

# Agenda item 5

**Report to:** East Durham Homes Board

**Date:** 31 May 2012

**Title of report:** CIIP inspection of communication around repairs

**Report by:** Customer Inspection and Improvement Panel

**Report for:** Decision

## 1. Purpose of report and link to strategic objectives

The purpose of this report is to outline findings from the recent inspection of communication around repairs, and highlight any recommendations.

The report links to **3** of the strategic objectives:

- Involving customers to improve services
- Delivering excellent services to all
- Employer of choice and financially stable

## 2. Recommendations

**As a result of the CIIP inspection 21 recommendations have been made. These are outlined in an action plan in appendix A for the Board's consideration and approval.**

## 3. Executive summary

This is the third inspection carried out by the Customer Inspection and Improvement Panel. The CIIP carried out an extensive desktop review including the peer review of the repairs and maintenance service (January 2011), partnership learning log, service standards, service improvement strategy, opti-time appointments and customer journey mapping including emergency repairs.

The CIIP also reviewed a number of documents relating to communication with customers such as appointment letters and the customer handbook, concentrating on aspects relating to communication. The inspection also involved job shadowing, telephone interviews, interviews with Morrison staff members, consultations with tenants and resident groups and a customer focus group.

The CIIP focused the inspection on EDH's partner organisation Morrison (taking into account the findings of the peer review), and did not look into decent homes work carried out by other partners. The scope of the inspection included responsive repairs, batch repairs and out of hours, and the CIIP considered all aspects of communication including call centre scripting as well as the number of staff in both Morrison's and EDH's sections of the contact centre.

The report covers the main findings of the inspection, recognising the good practice already in place such as the dedication of the staff and good customer access to the service (variety of ways to report a repair).

The report also outlines a number of concerns such as:

- 1 Missed appointments and particularly those calls associated with emergency repairs.
- 2 Tenants can over exaggerate what counts as an emergency. The tenancy agreement could be used to take action against tenants who do this.
- 3 Not keeping customers up-to-date with progress of their repair if it wasn't completed right first time.

A full list of recommendations for improvements resulting from the inspection can be found in appendix A.

#### **4. Risk implications**

The main risk is failure to implement the recommendations.

#### **5. Consultation**

As part of the inspection, the CIIP has consulted the following people:

- 1 Morrison operatives; operatives and call centre operatives
- 2 Tenant Liaison Officer
- 3 Business Support/Stores Manager
- 4 Key Account Manager
- 5 Partnering Manager
- 6 Tenant and resident groups
- 7 Customer focus groups
- 8 Telephone interviews with recent customers

On completion of the inspection, the CIIP consulted with Morrison's Partnering Manager, the Head of Neighbourhood Services (Repairs & Technical), East Durham Homes Customer Services Manager and the Director of Neighbourhood Services to review the recommendations.

## **6. Background**

As agreed in the CIIP's Terms of Reference EDH's Board can suggest one service area to look at per annum. The CIIP agreed to look into communication around repairs at the request of the Board made in September 2011.

## **7. Findings**

### **Strengths**

#### **Systems and procedures**

There are a number of good procedures already in place in terms of communicating relevant information to tenants including leaving cards to say the work's been done if Morrison conducts an external repair.

It is good that a scripting system is already in place to assist operatives and customers to correctly identify the problem. However, it must be recognised that the scripts are only as good as the information customers relay in the first place, and there will always be an incentive for tenants to over exaggerate the problem in order to have it resolved more quickly.

The CIIP identified some topics are not covered in the script for example double glazed windows. Ideas for additions to scripting are outlined in appendix B.

#### **Workforce**

From the job shadowing carried out, the CIIP was very impressed with Morrison's workforce, in particular their contact centre staff who are very dedicated to the job and hardworking. In turn, Morrison's operatives are carrying out their day-to-day job well. They follow procedure by introducing themselves, showing ID badges and wearing shoe coverings, and are polite and courteous. From what the CIIP observed, operatives keep tenants informed by clearly explaining things as they go.

Morrison offers a valuable, flexible service by including after hours work and Saturday morning appointments. However, the CIIP was concerned about the apparent reluctance by many to carry out out-of-hours work as currently only one or two operatives are willing to volunteer. Morrison's

management has already taken action to improve this situation by entering into a formal consultation with trade unions about introducing a rota for out of hours that operatives must adhere to.

### **Improved working relationship between MFS and EDH staff**

Feedback from interviews would suggest there has been a marked improvement in the working relationship between MFS and EDH over the last 6-9 months. In particular, there is more consistency for Morrison's staff due to dealing with the same person and knowing who to contact.

EDH and MFS are also working more closely together to learn from customer complaints. EDH already had an established learning log, but due to repeat issues, ownership of this log has also been adopted by Morrison. The log is monitored at a high level on a monthly basis. The CIIP sees this is a very positive step in improving the customer experience, especially in terms of keeping the customer informed. However, this has only been recently introduced; the CIIP encourages both parties to ensure learning continues to be acted upon.

## **Weaknesses**

### **PDA's (Hand held computers)**

PDA's are currently being used by operatives and have the potential to be a great planning tool. However, at present only one appointment appears on the screen at a time, meaning that there is the potential for an operative to pack up and leave a property only to return when the second job appears on their PDA.

The CIIP recognised it would be beneficial if operatives could view all the jobs for a day/half day. The CIIP understands that Morrison is currently looking into this, but at the time the inspection was carried out, this was not an option.

### **Keeping customers informed**

It has become apparent from many aspects of the inspection that there is still a real problem about keeping customers informed of the progress of a repair, particularly if a customer is waiting for a part to be ordered or if the repair was not completed right first time. Furthermore, there appears to be no adequate procedure in place such as a courtesy call to overcome this problem and keep customers informed.

Examples, taken from document reviews, job shadowing and telephone interviews, include:

- 1 When operatives are unable to make a job on time, they do not inform the contact centre, which in turn is not keeping customers informed that the operative is likely to arrive later than scheduled.
- 2 A job has been cancelled and the customer has not been informed.
- 3 Customers have waited months to hear back on progress around a repair and calls have not been returned when they've made enquires.
- 4 Work has not been carried out right first time and the customer has had to contact EDH repeatedly before it has been put right.
- 5 An operative has been sent out again to the same property to fix a job when he's already made a recommendation for a different tradesman to come out.
- 6 Details have not been passed to operatives about the job, resulting in the operative asking the tenant what the problem is. It is unclear whether this is due to a lack of information from the contact centre or not enough information being captured on the PDAs.

### **Tenants behaving badly**

The CIIP recognises that the problem with communication does not solely lie with Morrison. When job shadowing, there were numerous occasions when tenants did not keep appointments and had not informed Morrison that they would not be in.

There is particular concern around emergency call outs. One CIIP member witnessed 3 emergency calls outs in the same morning when the tenant wasn't in and this experience was not uncommon for the rest of the job shadowing.

It is clear that Morrison is losing money from the number of tenants not in, but the question remains how will Morrison manage this problem in future and are they doing everything necessary to try and gain access to a property? There don't appear to be any effective deterrents in place to prevent abuse of the system.

In EDH's tenant handbook (and tenancy agreement) it states that a person may be charged if they are not in for their appointment, but it would appear this is not being enforced.

There is also concern that operatives start work at a property, but are asked to leave by the tenant as it is not convenient with their schedule e.g. school run, meaning that the operative needs to call out again. It needs to be made clear to tenants that operatives must be able to carry out their work until finished, and that tenants should respect the operative's place of work by not smoking in their vicinity and locking dogs away until operatives have left the premises.

### **General doing the job**

- 1 Operatives are not able to complete work until Transco has carried out theirs. At present Morrison is very reliant on customer informing them of when work has been completed by Transco.
- 2 There doesn't appear to be much consideration for journey planning when booking in repairs, particularly in relation to where operatives live or are setting off from. More careful planning would create savings in fuel costs. Using PDA's correctly would help with this as the job could be given to the nearest operative who is available.
- 3 The CIIP picked up on a number of cases when customers wanted to report a repair for a product under warranty, but had difficulty getting the problem resolved as Kier carried out the work in the first place. This issue relates to the problem of the different systems EDH uses to log information not being linked up. This problem has already been identified and should be rectified when PIMSS is installed by the end of April 2012.
- 4 When booking out of hours appointments, EDH contact centre staff sometimes do so without consulting with Morrison's staff or considering Morrison's schedule, resulting in out of hours appointments beginning at 6pm for example rather than 4pm and operatives having no work to do in the meantime. It would be beneficial to make scheduling more efficient in terms of the operatives' time.
- 5 Morrison contact centre is understaffed. The 2 operatives worked very hard and find it difficult to take breaks due to an extremely busy working environment.
- 6 Toolbox talks are held once a month at Morrison and are meant to cover aspects of customer service as well as keeping operatives up-to-date of good working practices. When 2 panel members attended, there was lots of useful information about health and safety, but no real focus on customer service.

## **Further considerations**

The CIIP appreciates the extensive task Morrison has in terms of carrying out repairs. They are servicing different systems and operatives can't carry all manner of spare parts in their vans. This makes it all the more vital that a fool proof procedure is in place to keep customers informed of ordering parts/delays to repairs as it's likely they will require a part to be ordered.

When carrying out telephone interviews, many of those consulted indicated that in addition to receiving the initial letter with appointment time, they would appreciate either a text or phone call 48 hours before the appointment to remind them. EDH may wish to consider consulting the wider tenant body on this matter, either via a questionnaire or adding this information to their system.

The inspection itself highlighted some breakdown in communication. For example there were a number of occasions when operatives didn't turn up for job shadowing at the agreed time and Morrison didn't inform the panel when a member of staff was unable to attend their interview because of illness. The CIIP also picked up during job shadowing that many of the operatives were very concerned about the inspection. It was clear it had not been communicated to them that the CIIP inspection was there to improve the service. Instead, it appeared they were expecting to be unnecessarily criticised.

### **8. Impact for customers (including access and customer care)**

Many of the recommendations will benefit customers in terms of communication, for example keeping them informed of the progress of a repair, particularly if there has been a delay due to a part being ordered. Passing on correct information in a timely manner from the contact centre will help operatives to be equipped to complete the job correctly first time. Calling ahead to remind tenants of appointments will also reduce the number of TNI (tenant not in) when operatives call.

### **9. Impact on equality and diversity**

Customer profile information in relation to preferred contact and any special needs will help to deliver a more personalised repairs service to customers.

### **10. Impact on value for money**

There are a number of positive impacts on value for money. If the recommendations were to be considered, savings in the long term will be

greatly beneficial. For example, less money wasted in terms of time and fuel cost when tenants are not in, especially on emergency calls. When job shadowing one panel member witnessed 3 consecutive emergency calls where tenants were not in resulting in a wasted 2 hours of a joiner's time and wasted fuel.

#### **11. Legal impact**

There are no legal implications in this report.

#### **12. Financial impact**

There are a number of actions identified within the report that may have a financial impact including employing additional staff for Morrison's part of the contact centre and training other members of staff to relieve Morrison's contact centre staff.

#### **13. Previous inspections**

A progress report regarding the recommendations for the ASB and Estate Management inspections have been included with this report in appendix C and D. 12 of the 15 ASB recommendations have now been put in place and the remaining ones are on track. All 23 recommendations for Estate Management have now been actioned.

**Author:** George Dowse and Joan Zettle, Customer Inspection and Improvement Panel, supported by Jennie Hewitt, Customer Scrutiny Officer  
**Contact number:** 0191 518 5389  
**E-mail address:** [jennie.hewitt@eastdurhamhomes.co.uk](mailto:jennie.hewitt@eastdurhamhomes.co.uk)