

RAISE – Scrutiny of Responsive Repairs

1. Introduction -

RAISE asked customers in 2011 to nominate a topic for scrutiny. From the suggestions made the responsive repairs service was the most popular topic.

Based on the reasons customers gave for the nomination, RAISE set the following scope for the scrutiny:

A) Understanding the customer journey through the repairs service and assessing the effectiveness of communication, considering:

- The appointments process
- Communication during repairs work being undertaken, particularly follow up visits
- Use of letters, text messages and the internet
- Customer understanding of planned and responsive works and how this is conveyed when a repair request is made
- Ease of reporting a repair and correctly identifying the repair
- How the service responds to meeting individual needs.

The scrutiny nomination was welcomed by the Director and Managers of the service and an invitation for RAISE to identify what would make the service truly customer-responsive was made. Taking into account the requirements of the 2012 regulatory standards a secondary aspect to the scrutiny was agreed:

B) What might a responsive repairs service look like in the future?

- Explore opportunities through tenant cashback
- Use of a handyperson service
- Consideration of ways to deliver the service differently.

During the scrutiny it became clear that it would take a long period of time to report on both parts of the scrutiny scope. As a result in consultation with the Management Team RAISE decided not to explore the second aspect of the scrutiny due to the time it had taken to complete part A. RAISE recommends that this aspect is looked at by the repairs service in partnership with customers on the repairs steering group.

The intended outcomes of this scrutiny are to improve communication between Calico and its customers and contribute to the further development of the service.

2. Methods used for the scrutiny of Responsive Repairs Service

RAISE used a variety of methods to gather a range of evidence. This enabled RAISE to make effective judgements and recommendations in relation to the service. These included:

- Reviewing information that is available to customers on the repairs service
- Receiving a briefing from Calico on the service
- Shadowing Operatives on visits

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- Conducting a telephone, postal and online survey with tenants
- Holding a focus group with Operatives
- Utilising the findings of an exercise by the Repairs Steering Group
- Contact Centre call listening
- RAISE's own experiences of the service
- Mystery Shopping
- Review of Calico Choice focus group findings
- Contact Centre call categorisation statistics
- Attendance at Contact Centre team meeting
- Attendance at Repairs drop in surgery

3. Overview of scrutiny findings

Overall RAISE found that the responsive repairs service delivered a good service with high levels of customer satisfaction. The Contact Centre and Operatives were found to deliver high standards of customer care.

The service was found not to be as good where customers' request works that are not straightforward and particularly where they require follow on work. When follow on work is required RAISE found that appointments are often poorly communicated to customers, with work often taking long periods of time to complete which does not meet customer expectation. RAISE found that this area of the service could be improved by reviewing the causes of follow on work, and ensuring that work is tracked, monitored, reported on and communicated to the customer to deliver greater customer satisfaction.

RAISE found a number of areas where communications with the customer could be improved, these include:

- More frequent and clear communication with customers who require follow on work
- The development of customer focused letters
- The development of a satisfaction survey which more accurately collects information on the customer experience
- Better utilisation of self service repairs reporting via the internet or use of Smartphone's
- Training on questioning and listening techniques to understand the needs of the customer.

In addition, RAISE felt that further work was required on tailoring the service to meet the needs of vulnerable customers and provide more flexibility within the service to fit with customers' lifestyles. For example, an appointment system to meet the needs of customers who work.

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3.1 Regulatory Compliance

RAISE have found that the responsive repairs service is compliant with the HCA Home Standard and Involvement and Empowerment Standard. The responsive repairs service has the objective of right first time and its work through involving customers on the repairs steering group will continue to improve performance in this area. In July 2012 Calico published the 2012 Customer Calendar (Annual Report). This demonstrates to customers how Calico is meeting the standards and performing against the local offers it has set with regard to repairs and maintenance. RAISE notes that Calico has begun work on exploring opportunities for residents to undertake a range of repair tasks and share in the savings as required by the Involvement and Empowerment Standard.

RAISE anticipates that its recommendations will improve the repairs service further and contribute to further demonstration of compliance with the standards.

4. Our findings in detail

The following report identifies strengths and areas for improvement in the six key areas identified in part A of the scope of the scrutiny. Recommendations for service improvement are detailed in each section.

4.1 The appointments process

RAISE have used a variety of methods, including call listening and surveys to explore the use and effectiveness of the appointment system. RAISE have identified the following:

Strengths

- Reporting a repair by telephone is accessible, easy and fit for purpose. Contact centre staff are friendly, helpful and professional. Mystery Shopping of the service and survey results indicate that for customers it is the preferred method of reporting a repair due to ease of access.
- As of June 2012 RAISE welcome the introduction of customers being given a definite appointment slot on first contact. Previous to this RAISE identified that when appointment times were changed it was not always clearly communicated to the tenant. Customers should now be clear about their appointment time and should not receive conflicting information.
- The text message service is a useful service for customers to remind them about appointments.
- If Operatives have completed their work early for the day they will call customers in the area they are based to see if they wish their work to be completed ahead of their

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scheduled appointment time. This is convenient and beneficial for the customer and enables repairs to be completed in a timescale that is quicker than anticipated.

Areas for improvement

- It is not made consistently clear to those customers who report repairs by telephone that there can be flexibility with appointment times and dates. Customers are not always asked if the date and time given is suitable for them. It is up to the customer to state if the appointment is not convenient.
- The customer satisfaction survey is geared to collecting information for Calico performance indicators rather than understanding the customer experience of the service. Questions 2,3 and 4 on the customer satisfaction survey regarding repair categories, timescales and visits do not correlate with the information given to customers when they report a repair to the Contact Centre. Customers may find it difficult to answer these questions, as they have not been given this information when they reported the repair. This may result in inaccurate information being obtained from customers about their views of the service.
- The use of language by staff concerning the categorisation of repairs can be confusing. In the tenants' handbook, repairs leaflet and customer satisfaction survey repairs are referred to as responsive or planned and are put in to categories according to the time they will take to complete. This language is not used when you contact Calico to report a repair. Customers are not informed of the timescales within which they can expect their job to be completed or the category that is has been placed in. Customers cannot track the timescales for completion of their work to see if they are in line with Calico's policy.
- It is not made clear to customers at point of contact and in letters what the repair work will consist of and what they need to do to prepare for the work. For example, customers think they are getting their bathroom retiled when it is a few tiles being replaced. Some customers have not cleared items from areas where work is due to take place, which can cause a job to take longer than expected or result in follow on work.
- Appointment slots cover a large timescale and customers are not given any further indication of when within the slot an operative will arrive. The survey that RAISE has conducted and the Calico choice findings indicate that customers would like a more refined appointment service.

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- 1. At the Contact Centre customers should be routinely asked if the appointment slot given is convenient for them.**
- 2. Work with the repairs steering group to review the customer satisfaction survey. Questions should be developed that relate to the information customers receive about the service and gain more information on the customer experience. Explore other methods of obtaining satisfaction information, for example text messaging, telephone surveys and Smartphone apps.**
- 3. With the repairs steering group review the language that is used to describe the service to customers within the repairs service. Agree consistent and customer friendly terms that are used at the Contact Centre, in letters, text messages, leaflets and the tenants' handbook.**
- 4. Clearly explain to customers what their repair work will consist of and advise what they need to do to prepare for it, for example clearing away items.**
- 5. Provide the customer with an indication of when within a timeslot an Operative will arrive.**

4.2 Communication during repairs work being undertaken, particularly follow up visits

RAISE shadowed operatives, undertook call listening and attended a repairs drop in to explore issues relating to communication, particularly with regard to follow on work. During the scrutiny members of RAISE had genuine reasons to report repairs and their experiences were fed back to the group.

Strengths

- Calico Operatives are friendly, skilful, have a professional approach and a commitment to quality of workmanship. RAISE evidence indicates they are tidy in their work and give clear explanations to the customer about the work they are undertaking. Customers are very satisfied with the service they provide.

Areas for improvement

- When further appointments are required to complete a job it is not clear to the customer who is accountable for making and changing appointments. RAISE identified that not all follow on work is clearly communicated to the customer and found evidence at the contact centre and at the repairs drop in surgery of customers chasing up work, as they were unaware of when their job was due to be completed. RAISE found that performance indicators do not track follow on work. Current performance indicators (12/8/12) give the impression that 98% of repairs are completed on a first visit. This issue has been identified by the repairs steering group and the Calico Choice research but has not been acted upon. Customers find it

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difficult to track what is happening with their repair once follow on work has been agreed, and do not feel fully informed on how things are progressing.

- Time allotted to jobs as part of schedule of rates does not always reflect time needed to do the job, which can result in follow on work for the customer, or jobs taking longer to complete.
- Communication with customers regarding outdoor works is poor. We found evidence at Sheltered Schemes that it is not made clear to customers when outdoor work has been completed. Satisfaction surveys, RAISE's own experience and the Calico Choice research indicate that some outdoor work is completed without customers being informed that operatives are at their home to do the work. This can cause alarm for customers if they have not noticed that an Operative is on site.
- Operatives do not routinely phone customers to advise they are on their way. Customers do not receive any further indication of when within an AM or PM time slot an Operative may arrive. Customers in the Calico Choice focus groups indicated that is an issue that can inconvenience the customer and result in missed appointments.

Recommendations

6. Review the causes of follow on work and improve how follow on work is tracked, monitored, reported on and communicated to the customer to deliver greater customer satisfaction in this area.

7. Keep a maintenance log at sheltered schemes for communal work that has been undertaken.

8. When undertaking outside work, the contractor should knock on the door to inform the customer of their presence on site and leave a calling card when the work is complete.

9. Operatives to routinely call all customers to advise on an approximate time of their arrival.

4.3 Use of letters, text messages and the Internet

RAISE focused on the customer experience of using the repairs service and assessed how letters, text messages and the internet were used to benefit customers.

Strengths

- The text message service provides a useful reminder to customers regarding their repair.

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Areas for improvement

- The letters sent by Calico confirming repair appointments use very formal language, which reflects the internal process of ordering repairs at Calico rather than being focused on the needs of the customer. For example the job reference on the letter is not used or needed by the customer and there are inconsistencies within letters on the timings of appointment slots. Letters are focused on the needs of Calico rather than conveying information in a way that is tailored to the customer and their repair.
- The timing of texts being sent out is not always convenient for the customer, with messages coming through late at night. Operatives noted that customers have complained about this, RAISE members have also been disrupted during the night. RAISE note that during the course of this scrutiny this issue appears to have been addressed.
- The website is not user friendly for reporting repairs. For example, the text box to enter the details of the repair looks small and it is not obvious that this can be expanded. You are not able to upload photos to aid the description of your repair. The categories of work that can be selected are not extensive enough. RAISE found examples of other websites where repair reporting was easier and noted that some tenants are now able to report repairs using an app on their Smartphone.

Recommendations

10. Work with the repairs steering group to develop customer focused repair confirmation letters. RAISE will pass on the evidence it has collected on this issue to assist with the review and development of letters.

11. Repairs steering group to monitor feedback on text message service

12. Review the website with customers to enable simple and clear repair reporting.

13. Explore the costs and benefits of developing a Smartphone app for reporting repairs.

4.4 Customer understanding of planned and responsive works and how this is conveyed when a repair request is made

RAISE explored customer understanding of the categorisation of repairs to see if this impacted on customer satisfaction with the service.

Areas for improvement

- Customers are not clear about the differences between responsive and planned repair work and the impact this has on the timescale for completion of work. RAISE's own experience and mystery shopping indicate that it is not clear to customers why some repairs will take longer to complete and results in dissatisfaction with the

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service. (Recommendation 3 seeks to address this issue, so no further recommendation is made in the box below).

- Customers are not routinely given information on investment works due at their properties, which impacts on their understanding of the responsive and planned repair work which may be undertaken at their property. Operatives informed RAISE they are not aware of improvement works due to take place, which can result in customers being dissatisfied with the repair work being undertaken. For example the repair may not be as extensive as the customer wishes due to improvement works planned for the property.

Recommendations

14. Customers and staff to have access to information on investment works.

4.5 Ease of reporting a repair and correctly identifying the repair

RAISE assessed the ways in which repairs can be reported and looked at how easy it is for the customer to report their repair accurately.

Strengths

- Contact Centre staff are well trained and have systems in place to assist customers to correctly identify the repair that is required. The tenants' handbook provides clear information for customers to assist with the identification of repairs

Areas for improvement

- The repairs emergency number is not easily available to customers if they contact Calico outside of office hours. Customers have to listen to a long message before they are given the number. This may result in people hanging up because they think the office is closed and do not realise that an emergency service is available.

Recommendations

15. Ensure emergency repairs telephone number is prioritised in the out of hours answer phone message.

4.6 How the service responds to meeting individual needs

RAISE recognises the diversity of customers and explored if the repairs service is accessible to all customers and provides services in a way that meets individual need. RAISE identified the following:

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Strengths

- All Operatives have a ‘vulnerability wheel’ in their vans, which identifies whom they should contact if they identify an issue. RAISE found Operatives to be clear in their role of identifying and reporting issues relating to vulnerable tenants.
- RAISE welcomes that the service is now offering some flexibility on its repairs policy according to the individual needs of customers.
- Calico is undertaking an equality impact assessment of its policy to ensure that the repairs policy is meeting the diverse needs of customers.

Areas for improvement

- Operatives do not always show ID when on site. This has been evidenced through the repairs steering group and RAISE’S observations.
- Identifying and responding to the needs of vulnerable customers can be further improved to provide greater consistency. During its research RAISE identified a number of vulnerable customers who had requested repairs, which were placed in the planned category. The impact of these repairs not being done had not been assessed against the quality of life for the individual. Although these repairs were eventually completed more quickly than scheduled, it took several complaints from the customer to resolve the issue.
- Appointments for customers are not offered outside of working hours. Working customers through the Calico Choice research, the Repairs Drop In and RAISE survey indicated that the service did not meet their needs and as a result were less satisfied with the service than other customers.

Recommendations

16. Operatives to always show ID when on site.

17. Use customer information, questioning and listening techniques to explore how repair issues impact on quality of life when deciding on scheduling of work.

18. Undertake cost benefit analysis of offering evening and weekend appointments and report findings to repairs steering group for consideration.

5. Response to this report from the Management Team

The scrutiny exercise completed by the RAISE panel has identified a range of opportunities for improvement within the repairs service.

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Whilst considering the findings and recommendations made as a result of the scrutiny exercise, we identified common themes across each of the areas scrutinised. So rather than addressing each recommendation in isolation, these themes informed overall objectives which should in turn address each recommendation. These themes are; Customer Service; Communication; Performance/Process and Staff Development. This is summarised in Appendix One of this report.

The majority of the objectives will be delivered through the Customer Services and Repairs Service Plans for 2013/14 and, where appropriate (where funding is required), considered as part of the budget setting process for 2013/14. It would not be appropriate, or realistic, to try and address all objectives at the same time. Therefore we will attend a meeting with the RAISE group to agree priorities and discuss time scales for delivery and once this has been done we will be able to populate the table with priority information and more specific timescales, which may change depending on the outcome of our discussions. We are also happy to report back to the RAISE group on progress against the action plan.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank RAISE panel for the time they spent within our service and the effort that has been put into producing the report and recommendations.

6. Support provided for the scrutiny

RAISE wishes to express its thanks to all those staff members who have fully supported and assisted with the scrutiny.

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