



Customer Excellence Panel

Repairs and Maintenance Review

July/August 2009



Purpose

The purpose of this report is to summarise the findings of the Customer Excellence Panel (CEP) review of the Repairs and Maintenance Service.

The review was carried out in July and August 2009.

Background

The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) expects housing associations to have a clear strategy for involving tenants and residents in influencing and monitoring service delivery.

Tenants should be clear on how they can be involved in managing their homes, and Helena must demonstrate how services have been modified in response to tenant views.

Over recent years there has been increased emphasis on tenant led regulation; ensuring housing associations are accountable to its customers.

“Making services and decisions accountable to, and contestable by, residents, and responding to the resident voice, are vital to achieving... excellence in housing.”
Chartered Institute of Housing, 2008

“We expect all housing associations to clearly show how their services have been commented on and influenced by the people living in their homes...We also expect housing associations to be able to show that responding to residents’ views is something that runs through all their activities as part of their culture and the way they deliver services.”
Housing Corporation, 2007

Helena has already made successful inroads to achieving this through its Customer Excellence and Resident Involvement Strategies, providing greater opportunities for tenants to influence the decision-making process and shape the services that they receive. The Customer Excellence Panel is just one of a range of initiatives aimed at achieving this.

Introduction

Helena Homes want to ensure that our customers are at the heart of everything that we do. The Customer Excellence Strategy aims to ensure we deliver high quality services based on what matters most to tenants. We want to ensure that we continually improve and deliver customer led services.

The CEP have a key role within the Customer Excellence Strategy in helping to improve customer satisfaction and raise the percentage of very satisfied tenants by 25% over the next 5 years. It will help ensure that tenants play an active role in shaping service delivery and identifying areas for improvement.

About the Customer Excellence Panel (CEP)

The CEP was established to provide an enhanced scrutiny role across the services Helena provides. Scrutiny is an important function, which helps to ensure that our customers receive high quality services that are relevant to their needs and demonstrate value for money. It adds a new dimension to Helena's decision-making process by examining and questioning performance and decisions made by the organisation from a tenant's perspective.

Aims of the panel:

The aim of the Panel is to help Helena deliver better services by ensuring tenants are able to influence service design and hold Helena to account for performance.

The panel aims to regularly review Helena's performance, actively challenging the way in which we deliver services to assist us in continuous improvement.

The Panel's role is not as a consultation group to advise on policy and procedure, but as a scrutiny panel to challenge the way in which services are provided.

The Panel will draw on wider sources of information (such as customer satisfaction surveys and complaints) to ensure that they represent the views of the majority of tenants (and residents where applicable).

The Panel enables tenants to have a greater role in:

- Defining what is important and expressing preference in shaping service delivery, including reviewing and setting service standards
- Monitoring performance and holding Helena to account.

In doing this it is hoped that the role of the CEP will help us to increase customer satisfaction with the services we provide.

Overall the approach will help to further embed a customer focus in the way we behave, leading to better services for customers.

Review Process:

The Panel has received independent training and support (from the Northern Housing Consortium) in order to build confidence and capacity in their role.

It maintains an overview of service delivery and performance, and questions whether they can further develop to improve customer satisfaction and value for money.

To do this the Panel is provided with a range of performance information and scrutiny activity to accurately reflect the customer experience. This includes:

- Performance information

- against targets
- over the past three years (trend analysis)
- against similar organisations (benchmark information)
- Customer feedback to determine what matters most to tenants
- Complaints information
- Positive feedback and compliments
- Best practice information from other organisations
- Activity based costing (ABC) information
- Service standards
- Findings from Customer Inspector reviews
- One Voice survey findings
- GIS maps to identify geographical trends (where applicable)
- Customer Insight information
- Other information as required

The panel also have the opportunity to meet and discuss performance with relevant service managers.

The panel use this information to gauge a view of how well we are performing, and ensure that we are working towards meeting tenant priorities and providing value for money, in order to recommend areas for improvement.

If further information is required the Panel can request questions to be put to the One Voice tenant panel, or ask the Customer Inspectors to carry out a review of the relevant service area.

This approach helps to ensure that Helena keeps tenants are the heart of service delivery and that tenant views and opinions are a key consideration in the decision-making process.

Repairs and maintenance – Customer Excellence Panel Review

This is the first service area review undertaken by the Panel.

The schedule of reviews was agreed between the Performance and Intelligence Team and the CEP based on the current corporate priorities and what tenants have identified as key drivers of satisfaction. *(A copy of the review schedule for 2009/10 can be found on Highway within the Customer Excellence Project page.)*

Aims of the review

Overall, in relation to repairs and maintenance, the review aimed to:

- Review and scrutinise performance & customer feedback (including complaints)
- Agree Customer Excellence Performance Indicators
- Review current service standards
- Recommended areas of improvement and identify actions
- Consider whether the service is providing value for money and delivering excellent services to tenants and residents.

Approach to the review

The Performance and Intelligence Team presented an overview of performance to date drawing on the range of information outlined above (within the 'Review Process' section).

A number of breakout sessions were held throughout the presentation in order for the panel to discuss their views and opinions, ask questions and challenge performance.

The breakout sessions were structured around:

- What matters most to Helena Tenants?
- Do our service standards reflect this?
- How are we performing? (including cost and value for money)
- Are we monitoring the right things?
- What improvements do tenants want?

Managers were invited to attend the meeting to respond to any questions the panel raised and explain any reasoning behind decisions made.

A wrap up session was later held to agree recommendations for improvement and action-planning.

This report outlines the findings of the review and actions agreed in response.

Findings

Overall the Panel is satisfied with how the Repairs and Maintenance Service is performing. Improvements made recently (e.g. Opti-time appointment system) is making a positive impact on the level of service provided to tenants. Satisfaction with the Repairs and Maintenance Service is almost upper quartile, with costs demonstrating good value for money when compared to similar organisations.

The Panel has made a number of recommendations for service managers to consider which it hopes will help to raise satisfaction levels further and help in achieving excellence.

How are we performing?

At first glance, performance over the last 3 years appears to have dipped in 2008/09. However, this is not a true reflection of performance due to technical issues during the implementation of Opti-time. To fully understand the impact this has had on performance, the Panel requested further information regarding Opti-time from the service managers. The panel also considered tenant feedback and complaints to evaluate the impact on tenant satisfaction.

The Panel is satisfied with performance and accepted that the technical problems encountered during the implementation of Opti-time have now been resolved. Overall the introduction of Opti-time has led to an improved service for tenants and quarter on quarter trend analysis demonstrates that performance is improving.

The Repairs and Maintenance service is providing good value for money. The Panel considered Housemark Activity Based Costing (ABC) information in relation to other similar sized stock transfer associations. Helena's response repairs service is performing well with low management costs, low people to property ratios and low spend-per-property, whilst achieving high satisfaction levels.

The main reason for complaint (regarding Repairs and maintenance) is related to appointments not being kept (29 complaints within 2008/09). It is therefore important to keep tenants informed and up to date if an appointment will be missed. Keeping tenants informed if an appointment is brought forward is also critical to providing excellent services. Operatives are regularly informed not to 'cold call' tenants in advance of the appointment, without contacting the tenant first to check that it is convenient for the repair to be carried out earlier than originally planned, however the Panel felt this still occasionally occurs.

The Panel was asked to consider performance against targets.

There is room for improvement regarding the percentage of complaints responded to within target time. The Performance and Intelligence Team informed the Panel of the current review of the Complaints process and system which is aimed at improving complaints performance. The Panel requested a future CEP meeting to focus on complaints once the new system is in place.

Currently major repairs and improvements (for example large external repairs or where work is grouped into a 'scheme' for the area such as fencing work) have a target completion date of six-months. Helena's performance however often exceeds this target with major works and improvements completed much earlier. In addition, the One Voice survey findings suggest that there is demand for major works to be completed within a reduced timescale.

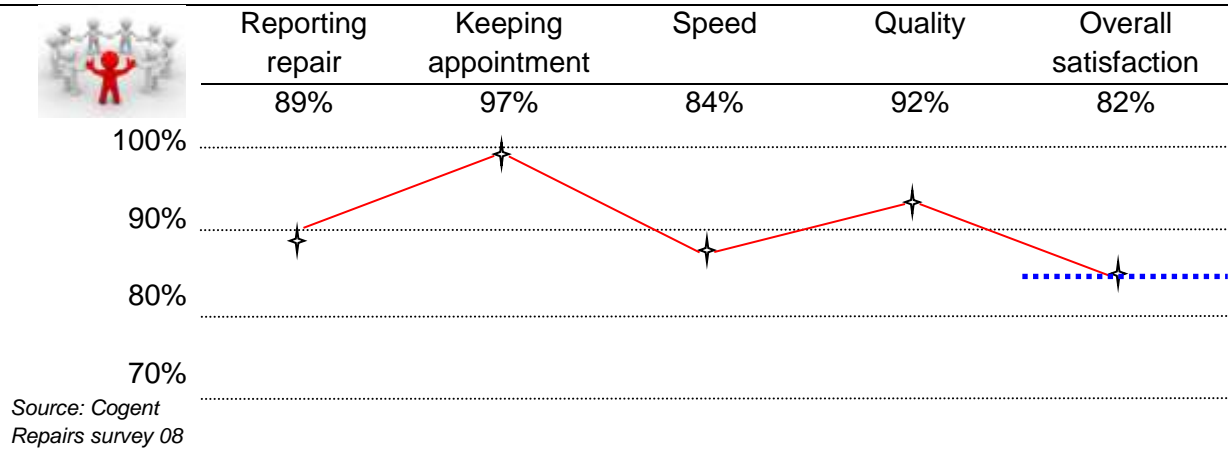
Audit Commission guidance suggests a target of 70% of all response repairs to be routine, 20% urgent, and only 10% emergency. However, Helena's performance is outside of these guidelines due to our commitment to tailor services to meet the individual needs of tenants. Using data gathered during the tenancy audit, One Call has the authority to raise the category of the repair (from routine to urgent for example) if individual tenant circumstances require. The Panel were pleased that One Call is already providing a flexible service to vulnerable tenants, and although additional costs are incurred as a consequence, it is felt this tailored approach will improve satisfaction and customer service.

What matters most to tenants

Overall, the Panel is impressed with the repairs and maintenance service and the levels of tenant satisfaction currently achieved.

The presentation outlined feedback regarding the customer journey, from reporting the repair, through to its completion.

Customer Journey – Satisfaction with repairs and maintenance service



Key:

- = National Upper Quartile Performance 2008 (82.4%)
- = Customer Satisfaction at different stages of repairs and maintenance process

Satisfaction when reporting a repair is high with almost 9 in 10 tenants stating they are satisfied with the service they receive from One Call (63% very satisfied). Almost all respondents agreed that their repair was completed on or before the agreed appointment date.

7 in 10 respondents agreed that the repair was completed within first visit, with more than 9 in 10 stating they were satisfied with the quality of the repair.

Over half of respondents to the survey stated that the repairs service had improved over the last 12 months, with only 10% stating it had got worse.

Based on the above feedback, the Panel is satisfied with how well the service is performing in regards to customer satisfaction. Overall, Helena is just outside the top quartile for overall satisfaction with the repairs and maintenance service. To help identify how Helena can further improve satisfaction, the Panel considered the results of the One Voice survey.

Tailoring services is of high importance to tenants and will help to improve satisfaction levels further. The Panel is pleased that Helena is considering extending repairs appointments times and felt that the One Voice survey findings demonstrate that there is sufficient demand for this service.

The Panel noted that the introduction of extended repairs appointment times will have cost implications. The Panel agreed that extended appointments should be limited to those who specifically require evening or weekend appointments due to employment reasons for example. The Panel believes that the proposed appointment times will help to improve accessibility to services for a wider tenant base, improving satisfaction levels and thus providing value for money.

Do our service standards reflect what matters most to tenants?

The panel considered the current service standards in relation to what matters most to tenants.

Overall, the Panel is happy with the current service standards but feel more could be done to ensure that they fully reflect what matters most to tenants.

Performance information and customer feedback indicates that the standards are being met. Whilst the Panel did not disagree with the standards, they noted that they focus predominantly on completing repairs within target time (as opposed to quality of service).

Observations made by the panel include:

- Tenants tend to complain if their repair has been misdiagnosed leading to a delay in its completion or if they have to report the repair more than once before it is resolved. The Panel therefore feels that Helena should aim to get repairs completed right first time.
- What is classed as an emergency, urgent or routine may differ depending on the individual circumstance of tenants. The repairs service should therefore continue to be flexible to meet the individual needs of tenants and performance should be amended to reflect this.
- Overall satisfaction with the repairs services is not simply based on the quality of the repair, but to the whole service provided from when it is reported through to its completion. It is therefore important that tenants are kept informed of progress throughout to improve overall satisfaction with the service provided.
- Tenants should also be informed in advance if a repairs appointment can be completed in advance of the agreed appointment time. The Panel felt that this is vital to improving customer satisfaction.

Feedback and complaints suggest that it would be beneficial to customers if the standards also focus on:

- getting a repair right first time;
- ensuring that the operative leaves the home clean and tidy following any work; and
- deliver a high quality standard of repair.

There is some concern that service standards are not clear.

The Panel considered the standard regarding painting external woodwork (*We will paint any woodwork outside your home every six years*) and felt that it needed to be more specific. It was unclear whether this included fencing and outhouses, or if the responsibility for these lies with the tenant rather than Helena.

What is classed as an emergency, urgent or routine repair is also not always clear to tenants. In addition, what is considered routine to one may be urgent to another. The Panel

felt that this can impact on satisfaction if the customer does not understand why their repair has been classified as it has by Helena.

Are we monitoring the right things?

The Panel is keen to develop a suite of Customer Excellence KPIs. Whilst the Panel recognise the need to monitor regulatory requirements and viability, they would also like to monitor issues of importance to tenants, to help ensure that we are working towards improving services for tenants and increasing the percentage very satisfied.

The Panel was therefore asked to consider what performance information they would like to monitor in relation to repairs and maintenance.

Monitoring the percentage of repairs right first time is considered best practice and the Panel feel that this is of importance to tenants. The Panel would like to include 'First Time Fix' as a Customer Excellence Key Performance Indicator.

Panel Recommendations

In order to increase the percentage of satisfied (and ultimately very satisfied) tenants the panel recommends that Helena:

- Focuses more on getting repairs right first time
- Tailors services to meet the individual needs of tenants and residents by exploring extended appointment times for those in full-time employment.
- Improves communication e.g. keeping tenants informed of progress
- Involves tenants in determining what repairs are classed as emergency, urgent or routine.
- Amends the service standards and introduces the new Customer Excellence KPI as recommended by the Panel.

See Action Plan below..

Action Plan- Repairs and Maintenance CEP Review.

Recommendation	Action	Reason	Service Area Response	Who	When	Progress report to CEP
Review KPI target times	Reduce major repairs target down to 3 months from 6	One Voice Survey identified demand.	Following a period of consultation between Assets, Property care and One Call, it is proposed that major works will be packaged into mini schemes on a geographical basis and completed on a rolling programme. This should also result in efficiency and cost savings.	Assets (Ste Garner)		Oct
	Review target times to complete routine repairs. - Identify average time to complete Emergency, urgent and routine repairs. *see appendix 1 for details.	Performance when benchmarked against similar organisations is 'average'. Helena should consider whether it is realistic to improve, and if this would help to achieve excellence.		Assets (Ste Garner)		

Recommendation	Action	Reason	Service Area Response	Who	When	Progress report to CEP
Increase appointment times: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wednesday evening to 8pm - Saturday mornings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluate logistics - Identify cost implications 	One Voice survey identified demand. To ensure value for money is achieved this service should only be offered to those most in need of it e.g. tenants in full time employment.	<p>We are looking to extend the service to 8pm on wednesdays following consultation with the workforce. It is anticipated that any additional costs will be offset by the enhanced service that we will be able to provide. Service uptake will be closely monitored.</p> <p>Further discussions need to take place between Assets and Property care, specifically around processes and cost, before any definite commitment can be made in terms of Saturday morning appointments.</p>	Assets (Ste Garner)	Before next meeting. Cost.	Oct
Review service standards and ensure standards are clear –any ambiguity removed. New standards proposed by the panel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Right 1st time - Leave home tidy & clean 		Current standards focus predominantly at time element of performance.	Steps are being taken to capture performance information on Right First Time. There are no proposals to start to maintain dividing fences due to massive cost implications but we will continue to maintain fencing supplied via ongoing or previous schemes. We will ensure that future communications around service standards are clearer so that customers know what they can expect.	Assets (Ste Garner) <i>Link to Listening day feedback also</i>	Sept	Dec

Recommendation	Action	Reason	Service Area Response	Who	When	Progress report to CEP
Tenant input in defining Emergency, Urgent & Routine repairs.		Tenants may not understand why their repair has been classified as emergency, urgent or routine. This may lower satisfaction with the service.	<p>Helena plans to review repairs definitions within 2009/10.</p> <p>Focus groups will be set up and tenants consulted with consideration given to the outcomes of the recent tenancy audit and the needs of our vulnerable and disabled customers.</p> <p>The current re-charge policy will also be consulted at the tenant focus groups.</p>	Assets (Ste Garner)	End of Nov	Dec Mtg
Review repairs completion target times.	Monitor average time to complete an emergency, urgent and routine repair in 2009/10. (Performance data in 2008/09 was negatively affected by introduction of Opti-time and therefore unreliable source to base recommendation .)	Current target times are as expected when compared with similar organisations. However, there is room for improvement to reach upper quartile.		Assets (Ste Garner)		

Recommendation	Action	Reason	Service Area Response	Who	When	Progress report to CEP
Tenants to have their say if something is fixed or replaced.*		<i>*View based on anecdotal evidence – not highlighted in recent research.</i>	This is not always practical due to the associated cost implications. To ensure good value for money is achieved, the most cost effective method (providing quality is maintained) will drive the decision made to replace or repair.	NA		Dec Mtg
Other recommendations (non Repairs and Maintenance)						
Inform CEP of what we are doing to employ local people.**	- PIT to invite Roy Williams to future CEP meeting	<i>**General request from the Panel</i>	PIT team to arrange for Neighbourhood Employment Project Officer to attend future CEP meeting.	PIT/ Roy Williams	Oct Mtg	Oct
CEP to review Complaints	- PIT to arrange CEP mini-meeting around new complaints system.	Although complaints analysis is included at each service area review, the Panel is keen to understand complaints as a whole, and how Helena learns from complaints made to improve services to tenants.	PIT team to arrange future CEP mini-meeting around Complaints.	PIT		

Appendix 1:

The Panel considered the current repair completion target times and made recommendations for improvement based on current performance:

Responsive Repair Target Times (Are they realistic & challenging?)		
Emergency	Urgent	Routine
Target = 1 working day	Target = 5 working days	Target = 20 working days
Health & safety issues	Seriously affect days to day living	All other routine repairs
<p>Panel Comments:</p> <p>When compared to similar organisations, a target time of 1 day is standard.</p> <p>In the main, the Panel are confident that emergency repairs are often completed within hours.</p> <p>The Panel would like to know the average time taken to complete an emergency repair to consider whether it is realistic to reduce the target time. (Performance data for 2008/09 was skewed due to implementation of opti-time).</p>	<p>Panel Comments:</p> <p>The target of 5 working days is realistic and the Panel do not see reason for the target to be reviewed.</p>	<p>Panel comments:</p> <p>The target of 20 working days is in line with the average (when compared to similar associations via Housemark). However, this is not upper quartile and therefore there may be room for improvement.</p> <p>The Panel would like to know the average time taken to complete a routine repair to consider whether it is realistic to reduce the target time. (Performance data for 2008/09 was skewed due to implementation of opti-time).</p>