**Cheshire West and Cheshire Council (CWAC)**

**Mystery Shoppers**

**Sample Service Review**

**Report to Executive Team, December 2011**

1. **Introduction**

Mystery shoppers were formed in November 2011.

We aim to:

* Find out about the services offered by the council
* Find out if the Council is doing what they promise
* Check if tenants are getting value for money
* Make things better for other tenants/customers
* To make sure things are done on time
* To consider the approachability of staff on issues which are important to customers.

This is our first report.

All of our work aims to improve the quality and efficiency of services for tenants and leaseholders of CWAC.

We chose to look at a range of issues of interest to us, as this service test formed part of our initial training as mystery shoppers.

For this review, we tested the services promised in the local offer (Open door April 2011).

We have concentrated on what matters most to tenants.

We want to secure your commitment to full customer involvement and advice in any new ways of working proposed as a result of this report, but we are happy for the council to address issues of immediate concern.

## 2 What we looked at

Prior to starting the review, we reviewed the promises made by CWAC on the website, in open door and leaflets. This helped us to scope our work and frame the Mystery Shop.

We reviewed a list of documents and performance indicators used by CWAC to manage the services. The following documents were provided and reviewed to get us going for our on the job training:

* Open Door Newsletter April 2011
* Leaflets in the reception area
* Annual report to tenants

**Results of our Mystery Shopping**

* 1. **Phone shopping**

Strengths

* Most service were good, with the phone being answered quickly
* Staff were polite and friendly
* We generally got through to who we asked for

Weaknesses

* We were told by the main reception (not the housing reception) that we were able to get information in Braille, but we have since found out that council tenants do not get this service due to the expense, it is only offered to council tax payers
* Some staff gave their name and not the department; others gave their department, but not their name until they were asked for it. The standards say that both will be given
* We did wait for one call to be answered for 29 rings
* We did ask to speak to a housing officer, without saying what the issue was and we were put through to another officer who proceeded to share information about neighbour nuisance and the perpetrators of the ASB which we did not ask about or phone up for.
  1. **Website**

Findings

* The information was there but housing information is very hard to find, we understand that improvements are planned, we would like to know more about them
  1. ,**E mail**

Findings

* We looked at this, but we did not submit a query this time
* We are awaiting a response to our complaint enquiry
  1. **Letter**

Strengths

* We only tested one letter that got a reply

Weaknesses

* We have already passed on our concerns about the letter which one of our shoppers sent asking for confidential information about a neighbours rent account and we were sent this. We understand CWAC is acting on this, but would like to know what has been done
  1. **Office visit**

Strengths

* Staff were polite and helpful
* Staff offered the direct line of a housing officer when requested
* Most staff wore badges

Weaknesses

* Some staff did not wear their badge
* Private interviews were not offered and there were no screens
* We have a hearing impaired mystery shopper and she asked for private facilities as she could not hear what was going on
* There were many very personal conversations going on in the housing reception on housing benefits and income which should have been done in private
  1. **Speaking to customers who had recently used the service**

Our Approach

We were supplied with telephone numbers of the last 30 people who had used the CWAC offices.

We spoke to 3 tenants who had recently used the CWAC offices for rent enquiries and a further 6 who had used the offices for repairs enquiries.

We explained we were mystery shoppers and that we had signed confidentiality agreements. We said we were supporting CWAC to improve services and asked if they would not mind giving us some of their time over the phone. We explained we only had their name and number and no other confidential information had been relayed by CWAC

Rent enquiries

Strengths

* Staff were polite and helpful
* Forms were easy to understand
* Staff in the main wore a badge
* Queries were resolved quickly and efficiently

Weaknesses

* Tenants would have liked a private interview room, in particular for the rent queries
* The text phone is not in use and tenants have to be sent to the library if they have a hearing impairment after waiting at reception

Repair enquiries

Strengths

* Tradesmen were polite and helpful
* They wore badges
* Tradesmen left things clean and tidied up after themselves

Weaknesses

* Call cards were not left (when a no show for work was followed up, this came to light), if the tenant had not chased it, he would have still be waiting for the trade to call
* When there is a need for a follow up repair, there is no receipt or reference given to the tenant, so they have no assurance that this is being followed up. Tenants would like a receipt and to know when additional/follow up work will be completed. It would help to have a reference to refer to if the tenant wished to phone about that repair.
* The information on the property system did not show that a tenant was disabled and so the job took one month to complete (the job was done in a day) to remove a ramp and replace it and to unblock a sewage pipe when the smell was un healthy
* Tenants would like to discuss whether new pipe work should be boxed in and the health and safety arrangements about doing the work/not doing the work

## 3 Why we chose to shop this service area

We aim to make suggestions for service improvement, both from a customer service perspective and to improve the management and delivery of the service, so that CWAC deliver maximum value for the rent we pay.

The reasons for the interest of mystery shoppers in this shopping was simply to test out their training in practice, so we chose a variety of recent customers to CWAC and a variety of scenarios to test some of the local offers.

In future we will choose specific topics and local offers to work on.

4 Recommendations – a summary of the issues we want you to resolve

**Mystery Shoppers would like CWAC to address all of the above issues in reviewing the way CWAC works**

Here is a summary of our key concerns:

1. Confidentiality and Data protection was breached twice in the limited number of calls we made. We would like staff to be trained in confidentiality and what can and cannot be shared.
2. Repairs – we do not know what information your computer system holds on disabilities, but it was clearly unaware of the adaptation of one of the tenants we spoke to and it did not recognise the hearing impairment of one of our shoppers
3. A reminder to staff give name and team on the phone and to wear their name badges at all times
4. To fix the text phone in the reception, hearing impaired tenants are having to go to the library to communicate with the office
5. Tenants should be offered an private interview room if they request it, or where the officer thinks the issue raised is sensitive, the tenant should be offered one
6. There needs to be clarity on the different services available on the main reception and the housing reception of the availability of Braille
7. When a leak has occurred and there is water damage the tenants should be offered a dehumidifier or support with the clean-up operation
8. Call cards should always be left
9. Follow up repairs – the tenants should be given a receipt
10. The provision of aids and adaptations should be recorded on the property services database and staff should know when they are visiting a tenant with a disability or special need
11. The issue of boxing in pipes should be clarified for tenants in the tenant magazine as it is most unclear when CWAC will/will not do this work
12. **Final comments**

Mystery shoppers would like to thank the officers and tenants for giving up their time to help us with this review and for investing in our training.

* We will make ourselves available to officers to clarify issues raised and we will support officers by commenting and helping you shape the new ways of working.
* We look forward to moving on to review our next service and look forward to working with you on our next service review in January.