. |
| Introduce new skills in to the organisation to coach and develop telephony teams. | | Telephony training module delivered in August 2010. | | | |

Costs/Resources required

The creation of a customer service centre is a significant change to our delivery model – we have budgeted around £3m as part of our transformation programme to implement the major property, facility, process and organisational changes necessary to deliver this change.

How customers will have a say: Customers will be consulted on our new service standards through customer satisfaction surveys, Local Panels, One to One interviews, Involving you Steering Group, the customer newsletter, the website, focus groups and local office visits. Feedback from customer satisfaction survey will establish customers' experiences. Customers will support the development and design of the contact centre.

“ Being a tenant I am quite happy with the way Home is carrying out their repairs and service gas appliances. I’ve had no problems with them so far. ”

R2 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

CONSULT WITH CUSTOMERS AND REVIEW BEST PRACTICE ELSEWHERE TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER CARE AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

Audit Commission Target Date: June 2011

R2.5 Complete the review of complaints to ensure a consistent and high quality of response that addresses all issues raised and learns from them.

Responsible: Diane Desay – Customer and Client Experience Director | Executive Sponsor - Rosemary Du Rose

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we've achieved this? |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| Customers' complaints will be handled more quickly and consistently with the new service standard. | Implement complaint project to: | 5th July 2010 (completed). | The initial project was agreed by the customer panel. Panel required group of 250 customers to be consulted on new standards and over 90% agreed with approach. | We know the actions we have taken are working when: |
| Customers will benefit from Home's ability to learn from previous complaints and improve services and therefore reduce the need for further complaints. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce new standards for complaints responses Implement a new upgraded complaint management system Establish a team to analyse data and communicate performance and insights Communicate insights to both customers and colleagues to help identify service failures and improvements Review implementation and identify lessons learnt. | 5th July (completed). 9th August 2010 (completed). September 2010. Post implementation review September 2010. | Central complaints team to provide performance reporting and analytics have been recruited. System upgrade commissioned. Amendment to complaints standards/policy. Webinar and face to face training on ReSOLVE system rolled out to colleagues. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 90% of complaints are dealt with within target timescales There is a 30% decrease in the number of complaints at each stage of the process We reduce the time it takes to deal with complaints to 5 days. |
| | Customer Service skills workshop for all colleagues including plain English and effective resolution. | Training roll out to commence 1st September 2010, full roll out of training to be completed by December 2010. | | |

Costs/Resources required

The cost of this project is £32,263 (including expenditure on system upgrade/reconfiguration, system training and the Explain Satisfaction survey). In addition, an ongoing budget of around £91,000 has been identified to provide a 4 full time equivalent complaints team to manage the new process and translate learning into action.

How customers will have a say: Initial consultation has taken place with the National Customer Panel and 250 customers on the approach to complaints handling. The National Customer Panel will be informed of complaint performance, root cause analysis and trends at each National Customer Panel meeting and will advise on service improvements accordingly. Local customer groups will be informed of local Government Office Region performance – highlighting areas for improvement and actions taken.



“ It looks like you are going in the right direction. Thank you for a good service. ”

R2 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

CONSULT WITH CUSTOMERS AND REVIEW BEST PRACTICE ELSEWHERE TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER CARE AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

Audit Commission Target Date: June 2011

R2.6 Ensure all buildings used by customers to access services comply with the Disability Discrimination Act.

Responsible: Zoey Hawthorne – Director of Development Services | Executive Sponsor - Joe Docherty

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we've achieved this? |
|---|---|--|---|--|
| All buildings used by customers comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and subsequent acts. | Define all potential buildings within scope, including offices, depots, foyers, and community buildings, undertaking a baseline assessment. | Review baseline data and agree improvement targets by 25th June 2010 (completed). | Baseline assessment completed and 18 Disability Discrimination Act assessments completed. | We know the actions we have taken are working when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have completed 56 outstanding Disability Discrimination Act assessments • 100% of buildings used to deliver customer services are Disability Discrimination Act compliant (by March 2011). |
| | Undertake a programme of new/refreshed Disability Discrimination Act assessments where required. | 18 assessments to be completed by 10th August 2010 (completed). 38 additional assessments to be undertaken between 10th August and 10th October 2010. | | |
| | Identify and deliver a programme of physical adaptations where buildings are capable of reasonable adjustments, where not, strategic decision to be made of future use of building and service delivery in that area. | Resulting Disability Discrimination Act investment work to be concluded by December or where more significant works are required, by March 2011. | | |
| | Develop a group Disability Discrimination Act compliance policy and methodology and embed within the new asset management strategy. | Formal policy to be finalised by December 2010. | | |
| | Deliver a communication plan to raise awareness with colleagues on our new corporate approach to Disability Discrimination Act compliance management. | January 2010. | | |

Costs/Resources required

We have redeployed 2 full time equivalent to manage the Disability Discrimination Act improvement process and have identified a budget of £200,000 to implement changes to offices identified in the assessments. This will be reviewed as assessments are completed.

How customers will have a say: Customers will be consulted locally on any changes to service delivery.

“ 9 times out of 10 I can never get through to your office when I call. Because I work I find it difficult to be at home when a tradesman needs to come. Flexible times will make this easier for me.”

R2 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

CONSULT WITH CUSTOMERS AND REVIEW BEST PRACTICE ELSEWHERE TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER CARE AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

Audit Commission Target Date: June 2011

R2.7 Write letters in plain English.

Responsible: Mark Henderson – Chief Executive

| Key outcomes for our customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we've achieved this? |
|---|---|-------------------------|---|--|
| Customers will understand all communication from Home and be able to act on it where appropriate. | Introduce new guidance and training for all internal colleagues on how to write in plain English. | August 2010. | Customer panel have endorsed guidelines booklet for colleagues. | We know the actions we have taken are working when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from customers tells us that information is easily understandable; • 85% of customers and clients say they are satisfied/very satisfied with Home's customer and client service (by March 2011). |
| | Introduce an advisory service to enable letters to be improved before they are sent out. | September 2010. | | |
| | Use the customer panel as a sounding board on the development of new guidelines for colleagues. | July 2010 (completed). | | |
| | Organise customer panel led briefings for letter writers so that originators understand the customer perspective. | September/October 2010. | | |
| | Share best practice from other organisations. | September/October 2010. | | |
| | Launch internal campaign to support cultural shift. | August 2010. | | |

Costs/Resources required

£10,000 within existing budget for materials; £85,000 for Customer Service workshops of which clear communication ie. plain English is one component.

How customers will have a say: The National Customer Panel and Keep It Short and Simple (KISS) Groups will be used to help improve standard and sensitive communications to customers. The National Customer Panel has been consulted on the development of a plain English guide for colleagues.

“ I see this plan as having a positive impact on our service as it is focussing on key areas customers have identified. ”

R3 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

IN CONSULTATION WITH CUSTOMERS, IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR CUSTOMERS WHO HAVE DIVERSE NEEDS

Audit Commission Target Date: June 2011

R3.1 Provide training and guidance to enable colleagues to contribute effectively to safeguarding, to use translation and communication services and to tailor services to individual needs.

Responsible: Susan Coulson – Director of People Management and Development | Executive Sponsor - Peter Stott

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we've achieved this? |
|---|---|--|--|--|
| All customers will receive support that is relevant to their individual circumstances and will make them safer from a safeguarding point of view. | Roll out half day safeguarding training - topics to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Types of abuse and sign of abuse • Legal framework relating to vulnerable adults • Case studies to identify abuse • Framework to support children and young people • Barriers of children reporting abuse • Understanding the role of the alerter • Support and advice we can provide to potential victims of abuse • Communication skills for dealing with vulnerability including translation services. | Training runs from 29th June – 6th October 2010. Training will be ongoing via induction and refresher training. | SITRA, the largest provider of training for housing with care and support, have been engaged to develop a bespoke programme to meet the needs of Home. We have so far trained 120 colleagues in safeguarding, translation and communication services. Webinar on translation services to Senior and Business Leadership groups on 18th June 2010. Communication to all colleagues regarding translation and communication services rolled out week commencing 21st June 2010. | We know the actions we have taken are working when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have trained 775 colleagues in safeguarding, translation and communication services; • We increase the number of minority, marginalised and disadvantaged customers engaged. |
| | Promote translation services with colleagues with posters for offices and intranet communications. | July 2010 (completed). | | |
| | Develop e-learning product to raise awareness of safeguarding policy requirements for all customer facing staff. | September 2010. | | |

Costs/Resources required

Costs of approximately £50,000 for face to face and e-learning training have been allocated in existing budgets.

How customers will have a say: Customers have been involved in the development of the safeguarding policy and have been involved in the development and piloting of training courses.

“ As far as ‘home improvement’ goes you have made plans and promises in past years that have not come fruition, why should I expect a better service now? ”

R3 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

IN CONSULTATION WITH CUSTOMERS, IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR CUSTOMERS WHO HAVE DIVERSE NEEDS

Audit Commission Target Date: June 2011

R3.2 Break down satisfaction surveys and customers’ views by diversity strands to find out if services are meeting the needs of all customers and taking the appropriate action where necessary.

Responsible: Diane Desay – Customer and Client Experience Director | Executive Sponsor - Rosemary Du Rose

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we’ve achieved this? |
|---|--|----------------------------|------------------------|---|
| All customers’ needs and views are taken account of in the development and delivery of services. | Explain data broken down by diversity strands. | August 2010. | | We know the actions we have taken are working when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All services have achieved and retained the Gold Equality and Diversity Standard (by 2012); and • 80% of customers and clients are satisfied that their views are taken into account (target date to be set by the end of September 2010). |
| Customers from diverse backgrounds are able to recognise that their views have been taken account of. | Improve and update the information we hold about our customers ensuring we capture all relevant data. | December 2010. | | |
| | Analyse all surveys by diversity strand and use to set regional targets for colleagues to engage with diversity strands and take appropriate action. | End September 2010. | | |
| | Monitor, track monthly, and take appropriate actions within the business where trends show adverse impacts on particular groups. | Ongoing from October 2010. | | |

Costs/Resources required

Approximate £25,000 to the end of 2010/11 using external resources.

How customers will have a say: Diverse and specific groups of customers will be engaged to ensure that their views are being taken into account and lead to service improvements. Diverse and specific groups of customers are asked to provide feedback on whether changes to services are meeting their needs.



“ Over the years I have noticed your response to calls made in the office have improved greatly. ”

R3 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

IN CONSULTATION WITH CUSTOMERS, IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR CUSTOMERS WHO HAVE DIVERSE NEEDS

Audit Commission Target Date: June 2011

R3.3 Ensuring all equality impact assessments are undertaken and monitored to see if actions are carried out and have the desired impact.

Responsible: Athar Mohammed - Diversity Consultant | Executive Sponsor - Peter Stott

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we've achieved this? |
|--|---|---|------------------------|---|
| <p>All customers' needs are taken into account when services are both being developed and delivered.</p> <p>Groups with particular needs will have equal access to opportunities and services.</p> | <p>Develop a group wide plan to ensure that all customer facing services have an Equality Impact Assessment, focussing on high priority areas first.</p> <p>Carry out assessments in line with plan.</p> | <p>High priority services will be impact assessed by the end of 2010 and all others by June 2011.</p> | | <p>We know the actions we have taken are working when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All services have achieved the Gold standard for equality and diversity (by 2012); • We can evidence improvements to services as a result of using equality impact assessments • 85% of customers and clients say they are satisfied/very satisfied with Home's customer and client service (by March 2011). |
| | <p>Managers for service areas will be responsible for monitoring the improvement actions from Equality Impact Assessments. The National Customer Panels and Board to receive regular reports.</p> | <p>In line with the plan.</p> | | |
| | <p>Improvement actions will be consolidated into the new corporate approach to improvement planning, with progress monitored quarterly, once this is in place.</p> | <p>Corporate approach to improvement planning by April 2011.</p> | | |
| | <p>Best practice from Equality Impact Assessments to be collated by the Equality and Diversity advisory groups and the local equality and diversity strategy groups and shared throughout the organisation.</p> | <p>June 2011.</p> | | |

Costs/Resources required

Responsibility for delivering against this will rest with individual managers and be supported by the existing Equality & Diversity Strategy Group and Ambassadors as part of their existing workload.

How customers will have a say: The National Customer Panel will help determine the order in which functions will be impact assessed. Customers will be part of the Equality Impact Assessment process. The National Customer Panel will receive regular reports on Equality Impact. This approach was approved by the customer/client panel in June 2010.

R3 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

IN CONSULTATION WITH CUSTOMERS, IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR CUSTOMERS WHO HAVE DIVERSE NEEDS

Audit Commission Target Date: June 2011

R3.4 Ensuring that protocols and other suitable arrangements are in place in all areas that enable colleagues to have sufficient access to support for vulnerable customers.

Responsible: Rachael Byrne – Executive Director, Care and Support

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we've achieved this? |
|---|--|--|--|---|
| Vulnerable customers will receive support that is relevant to their individual circumstances and will help them to be safe. | Extend safeguarding protocols currently in operation in Care and Support, across the business. Training identified in recommendation R3.1 will support staff to identify where support may be needed. | December 2010. | SITRA, the largest provider of training for housing with care and support, have been engaged to develop a bespoke programme to meet the needs of Home. | We know the actions we have taken are working when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have trained 775 colleagues in safeguarding, translation and communication services • We can evidence that partnership arrangements with Care and Support colleagues have been met in the end of year performance reviews (March 2011). |
| | Extend current safeguarding management leads established in Care and Support to Customer Services. Leads ensure that safeguarding protocols are followed and that learning from serious case reviews result in protocol updates. | December 2010. | We have so far trained 120 colleagues in safeguarding, translation and communication services. | |
| | Establish formal buddying system across Care and Support and Customer Service. This will involve sharing service lists; contact information; service information relevant for the area, and creating a help guide for specific situations such as homelessness. Review progress against objectives. | Set targets for buddying roll out in individual objectives by July 2010. | | |
| | Develop a guide on what Care and Support can offer, to be used in communications with customers and as a resource for Customer Service colleagues. Include references to other agencies as appropriate. Develop advertisement for Care and Support services to be routinely included in customer newsletters. | Care and Support offer guide and briefings to be developed by September 2010. Publish guides on internet and use in communication with customers from September 2010. | March 2011. | |

Costs/Resources required

We will use existing communication channels to support delivery of this action and do not anticipate incurring any additional costs.

How customers will have a say: Customers helped to develop our safeguarding policy and subsequent protocols. Keep It Short and Simple Panel will assist in ensuring that a guide on Care and Support services is easily understood.



“ So far so good, I’ve had no problems. Why fix what is not broken, in my eyes. ”

R3 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

IN CONSULTATION WITH CUSTOMERS, IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR CUSTOMERS WHO HAVE DIVERSE NEEDS

Audit Commission Target Date: June 2011

R3.5 Complete the collection of profile information on customers and use the information to provide tailored services.

Responsible: Diane Desay – Customer and Client Experience Director | Executive Sponsor - Rosemary Du Rose

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we’ve achieved this? |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| <p>All customers’ needs are taken into account when services are both being developed and delivered.</p> <p>Groups with particular needs will have equal access to opportunities and services.</p> | <p>Outsource the collection of profiling information during August and September to significantly increase the profiling information we hold.</p> <p>Front line colleagues to collect profiling information for all new customers from 14th June onwards.</p> | December 2010. | <p>Outsourcing contract has been agreed with the company who carried out our STATUS survey.</p> <p>Front line colleagues have individual targets for collection from 14th June.</p> <p>All colleagues now have access to profiling reports and all senior managers have targets to evidence how they have used profiling in tailoring services to customers.</p> | <p>We know the actions we have taken are working when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have profiled 100% of our customers (by March 2011); • We can evidence improvements to services as a result of using profiling information. |
| | <p>Ensure all colleagues can access profiling reports.</p> | July 2010 (completed). | | |
| | <p>All senior managers have a target to evidence how they have used the information to tailor services to customers.</p> | July 2010 and ongoing. | | |
| | <p>Implement the Customer Relationship Management system to enable us to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have one single view of customer/client information • Better target services to customers • Enable us to target engagement at specific groups resulting in more meaningful consultation • Improve access channels • Avoid duplication of effort by providing services more effectively and efficiently, driving down costs. | May 2011 (on go live of contact centre). | | |

Costs/Resources required

We have budgeted £30,000 for external support to collect the profiling information.

How customers will have a say: Customers were involved in the format of the profiling form and questions asked. The National Customer Panel will consider improvements made as a result of the use of profiling information.

“ I love living here, it’s a lot better than the house I used to live in with 2 kids for 7 years.”

**R3 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:
IN CONSULTATION WITH CUSTOMERS, IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR CUSTOMERS WHO HAVE DIVERSE NEEDS**

Audit Commission Target Date: June 2011

R3.6 Collect the diversity profile of involved customers and take action to involve customers from sections of the community who are not well represented.

Responsible: Diane Desay – Customer and Client Experience Director | Executive Sponsor - Rosemary Du Rose

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we’ve achieved this? |
|---|--|----------------------|--|---|
| Views of customers from sections of the community which are not currently well represented will be both represented and taken account of. | Interrogate available customer profiling data to identify low represented groups in each Government Office Region. | October 2010. | Customer profiling activity commenced and continues. We have achieved 64% profiling to date. | We know the actions we have taken are working when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have profiled 100% of our customers (by March 2011); • 80% of customers and clients are satisfied that their views are taken into account (target date to be set by the end of September 2010). |
| | Use the National Customer Panel, independent research and best practice research to identify best methods of engagement. | Review October 2010. | | |
| | Run engagement initiatives in each Government Office Region to attract involvement through various channels. | December 2010. | | |
| | Evidence involvement and outcomes based on interaction and research. | January 2011. | | |
| | Communicate outcomes to all stakeholders as appropriate – appealing to low represented groups where possible. | November 2010. | | |

Costs/Resources required

Existing resources will be used – this includes redeploying £10,000 during 2010.

How customers will have a say: Initial project and approach has been agreed by the National Customer Panel. Customers to work with Home colleagues to agree approach locally. This will be organised on the basis of Government Office regions. Independent research to establish how different customer groups would like to be communicated with and engaged. Customers will be able to prioritise, track and monitor improvements as part of a new approach to improvement planning.

“ I am very happy with all that you do. The last contractor for repairs was rubbish, things are better now. ”

R3 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

IN CONSULTATION WITH CUSTOMERS, IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR CUSTOMERS WHO HAVE DIVERSE NEEDS

Audit Commission Target Date: June 2011

R3.7 Work with minority, marginalised and disadvantaged groups of customers to improve approach and plans for improving services to diverse customers.

Responsible: Diane Desay - Customer and Client Experience Director | Executive Sponsor - Rosemary Du Rose

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we've achieved this? |
|--|---|-----------------|--|---|
| <p>All customers' needs are taken into account when services are both being developed and delivered.</p> <p>Groups with particular needs will have equal access to opportunities and services.</p> | Interrogate customer profiling data to identify minority, marginalised and disadvantaged groups in each Government Office Region. | October 2010. | Customer profiling activity commenced and continues. We have achieved 64% profiling to date. | <p>We know the actions we have taken are working when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 80% of customers and clients are satisfied that their views are taken into account (target date to be set by the end of September 2010). |
| | Use Care and Support consultative framework to approach such groups and identify best methods of engagement. | September 2010. | | |
| | Work with clients and care and support colleagues to conduct focus groups and research where necessary. | December 2010. | | |
| | Evidence involvement and outcomes based on interaction and research. | February 2011. | | |
| | Communicate to all stakeholders as appropriate – appealing to minority, marginalised and disadvantaged groups. | February 2011. | | |

Costs/Resources required

We have provided a resource estimate for this action as part of R3.6.

How customers will have a say: Initial project and approach has been agreed by National Customer Panel. Customers to work with Home colleagues to agree approach locally. This will be organised on the basis of Government Office regions. Independent research to establish how different customer groups would like to be communicated with and engaged. Customers will be able to prioritise, track and monitor improvements as part of a new approach to improvement planning.

“ Home is a good provider for people with disabilities. ”



**R4 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:
IN CONSULTATION WITH CUSTOMERS, IMPROVE VALUE FOR MONEY OF SERVICES**

Audit commission target date: June 2011

R4.1 Develop an overarching strategy and implementation plan for value for money.

Responsible: James Walder – Head of Finance (Customer Service) | Executive Sponsor - Alan Park

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we've achieved this? |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| Customers will receive better value for money than at present. Customers will have greater influence on achieving value for money on the basis of their priorities. | Develop a corporate strategy and implementation plan for value for money in consultation with customers. | Feedback from National Customer Panel by August 2010. Wider consultation with colleagues and customers during August 2010. Final approval from Executive in September 2010. | We have reviewed best practice in the sector. | We know the actions we have taken are working when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can evidence that we have considered value for money in taking resourcing decisions for a number of service areas (April 2011); • 80% of customers say they are satisfied or very satisfied with the value for money they get for their rent in our STATUS survey, currently 72% (next survey in 2011); • Value for money is embedded in operational plans for all parts of business (April 2011); and • We can demonstrate that colleagues understand and follow our value for money approach (April 2011). |
| | Strategy launched on website and summary in customer newsletters. | October 2010. | | |
| | Develop guidance for managers on the use of benchmarking information in setting service plans, objectives and setting the 2011/12 budget. | October 2010. | | |
| | Develop a toolkit to raise awareness and develop skills around value for money for colleagues and involved customers. | October 2010. | | |
| | Establish forums for engaging customers in the reporting of value for money performance and improvement points/sharing good practice. | October 2010. | | |

Costs/Resources required

We have budgeted up to £10,000 for communications and for development of value for money training.

How customers will have a say: The National Customer Panel will help to develop the value for money strategy and implementation plan. Customers will be able to influence value for money decisions. Customers will be involved in developing the content and format of toolkits which will help to drive value for money in Home.

**R4 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:
IN CONSULTATION WITH CUSTOMERS, IMPROVE VALUE FOR MONEY OF SERVICES**

Audit commission target date: June 2011

R4.2 Take action to strengthen services and improve value by developing an understanding of the relationship between cost and quality in individual service areas, based on cost analysis and benchmarking of cost and quality.

Responsible: James Walder - Head of Finance (Customer Service) | Executive Sponsor - Alan Park

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we've achieved this? |
|--|--|-----------------------------|--|---|
| <p>Customers will be able to judge whether the services provided are worth the money spent on providing them against our service standards and with comparison to other housing providers.</p> <p>Customers will be able to use this information to have a greater degree of influence on Home spending decisions.</p> <p>Customers will receive better value for money than at present.</p> | Review current benchmarking arrangements for cost and quality. | September 2010. | <p>Housemark have been commissioned to carry out benchmarking for 2010/11.</p> | <p>We know the actions we have taken are working when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can evidence that we have considered value for money in taking resourcing decisions for a number of service areas (April 2011); • 80% of customers say they are satisfied very satisfied with the value for money they get for their rent in our STATUS survey (next survey in 2011); • Value for money is embedded in operational plans for all parts of business (April 2011); and • We can demonstrate that colleagues understand and follow our value for money approach (April 2011). |
| | Use Housemark to develop national benchmarks for cost and quality which can be used to target improvement. | September 2010. | | |
| | Use Housemark national benchmarking data to establish a baseline as at March 2010 and monitor improvements against baseline. | September 2010. | | |
| | Develop a strategic approach to benchmarking setting out who is responsible, what benchmarks will be used and how they will be used. | October 2010. | | |
| | Identify relevant benchmarking clubs and representatives from the business. Use clubs to understand regional variations, compare with others in locality and share best practice identified in sector. | October 2010 (and ongoing). | | |
| | Use benchmarking information from above sources to influence budget priorities and performance priorities through the budget process and service improvement process. | November 2010. | | |
| | Include top quartile information to performance indicator reports to Board. | Quarter 3 report. | | |
| | Publicise benchmarking information to colleagues and customers. | December 2010. | | |

Costs/Resources required

There is a £22,000 year cost implication for benchmarking via Housemark. All other activity will be undertaken by reprioritising existing resources.

How customers will have a say: Customers will be involved in ensuring that this information is presented in a way which best aids their understanding.

“ Get your contractors to speak english (not tech jargon). It demeans your customers when they do. Also when your contractors get us to fill in the survey they should supply a paid envelope so we send it to you not (via) them. ”

**R4 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:
IN CONSULTATION WITH CUSTOMERS, IMPROVE VALUE FOR MONEY OF SERVICES**

Audit commission target date: June 2011

R4.3 Develop service level plans for improving value for money.

Responsible: James Walder - Head of Finance (Customer Service) | Executive Sponsor - Alan Park

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we've achieved this? |
|---|--|------------------------------|------------------------|--|
| Customers will receive better value for money than at present. Customer will have greater influence on achieving value for money on the basis of their priorities. | Develop guidance for managers on the use of benchmarking information in delivering services in the current financial year. | October 2010. | | We know the actions we have taken are working when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can evidence that we have considered value for money in taking resourcing decisions for a number of service areas (April 2011); • 80% of customers say they are satisfied very satisfied with the value for money they get for their rent in our STATUS survey (next survey in 2011); • Value for money is embedded in operational plans for all parts of business (April 2011); and • We can demonstrate that colleagues understand and follow our value for money approach (April 2011). |
| | All services to put in place targets and action plans for improving value for money as part of the new corporate approach to improvement planning. | April 2011. | | |
| | Progress to be monitored through management teams on a quarterly basis. | December 2010 (and ongoing). | | |

Costs/Resources required

There are no incremental costs from this action, which will be delivered within the existing teams.

How customers will have a say: We will use customer insight to drive our service plans and direct resources.



“ All the ideas are common sense and can only benefit the people that they are intended for. ”

**R4 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:
IN CONSULTATION WITH CUSTOMERS, IMPROVE VALUE FOR MONEY OF SERVICES**

Audit commission target date: June 2011

R4.4 Involve customers, colleagues and other relevant stakeholders in prioritising the use of resources.

Responsible: Diane Desay – Customer and Client Experience Director | Executive Sponsor - Rosemary Du Rose

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we've achieved this? |
|---|--|---|--|---|
| Customers will have a greater degree of influence overall on Home's spending decisions which will result in customers receiving services that reflect their priorities. | Identify, publish and communicate a customer involvement framework/ process for value for money for Home. | October 2010. | Initial dialogue has taken place with the National Customer Panel on local frameworks. | <p>We know the actions we have taken are working when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 80% of customers and clients are satisfied with opportunities for involvement (target date to be set by the end of September 2010) • We can demonstrate that we have used customers' views to allocate the efficiency pot (April 2011). |
| | | | | |
| | Create efficiency pot – savings made at service level that customers can influence the reinvestment of. | Part of budget process, October/ November 2010. | | |
| | | | | |
| | Evidence that all major projects, products and services are assessed by customers, colleagues and stakeholders using independent research consultants to conduct focus groups where necessary. | November 2010. | | |
| | | | | |
| Evidence outcomes relating to involvement. | February 2011. | | | |
| | | | | |
| Communicate to all stakeholders as appropriate. | March 2011. | | | |
| | | | | |
| Publish priorities and cost information in quarterly magazine on the web. | March 2011. | | | |

Costs/Resources required

There are no additional costs to deliver this action.

How customers will have a say: Project and approach agreed by the National Customer Panel. Customers and clients at Government Office Region level to work with Home colleagues to agree approach locally. Independent research to consider how groups would like to be communicated with and engaged. Service improvements to be prioritised by customers and incorporated into the new corporate approach to improvement planning.

“ We have no complaints, we are happy with your service. The only thing is we were promised a fan in our bathroom for condensation and have heard nothing since for 6 months. ”

CUSTOMER PRIORITY
 26% of customers tell us they would like time slot appointments
 10% of customers wanted after hours and weekend appointments

**R5 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:
 IN CONSULTATION WITH CUSTOMERS, IMPROVE THE RESPONSIVE REPAIRS AND GAS SERVICE**

Audit commission target date: June 2011

R5.1 Develop a more flexible and consistent appointment system for repairs and gas servicing available at first point of contact.

Responsible: Jim Preston – Director of Maintenance Services | Executive Sponsor - Rosemary Du Rose

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we've achieved this? |
|--|--|-----------------------------|--|--|
| Customers' repairs and gas servicing will take place at times that suit their needs and will be book-able at the first point of contact. | Establish monitoring system for appointments made and kept. | 1st April 2010 and ongoing. | 2 hour appointment requirements included in current gas servicing tender. | We know the actions we have taken are working when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 90% of appointments are made at first point of contact (delivered by March 2011); 97% of appointments are kept (delivered by March 2011); 80% of repairs are "right first time" (delivered by September 2010); 93% of customers are satisfied with the repairs service (delivered by March 2011); and 96.5% of repairs are carried out within target response times (delivered by September 2010). |
| | Offer extended hours appointments at evenings and weekends. | October 2010. | Current ability to make appointments at first point of contact assessed. | |
| Customers will receive a service that will be flexible, fast, convenient and better value for money. | Offer 2 hour slots for appointments. | March 2011. | Short term fix agreed with contractor in Midlands and part of South to take calls direct and take calls at first point of contact. | |
| | Assess current position in our ability to make appointments at first point of contact. | July 2010 (Completed). | Percentage of appointments made and kept reported as a performance indicator. | |
| | Assess current position on appointments and hours of operation in existing contracts. | July 2010 (Completed). | | |
| | Amend current contracts to reflect increased specification. | April 2011. | | |

Costs/Resources required

Potential increase in costs due to renegotiation of contracts (estimated at £10,000).

How customers will have a say: The improved customer offer is based upon feedback from satisfaction surveys.



“ Can't in all fairness answer any of the above questions because I have never had any problems with gas servicing. Repairs, calls to office etc have always been very happy with all aspects. Find Home an excellent landlord.”



R5 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

IN CONSULTATION WITH CUSTOMERS, IMPROVE THE RESPONSIVE REPAIRS AND GAS SERVICE

Audit commission target date: June 2011

R5.2 Improve publicity around the importance of gas servicing and the ordering and appointments for gas servicing and responsive repairs.

Responsible: Jim Preston – Director of Maintenance Services | Executive Sponsor - Rosemary Du Rose

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we've achieved this? |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| Customers will know how to book appointments for gas servicing and repairs. | Develop adverts to communicate with customers on the importance of allowing access for gas servicing. | August 2010 (completed). | An advert has been included in the customer newsletter and will be included in all subsequent editions. | We know the actions we have taken are working when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90% of appointments are made at first point of contact (delivered by March 2011); • 97% of appointments are kept (delivered by March 2011); • 80% of repairs are “right first time” (delivered by September 2010); • 93% of customers are satisfied with the repairs service (delivered by March 2011); and • 96.5% of repairs are carried out within target response times (delivered by September 2010). |
| | Update website to include article on importance of gas servicing. | June 2010 (completed), to be refreshed each year. | An advert is available on the website. | |
| | Include article in all customer newsletters on importance of gas servicing and communicate incentive scheme. | First article in customer newsletter in August 2010 and ongoing. Launch incentive scheme August 2010. | | |
| | Develop advert to communicate improved flexibility in appointments in gas servicing and responsive repairs. | October 2010. | | |

Costs/Resources required

We will use existing staff and communications channels so there will be no marginal cost of resourcing this work.

How customers will have a say: Customer feedback during the Short Notice Inspection identified this as a priority.

“ For 3 years in succession, gas servicing have not kept their first appointment. My time is wasted. I welcome any effort to improve the situation. ”



R5 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

IN CONSULTATION WITH CUSTOMERS, IMPROVE THE RESPONSIVE REPAIRS AND GAS SERVICE

Audit commission target date: June 2011

R5.3 Improve contract and performance monitoring and communication processes to ensure that repairs and gas servicing are done on time, at the appointed time, in one visit where possible.

Responsible: Jim Preston – Director of Maintenance Services | Executive Sponsor - Rosemary Du Rose

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we've achieved this? |
|--|--|-----------------------|--|--|
| Customers will receive a service for both repairs and gas service which is at a convenient time to them, the work is carried out when expected and, where possible, the work is completed in a single visit. | Establish new monitoring formats and targets on key performance indicators on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointments made and kept • Repairs completed right first time • Repairs completed on the first visit. | Completed and in use. | Targets have been set and monitoring systems are now in place for all key performance indicators, to be used in contractor review meetings. A 3 month improvement plan is in place to reach 80% "right first time" by September. The target level of performance will then be reviewed. | We know the actions we have taken are working when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90% of appointments are made at first point of contact (delivered by March 2011); • 97% of appointments are kept (delivered by March 2011); • 80% of repairs are "right first time" (delivered by September 2010); • 93% of customers are satisfied with the repairs service (delivered by March 2011); and • 96.5% of repairs are carried out within target response times (delivered by September 2010). |
| | Develop contractor management framework (including improved communication arrangements). | October 2010. | Key performance indicators are being monitored monthly by Senior Managers and Executive and by Board at every meeting. | |

Costs/Resources required

We will use existing staff so there will be no marginal cost of resourcing this work.

How customers will have a say: The National Customer Panel will scrutinise performance levels and hold the service to account. Customers will help to develop the contractor management framework which will include arrangements for improved communication and customer involvement in contract monitoring.

“ Whenever I’ve had a problem, I ring up. I speak, explain the problem, you fix it - sorted! Home have always been fast efficient and pleasant. And gas always send a letter (yearly) with an appointment. They come and check it, then give me a certificate I do not have to do anything as every year it is done for me.”



**R5 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:
IN CONSULTATION WITH CUSTOMERS, IMPROVE THE RESPONSIVE REPAIRS AND GAS SERVICE**

Audit commission target date: June 2011

R5.4 Collect information on why customers are satisfied and dissatisfied with services and addressing the issues to improve satisfaction.

Responsible: Jim Preston – Director of Maintenance Services | Executive Sponsor - Rosemary Du Rose

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we’ve achieved this? |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| Customers will be more satisfied with the services they receive year on year. | Capture improvement activities in service improvement plans to be monitored with managers on a quarterly basis. | April 2010 and updated quarterly. | A questionnaire has been drafted and the process for consultation has been agreed with the market research provider. | We know the actions we have taken are working when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 93% of customers are satisfied with the repairs service (delivered by March 2011); Customer Service Management Team, Board, and Executive receives quarterly updates on performance. |
| | Extend the current customer satisfaction survey for repairs to include gas servicing. | 1st August (completed). | The survey will be launched once customers have reviewed the questions. | |
| | Review the information gathered on gas and response repairs to improve performance. | 22nd July (meeting with management team and survey company). | The meeting on 22nd July revealed that the biggest driver for customer satisfaction is time taken for repairs to be completed. Subsequent improvement actions from this feedback are reflected in the current improvement plan for repairs. | |

Costs/Resources required

Existing colleague resources will be used to deliver these actions. However, there will be an increase in survey costs of £15,000 due to extending coverage to gas servicing.

How customers will have a say: Gas satisfaction survey questions will be reviewed by customers to ensure they are understandable and appropriate. Customers’ views will inform improvements to the service. Customers will be informed about improvements and asked to feed back views.

“ It would be nice if you got a date and time when you ring repairs in, not we’ll contact you in 7 days.”

R5 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

IN CONSULTATION WITH CUSTOMERS, IMPROVE THE RESPONSIVE REPAIRS AND GAS SERVICE

Audit commission target date: June 2011

R5.5 Review gas access procedure particularly around legal action and risk assessment of access to improve performance and deliver efficiencies.

Responsible: Jim Preston – Director of Maintenance Services | Executive Sponsor - Rosemary Du Rose

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we’ve achieved this? |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| Customers are safer in their homes because gas appliances in all Home properties are serviced once a year. | Produce a gas servicing policy with faster and tougher access principles and incentives for first time access, taking into account best practice in the sector. | Customer sign off - July 2010 (completed). Board sign off - August 2010. | Legal services researched best practice in sector and made recommendations on all available powers. Policy has been drafted and an Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out. | We know the actions we have taken are working when 100% of properties have a current gas safety certificate (by September 2010). |
| | Update gas servicing procedures to include a risk assessment for earlier commencement of access procedures for customers with a history of not allowing access. Embed with colleagues training and communication. | September 2010. | The policy was consulted on at National Customer Panel on the 17th June 2010. The Panel endorsed the incentive proposals but requested that wording be strengthened on access procedures. Agreement made to commence access procedures earlier for all customers. New monitoring process in place for all properties with out of date CP12s. An internal audit was carried out on gas servicing in July 2010 identifying 8 action points, progress against which will be reported to Board. | |

Costs/Resources required

This action will change the way existing resources are deployed in order to deliver improvements in service levels.

How customers will have a say: The National Customer Panel improved the policy to ensure that it was clearly worded and took account of customers’ and clients’ needs. Customers in the south service improvement group have been consulted on letters to customers at each stage of the access procedure. Standard letters have been amended to reflect their feedback.

“ Your lack of communication and action. Different people have different needs - do you know how many disabled customers you have? Have you ever serviced the needs of those disabled customers? Need more attention to individual tenants requirements and more involvement in decisions regarding their property. ”

CUSTOMER PRIORITY
 55% of customers told us they wanted more flexible appointments or to be given an appointment when they called

**R5 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:
 IN CONSULTATION WITH CUSTOMERS, IMPROVE THE RESPONSIVE REPAIRS AND GAS SERVICE**
 Audit commission target date: June 2011

R5.6 Move towards better computer integration with contractors and operatives to improve communication with customers and provide a more flexible and efficient service.

Responsible: Jim Preston – Director of Maintenance Services | Executive Sponsor - Rosemary Du Rose

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we've achieved this? |
|---|---|----------------|---|--|
| Customers will receive a seamless service for both repairs and gas service which is at a convenient time to them, the work is carried out when expected and, where possible, the work is completed in a single visit. | Introduce a computer interface with gas and response repairs contractors allowing real time updates when services and repairs are complete. | June 2011. | We have decided to retender all gas servicing contracts. The specification for the new contracts includes a specific requirement to interface into our systems. | We know the actions we have taken are working when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90% of appointments are made at first point of contact (delivered by March 2011); • 97% of appointments are kept (delivered by March 2011); • 80% of repairs are "right first time" (delivered by September 2010); • 93% of customers are satisfied with the repairs service (delivered by March 2011); and • 96.5% of repairs are carried out within target response times (delivered by September 2010). |
| | Pilot interface with, ROK, our contractor in the South. | October 2010. | The infrastructure to support this has been designed. | |
| | Organisation wide repairs project to report on the future of the repairs service. | November 2010. | | |

Costs/Resources required
 No marginal costs.

How customers will have a say: We have used feedback from satisfaction surveys to design the service to meet customers' requirements.

R6 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION: IN CONSULTATION WITH CUSTOMERS IMPROVE CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT

Audit commission target date: December 2010

R6.1 Provide systems for customers to feed their views upwards and downwards in customer involvement structures.

Responsible: Diane Desay – Customer and Client Experience Director | Executive Sponsor - Rosemary Du Rose

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we've achieved this? |
|---|---|--------------------------------|--|---|
| <p>Customers will be able to choose how to interact with Home to give their views on service delivery and development.</p> <p>This will result in all customers' needs being taken into account when services are both being developed and delivered.</p> | <p>Establish, across the business, what groups and panels are presently in existence and take any best practice for national roll out. Use this to develop and implement a framework for involvement.</p> | <p>September 2010.</p> | <p>The National Customer Panel has been in place since April 2010 and is informing the improvement of customer involvement structures..</p> <p>The first report to the National Customer Panel on performance reporting was taken in July. This is now a monthly discussion with the Panel.</p> <p>Process underway to capture and evidence how the business is using customer feedback.</p> | <p>We know the actions we have taken are working when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 80% of customers tell us they are satisfied that their views are taken into account (target date to be set by the end of September 2010); • We receive feedback from the National Customer Panel that they understand how we have acted on their views and the views received from other customers. |
| | <p>Define a national strategy to implement a structures process of local and regional involvement.</p> | <p>July 2010 (completed).</p> | | |
| | <p>Progress and build upon the existing National Customer Panel and Viewpoint teams.</p> | <p>April 2010 and ongoing.</p> | | |
| | <p>Ensure the business has a robust mechanism in place to capture and act upon any issues arising from customer inputs.</p> | <p>October 2010.</p> | | |
| | <p>Improve our 'contact us' page on the website by making it more visible and user friendly.</p> | <p>July 2010.</p> | | |
| | <p>Utilise our contract and repair colleagues to obtain feedback (e.g. via customer response cards, end of call surveys) and also implement a 'question of the day' for telephone contact customers and as part of our wider engagement strategy.</p> | <p>July 2010.</p> | | |

Costs/Resources required

This work will be delivered by the 2 full time equivalents identified in action 6.2.

How customers will have a say: Customers' views were used to develop the strategy, which was endorsed by the National Customer Panel on 26th July 2010. Customers will be continually involved in defining structures for local and regional involvement.





R6 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION: IN CONSULTATION WITH CUSTOMERS IMPROVE CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT

Audit commission target date: December 2010

R6.2 Improve planning and communication so all parties know what is planned and what is happening in the development of customer involvement activities and structures.

Responsible: Diane Desay – Customer and Client Experience Director | Executive Sponsor - Rosemary Du Rose

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we've achieved this? |
|---|--|-----------------|---|---|
| Customers will have a range of options to get involved and help shape services. They will understand how they can get involved, where and when. | We will use the Short Notice Inspection consultation information to inform development of future customer involvement. | July 2010. | We have consulted with our customers through a questionnaire (“we REALLY need your help”) which went out to all customers in July. The results of this consultation have been analysed. | We know the actions we have taken are working when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 80% of customers tell us they are satisfied that their views are taken into account (target date to be set by the end of September 2010). |
| | Communicate our customer involvement strategy, including information on activities and involvement structures to colleagues. | August 2010. | | |
| | Re-launch the customers magazine ‘Home Life’ Quarterly with content around customer involvement. | August 2010. | | |
| | Engage with our customers to find out how they prefer to be communicated with through a customer questionnaire. | September 2010. | | |
| | Website development. | September 2010. | | |
| | Identify and define all our customer ‘touch points’. | October 2010. | | |
| | Develop and publish to our colleagues and customers a “calendar of events” so that everyone is aware of the different channels of communication available. | October 2010. | | |
| | Publish and promote our communications and customer involvement plans to our customers. | October 2010. | | |
| | An article will be inserted in the next customer newsletter to explain the purpose of the profiling work and how it will be used. | December 2010. | | |

Costs/Resources required

2 full time equivalents will be employed as part of our customer and client engagement team to lead on improvements to customer involvement. We estimate that the cost of this will be around £50,000 and this is included within the service budget.

How customers will have a say: The National Customer Panel is charged with reviewing customer involvement approaches and methodologies. They have reviewed the style and proposed content of the Customer Newsletter.

“ Happy with current level of service, if I have any problems they are sorted straight away.”

**R6 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:
IN CONSULTATION WITH CUSTOMERS IMPROVE CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT**

Audit commission target date: December 2010

R6.3 Inform customers what Home is doing or not doing in response to views put forward by customers.

Responsible: Mark Fletcher – Director, Communications | Executive Sponsor - Rosemary Du Rose

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we've achieved this? |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| Customers will know how their views have influenced our business priorities and how we are responding to their views. | Include a regular “You said, we did” feature on the website and in our regular customer newsletter. | Newsletter – August 2010. Website – September 2010. | The National Customer Panel and other customer consultation has been used to develop the refreshed customer newsletter and website. | We know the actions we have taken are working when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 80% of customers and clients are satisfied that their views are taken into account (target date to be set by the end of September 2010). |
| | Develop a list of areas where customers have had an impact on decision-making and publicise it widely. | August 2010. | | |
| | Inform customer-facing colleagues of the impact that customers have had on decisions so they can communicate this to customers. | August 2010. | | |
| | Introduce a contact protocol which provides clarity about how we will manage consultation and how we will feedback to customers. | October 2010. | | |
| | Include regular special features in the customer newsletter showing how customers' views have been used to improve services. | August 2010. | | |

Costs/Resources required

£2,000 within existing budget to fund the internal campaign to inform colleagues. We will use our existing communication channels to inform customers and there will therefore be no additional cost.

How customers will have a say: The National Customer Panel is charged with reviewing customer involvement approaches and methodologies. They have reviewed the style and proposed content of the Customer Newsletter. Customers have been consulted on the look and feel of the website and on the content they would want to be available. Customers have also been able to express views on the content, look and feel throughout the period of web redevelopment.

“ Home needs to keep their word when they make appointments or planned improvements, don't give false hope, be realistic on dates and times given.”

**R6 AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:
IN CONSULTATION WITH CUSTOMERS IMPROVE CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT**

Audit commission target date: December 2010

6.4 Develop a clear strategy for customer involvement that sets out the overall objectives and ensures that activities are relevant to customers' and Home's objectives.

Responsible: Diane Desay – Customer and Client Experience Director | Executive Sponsor - Rosemary Du Rose

| Key outcomes for customers | Key actions | By | Progress taken to date | How do we know when we've achieved this? |
|---|---|------------------------|--|--|
| Customers will be able to choose how to be involved with and influence Home. This will result in all customers' needs being taken into account when services are both being developed and delivered and that services meet customers' needs and expectations. | Consult with our customers around changes we need to make to our existing strategy for Client and Customer involvement and present feedback to National Customer Panel. | July 2010 (completed). | The Strategy has been signed off by the National Customer Panel. | We know the actions we have taken are working when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 80% of customers and clients are satisfied that their views are taken into account (target date to be set by the end of September 2010). |
| | | | | |
| | The National Customer Panel will be asked to agree the outcomes our customers would like to achieve. | 7th October 2010. | | |
| | | | | |
| Amend strategy as required to reflect and align with those findings and ask the National Customer Panel to sign it off based on feedback received on our involvement framework. | October 2010. | | | |
| | | | | |
| Communicate our strategy to customers and colleagues to ensure they are aware and engaged in the strategy using newsletters, emails and the website. | November 2010. | | | |

Costs/Resources required

The costs to deliver this action are built into the budget for the Customer and Client Involvement Team.

How customers will have a say: Customers' views were used to develop the strategy, which was endorsed by the National Customer Panel on 26th July 2010. Customers will be continually involved in defining structures for local and regional involvement.



Glossary

All dates that are presented as month/year in the action plan refer to the last day of the month.

Audit Commission

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is used economically, efficiently and effectively. They have undertaken an inspection of a number of our services and this document answers their recommendations.

Benchmarking

The process of taking an organisation's measurable results and then comparing them to other, similar organisations.

Board

Home has its own board made up of interested people who help us to do a good job. The role of the board is to help the senior management team to develop the business and monitor the progress.

Colleague

We use the word colleague to describe the people who work for Home Group.

Customer

At Home we talk about customers of services and clients of Care and Support services. Within the Action Plan and Approach we use customers to refer to both customers and clients unless it makes the meaning clearer to talk about both.

Customer Involvement

Creating opportunities so that you can get involved in ways which benefit you, other clients, Home as a whole and the broader community.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

A computer programme which helps us to use the information which customers have given us to provide consistent and tailored responses to them when they contact us.

Diversity

An approach to working with people which recognises and responds to the many differences there are between people. We aim to support and employ a broad range of customers and colleagues and ensure that everyone is welcomed and valued for who they are and what they can contribute.

Full time equivalent (FTE)

Term used when talking about colleague hours (e.g. 2 half time Project workers = 1 FTE).

Governance

Involvement in the running, development, management and direction of an organisation.

ICT

Information and communication technologies.

Key performance indicators (KPI)

We use key performance indicators to measure how successful we are in delivering on customers' ambitions.

Outcome

What a person, service or organisation is aiming for or what happens as a result of a job done. Something is said to be outcomes orientated if it focuses on what has been achieved rather than focusing on what has been done.

Pilot

Trying out a new idea or new project for a limited time in a few services or areas so that we can learn and improve before we introduce it everywhere.

Policy (operational)

A policy sets out the values and principles, based on current good practice and legal requirements, which we follow in delivering our services to customers.

Procurement

The process of identifying a piece of work e.g. repairs service, pricing it and choosing a company that will deliver the best value for money for the organisation.

Review

Take a look at what is happening and agree what has worked and what hasn't worked and what needs to be done to take things forward.

Service Level Agreement (SLA)

Part of a contract that sets out the level of service such as 'the telephone will be answered within 30 seconds'.

SITRA

An organisation which brings together agencies working in housing, care, and support, provides training and runs conferences. Members range from large organisations like Home to small local groups.

Steering Group

A group to guide, inspire and oversee a project or area of work.

Target Operating Model (TOM)

A picture of the how we want Home Group to look in the future from an operational point of view.

Toolkit

Materials that support people to do their job such as help sheets that explain a new way of working.

Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS)

National tenant participation organisation working to promote tenant empowerment.

Transformation

A programme of change to transform Home Group (including Stonham) into a fantastic organisation.

Tenant Services Authority (TSA)

The government agency that regulates housing associations. Replaced part of the role of the Housing Corporation in 2008.

TRANSLATION SERVICE

Afghani (Pushto) که اړتیا لری چې د دي کومه برخه وژباړی ، هیله ده زموږ لږه مرکزي دفتر سره اړیکې ونیسئ.

Mandarin 如果您希望得到该文件任何部分的译文，请与我们的总部联系

Gujarati જો તમારે આમાંના કોઈપણ ભાગનું ભાષાંતર કરવું હોય, તો કૃપા કરી પ્રકાશકનો સંપર્ક કરો.

Hindi यदि आप इसमें से किसी अंश का हिन्दी अनुवाद चाहते हैं तो कृपया प्रकाशक से संपर्क करें।

Somali Haddii aad rabtid in qeyb ka mid ah kan la tarjumo, fadlan la xiriiir daabacaha

Urdu اگر آپ کو اس کے کسی حصے کے ترجمے کی ضرورت ہو تو براہ کرم ناشر سے رابطہ قائم کریں۔

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