# Cheshire West & Chester

# Mystery Shoppers Report March 2012

**Introduction**

This is the work we have been asked to do for the council, we were given the areas and the questions to ask by the council. Our work aims are to improve the quality and efficiency of the services for tenants and leaseholders of CWAC. As mystery shoppers continuing our training we are working to help the council provide the best service possible. We contacted the housing department to check that they are adhering to the council offers and improvement. To achieve this, we were requested to concentrate our shopping on telephone calls and visits to the office regarding:

* Laminate flooring
* Estate walkabouts
* Requesting rent statements
* Going on waiting list
* Overgrown hedges/rubbish on estate
* Complaint
* Garages
* Contents insurance

**What we Looked At-our Findings**

**Laminate Flooring**

Visits and telephone calls regarding laminate flooring to 1st floor flat. Visit was quick and professional in a clean and tidy office. Leaflets were at a low level, giving good access for disabled people. Was told to write a letter requesting permission as an inspection of the property would be required. All together a positive experience. Telephone calls confirmed the same as visit and that sound proofing was specific, to prevent noise. One phone call got through to office in 3 rings, the officer did not know who dealt with this and shouted across the office, to find out that it was a housing officer. After putting me through, I got an answer phone. None of my details were checked, to update council systems.

**Estate Walkabouts**

Both on the visits and telephone calls information about estate walkabouts was thorough and professional. One telephone call was told would find out and would call back in 15mins. Call was returned in less than that and was told did not have to wait for walkabout in order to report issues. One call was given feedback and action on a report from same tenant based on recognising the voice. Visits were given the same thorough information as calls. Another very positive experience. One call was answered in 5 rings, but was told, thought it was on a special day, and that another person would call me back to confirm date. Person did call and also called on day of walkabout to remind the caller.

**Rent Statements**

Phoned regarding requesting a rent statement on the 8thFeb 2012 at 10.45 am and also 2.45pm also on the 23 Feb 2012 at 9.15am all calls went to answer phone and into voice mail. No messages were left and did not try any other numbers. At attempt 4 on the 29th Feb a message was left. A call was returned that afternoon to say that I would get a statement in the post, it was posted that day.

**Council Waiting List**

Phoned regarding going on housing waiting list on the 6th Feb 2012 at 2.30 and on the 23rd Feb, again going straight through to answer phone and voice mail. No message left and did not try a different number. Followed this up at a later date and the receptionist was quick, efficient and helpful explaining how to join the list. Offered on line access and said would put form in post which did arrive within 5 days as promised. She confirmed my identity by address on the phone.

**Overgrown Hedges/Rubbish on Estate**

Call regarding overgrown hedge in public area, again going straight through to answer phone. Called 3 times on 3 various days. After 3 attempts on the 29th Feb reported rubbish on the estate in garage area. Staff offered to call back and were quick, efficient, polite and courteous. Was told that rubbish would be removed which was followed by a call to say that it had been done.

**Garages**

A phone call was made regarding renting a garage on 12 Mar 2012. Girl was friendly and approachable and offered to send a leaflet out. She did not check the address but was told caller lived on the Westminster estate. She did not check any details for updating councils systems. An Email was attempted for an application, but found the web site really hard to use . Tried a search on garages and rent a garage but no success.

 **Insurance**

Called 0300 number it was not answered in 5 rings but did give all relevant details followed by form in the post next day. Very helpful .

 **Complaints**

Visit to reception, again office clean and tidy. Waited 5 min for receptionist who was polite and efficient, explaining the complaint procedure and asking if he could be of any help, there were 3 receptionists on duty. He gave me a form and told me that I could hand it into reception or post it. I could see his badge clearly because he was sitting back in his chair. They have updated phone number and address on complaints form.

**Resident Involvement**

Visit to the office reception which was clean and tidy. Was given Hazel Sweeney’s phone number and told that Open Door has all details. Staff were friendly and helpful.

**Housing Transfer**

Visit to the office, noted chairs have been changed, giving better access for wheelchairs and buggies. Did not tell me his name but was known to tenant. Went out of his way to find client information and helped to work out where vacant properties were, and which were of interest so that a bid could be made.

**Contents Insurance**

Phone call to enquire regarding home contents insurance, which was answered within 5 rings. Was told that as a leaseholder the insurance was not available to me, but would confirm with someone. Returned to phone and said yes that was correct, I couldn’t have it.

**Weaknesses**

**Answerphone /Voicemail**

Lots of staff use voicemail. How long do they do that for in a day? It feels harder to get in touch with people. Lots of tenant are given the option to email in, however there are many tenants that do not have access to a computer.

**0300 Numbers**

The 0300 number – staff do not know the area and have no local knowledge which makes it difficult in certain queries.

**Laminate Flooring**

With regard to laminate flooring, no one was told that it would be the tenant’s responsibility for any damage if CWAC needed to carry out any repairs to the floor. The staff did not say how long it would be for permission after council receives request letter.

**Reception Area**

Chairs in reception were too close together for wheelchair/buggy access(which has now been addressed). No book/toys were available for children. No public /disabled toilet, we were told to use library toilet as people make a mess.

**Customer Details**

Very few staff are asking for customer details to update councils records.

**Name Badges**

If staff that work directly with the public were to wear name badges on their left shoulder this would be appreciated for the name badges to be clearly visable to the customer/tenant. When visiting the office because receptionist sitting at desk, badge hangs below desk therefore unable to see name. Various staff were seen with badges wrong way round so mystery shoppers unable to read name.

**Back Entrance**

Smoking outside back entrance of the civic offices creates an untidy mess with lots of cigarette ends and litter. Tenants cannot sit on bench it is green and needs cleaning.

# Recommendations

1 For those staff dealing directly with the public we would like the staff to were their badges on the lapel(or at the correct height) to be clearly seen.

2 The staff who smoke at the back of the civic offices and formerly at the front leave a mess on the floor. We would like staff not to throw their butts on the floor, or for the council to prepare a special area for this. Another idea is that the council could provide a special container for cigarette butts.

 3 There is no toilet for the public at Civic Way. We suggest that the council looks at Morrisons public toilet which has a special UV light this prevents people using them for drugs as they are unable to find a vein. It is not acceptable for disabled people to have to walk to library.

4 The council web site at the council does not direct you to garages or rental under the search or under the letter search. The website needs to direct all housing queries to a housing main page. The council website could be more user friendly..

5 When a tenant rings in about neighbour noise or nuisance, they should be directed to a housing officer and should always speak to someone with knowledge and to help in person. Because tenants complaining are usually in a more fragile state and therefore will have worked themselves up with the courage to report ASB. It is important to speak to someone who has knowledge of ASB.

6 CWAC needs to remind staff to check tenants updated details as this was rarely done.

7 Very many of our calls went to answer phone at different times of the day, often 3 or 4 times.We understand that staff are out and we are aware that busy staff are able to turn their phone to answer phone. The answer phone could leave a message to say when the staff member will return and be available to speak to tenants in person of those who choose to ring back. We tried several numbers several times in one day and they did not say caller busy, on the line the call went to answerphone.

8 The 0300 number is in Winsford. We would like an 0151 number to speak to staff who understand the local issues.

 9 The bench at the rear of civic offices is in poor condition and we feel is unsafe to sit on. We would like this to be repaired /painted.

10 We feel we have checked the customer service standard since November. Staff are polite and the offices have improved. We would now like to speak to customers directly who have experienced the other service standards and we would like our next step on

* Nuisance/ASB
* Disabled Adaptions
* Repairs
* Gas Servicing
* Domestic Violence

**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 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 April.

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