



## **Customer Excellence Panel**

## **Furnished Accommodation**

**September 2012**



***Report by***

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## Findings

- From evidence the Panel considered that the service was performing highly with 96% of tenants agreeing that it met their needs and 99% being satisfied with the service overall.
- The Panel were pleased with the conduct of member of staff supported by feedback from the satisfaction survey and Customer Inspector Interviews.
- It was suggested that the advice given to the customers was good however advice around service charges and conditions of the scheme could be improved.
- Staff gave a positive impression in the advice they were giving in regards to 'Welfare Reform',
- Most of the furniture part of the scheme was rated highly, the only real area of concern were carpets.
- Feedback from the Customer Inspectors highlighted that colour choices on the scheme could be improved to improve how customers feel about the scheme.
- The Panel were happy the service had received no complaints
- The Panel were particularly pleased that customers within the scheme received an annual visit
- The Panel were happy that the set of service standards for the service were generally consistent with 'what matters most to tenants?'
- Although making no changes to the actual service standards the Panel did highlight they could be clearer for tenants to understand.
- Although the Panel were happy for such standards to remain out of the Customer Charter due to their relevance to such a small group of customers they did suggest that they are included on other methods such as Helena Websites and Digi TV.
- The Panel acknowledged that Helena currently have 564 furnished properties, the Panel were happy with this proportion. They were pleased that the figure was under the ceiling of 5% (at 4%).
- The Panel were pleased when they considered the value of the scheme, considering the use of a

## Introduction

The Customer Excellence Panel is one of a range of Helena's initiatives that aims to enable tenants to have a greater say in the decisions and have an influence in service delivery. The Panel provides an enhanced scrutiny role across Helena which is an important function to ensure that our customers receive a high quality service which also provides good value for money.

The Panel monitors Helena's performance mainly in relation to customer related elements of service delivery. They are not a consultation group and therefore do not advise on policy and procedure but as a scrutiny group who challenge and make recommendations to improve Helena's service's based on evidence from our wider tenant base. The Panel also set targets for performance along with reviewing and setting service standards.

Listening to our customers at this level gives us another dimension to our process and ensures our services meet the needs of our customers.

The Panel has been in place since 2009 and have since carried out a range of service reviews, the work of the Panel has gained significant amount of recognition and were thrilled to be announced as one of ten scrutiny groups who were awarded as 'Co-regulatory Champions' by the TSA for their progress around scrutiny.

For more information about the Panel along with details of how they carry out their reviews and how they prioritise their work please visit the Panel's website at [www.excellenceathelena.co.uk](http://www.excellenceathelena.co.uk)

## Aims of the Furnished Accommodation Review

Specifically for this service area the Customer Excellence Panel service review aimed to:

- Review and scrutinise performance and customer feedback (including complaints)
- Review current service standards
- Agree Customer Excellence Performance Indicators
- Recommend areas of improvement and identify time bound actions
- Check that recommendations from a previous review have been implemented
- Consider if the service is providing good value for money and delivering an excellence service to tenants

## Method

An overview of Furnished Accommodation performance drawing of a range of performance information from Key Performance Indicators to Customer Inspectors findings was presented to the Panel. Breakout sessions were held throughout the presentation of the information to gather the Panel's feedback on current performance, throughout the sessions the Panel challenge, scrutinise and question performance. At the end of the review members were given an opportunity to put forward there recommendations for the service.

All feedback is structured around the Panel's set workbook which aims to ensure decisions are based on evidence from wider feedback. The workbook focuses around the following:

- What matters most to our tenants? (*Complaints, Customer Inspector Findings and Survey analysis*)
- Service Standards
- Performance Indicators
- Value for money
- Future update



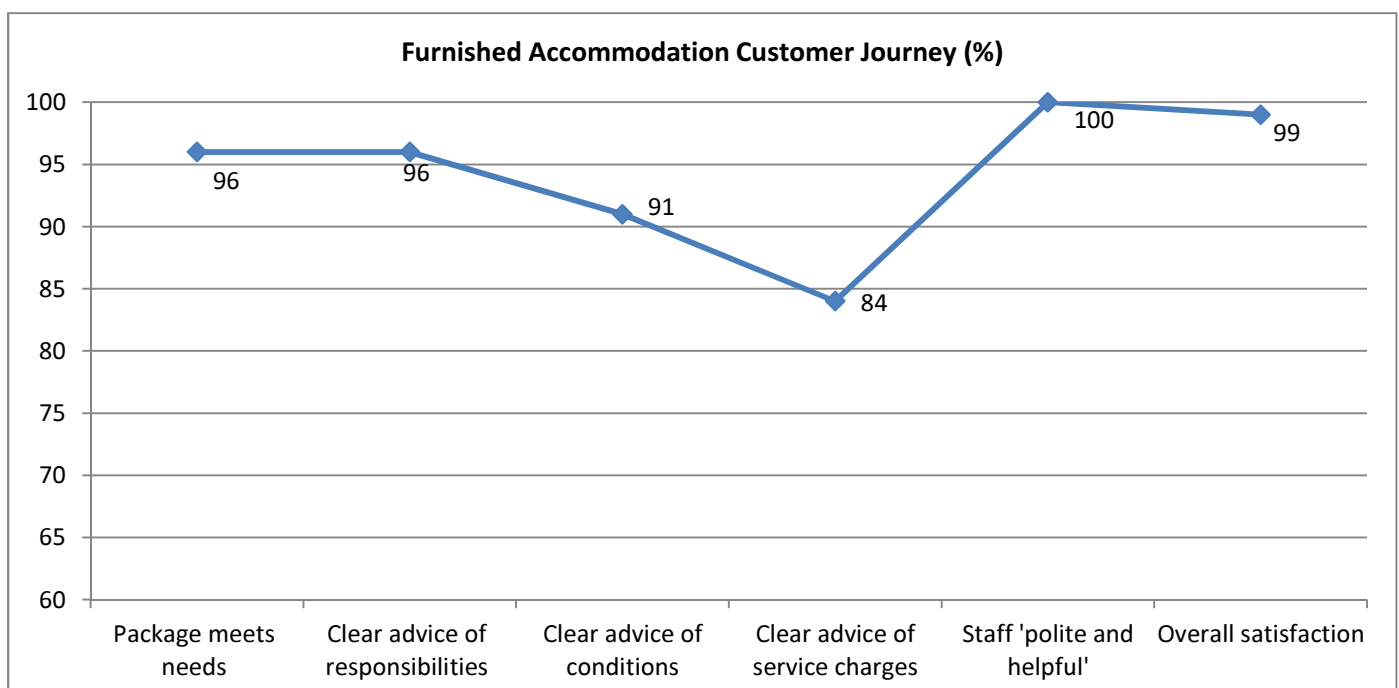
Throughout the sessions the Panel make recommendations for improvements to the service in line with improving customer satisfaction with the service. On completion of the workbook the Panel agreed an action plan with the service manager, Sharon McKenzie

### What matters most to tenants?

The first area the Panel considered as part of their review was 'What matters most to tenants?', this section enables the Panel to analyse all the feedback we gather from our tenants in regards to the service. Specifically the Panel reviewed feedback from the Customer Inspectors Interviews with members of staff along with a previous satisfaction survey and complaints.

During this review the Panel made use of the 2010/11 satisfaction survey results, they acknowledged that they were a year out of date but were aware that within 2011/12 a review took place which unfortunately meant the team did not have the capacity to conduct the survey and in addition there were significant changes being made to the service.

The diagram below makes use of the 2010/11 Furnished Accommodation satisfaction responses, it demonstrates the average journey a customer goes through when they are accessing this service.



88 of 540 surveys were completed for 2010/11 which gives a good response rate of 35%

## ***Satisfaction***

Evidence from the 2010/11 satisfaction survey confirmed that furnished customers are generally happy with the service with 96% agreeing that it met their needs. 99% were satisfied with the service overall, which the Panel were impressed with.

The Panel were also pleased with the 100% satisfaction rate in the 2010/11 satisfaction survey for being 'polite and helpful' which they think should continue with future satisfaction surveys. The Panel suggested that this should continue. The Panel also felt that feedback from the Customer Inspectors in their Interviews with Furnished Accommodation staff that they were all passionate about the service and were consistent in their behaviour all believing that customers they are dealing with deserve a high level service tailored to their needs.

## ***Members of staff***

Whilst the Panel were pleased with the advice staff gave and highlighted that all related elements are over 80%. They did however acknowledge that satisfaction was very slightly lower with 91% feel happy with the advice they were given about condition of the scheme and only 84% for service charges. The Panel suggested both these satisfactions should be at the same level of satisfaction that was received for 'advice around responsibilities' (96%).

Staff also gave a positive impression in the advice they were giving in regards to 'Welfare Reform', from the Customer Inspectors interviews the Panel were able to confirm that staff are taking the uncertainties in their stride and were updating and helping customers as much as they could.

## ***Furniture***

Again from the satisfaction survey the Panel reviewed the actual furniture that forms part of the scheme. They were happy that the following elements demonstrated no concern as satisfaction was over 90%:

- Chest of draws, wardrobe, washing machine and fridge (99%)
- Dining room table and chairs (98%)
- Bathroom vinyl (93%)
- Cooker (92%)

The Panel suggested the following furniture within the package as an area for improvement, this was as satisfaction with the item demonstrated satisfaction lower than 90%:

- ¼ Freezer (84%)
- Sofa (87%)
- Kitchen vinyl (88%)

The Panel were concerned that the carpet within the package was a concern as satisfaction with the 2010/11 survey was lower than any other elements with the living room carpet at 82% and the hall, stairs and landing carpet at 81%.

### ***Choices***

Feedback from the 2010/11 survey and the Customer Inspector interviews highlighted that colour choices on the scheme require consideration about how they could be improved. The Panel viewed the choices and accepted why feedback was as it was they commented on that fact that they were vivid and not everyone's preference.

Whilst they understood the need to keep cost of the scheme low they also felt there should be a balance between this and satisfaction to ensure once customers is further on in the scheme they still remain happy with the choice of goods they have in their home. The Panel felt colours should be neutral.

The Panel suggested that in a future survey customers should be contacted to find out what they think of the available choices and suggest how they could be improved.

### ***Complaints***

The Panel acknowledged that there had been no complaints since March 2010 – July 2012, they were impressed with this and highlighted that the service being provided must be to a high level.

### ***Visits***

The Panel were also pleased that the service has implemented an annual visit for each customer on the scheme this was an outcome of the service review. They felt this demonstrated that the team are making on-going improvements to the service.

### ***Customer Inspectors recommendations***

The Customer Inspector conducted a series of 30 minutes interviews with members of staff working within furnished accommodation. The feedback gathered within the interviews enabled them to form their own recommendations based on their findings, these are noted below and have been accepted and supported by the Panel.

- For customers on the scheme who don't need intensive support there should be a definite end so priority is given to those who really require intensive support
- Increase the choices to improve satisfaction
- Continue to direct customers to other agencies
- Manage expectation
- Update customers on the impact of Welfare Reform
- Continue to be flexible with the scheme considering limitations, for example with removal furniture
- Furniture monitored in terms of repairs and quality
- Continue to donate furniture no longer suitable for the scheme

### ***Satisfaction survey***

The Panel are keen that the service continues to conduct an annual satisfaction survey with relevant customers. Although they acknowledged the large internal review of the service carried out in 2011-12 making the survey a

secondary priority they did request that the survey now continues in 2012-13. The Panel are keen for the survey to take place to ensure the team are able to assess how happy furnished customers are with the scheme.

## **Service standards**

On consideration of the presented evidence the Panel reviewed the service's set of standards, which are ultimately the promises to Helena customers.



The Panel were happy that the set of service standards for the service were generally along the right lines in regards to 'what matters most to tenants?' – the Panel agreed evidence from the survey supported this.

Although making no changes to the actual service standards the Panel did highlight they could be clearer for tenants to understand. The Panel suggested that the following standards were particularly confusing and whilst relevant within the set of service standards could be written more clearly:

- If a replacement you will be advised of the delivery date. Replacement cooker, fridges and freezers will be delivered in case of an emergency within 2 working days, for other replacements within 8 days.
- If an item has been damaged through misuse we will write and advise within five days of our visit and charge you

Following this the Panel felt they should all be written in a customer friendly format to ensure they are understood by all. Once in such a format the Panel were keen that customers are fully aware of such standards and were available to access should customers wish to do so.

Although the Panel were happy for such standards to remain out of the Customer Charter due to their relevance to such a small group of customers they did suggest that they are included on other methods such as Helena Websites and Digi TV.

## **Performance Indicators**

The Panel recognised the importance of measuring quantitative information to evidence compliance with set service standard and performance indicators. They have their own suite of measures which they can use to identify Customer Excellence, these measures are analysed on a quarterly basis.



Included in the performance measures are not only measures to assess regulatory requirements and financial viability but also satisfaction measures to ensure we are meet the needs of our customers and ensure satisfaction with our services are high.

The panel acknowledged that Helena currently have 564 furnished properties, the Panel were happy with this proportion. They were pleased that the figure was under the ceiling of 5% (at 4%). They were pleased that tenants who require such a service were making use of it.

Performance of the service was generally determined by satisfaction information which the Panel were generally pleased especially the overall satisfaction rate of 99% which the Panel would like to see maintained.

The Panel considered what performance measures they would like to monitor from the 'Furnished Accommodation' service area. They would like to continue measuring,

- Satisfaction with the service
- The length of time members remain on the scheme

## **Value for money**

The Panel reviewed a case study to help them assess value for money with the service. The sample customer pays £13.34 a month which is covered by those who are eligible for this as part of their Housing Benefit. If the customer was to buy her items from companies providing furniture by monthly instalments then at 'Bright House' they would be paying £36.90 for some of the goods and £24.31 at Perfect Home and again not receiving all the required goods. The Panel confirmed that Helena are providing a good value for money services. They were very impressed with this.

## **Recommendations**

In order to ensure continuous improvements are being demonstrated and the service is continuing to listen to its customers and act on feedback the Panel have made the following recommendations:

- More colour and style choices for furnished customers (including white goods)
- Conduct further investigations on the furniture and the numbers of repairs to ascertain if the goods demonstrate good value for money, for example if more expensive furniture lasts longer and needs less repairs.
- There should be a clear set of service standards for furnished accommodation
- Promote service standards using a variety of communication methods
- Recycle where possible the carpets for empty properties
- Ensure plenty of time is given to each customer at sign up to allow the information and restrictions of becoming a furnished tenant to be fully understood and expectations are clear
- Introduce a reward scheme for furnished tenants who look after their furniture
- Implement a regular satisfaction survey and gather feedback on the furniture choices available
- For customers on the scheme who don't need intensive support there should be a definite end so priority is given to those who really require intensive support

## **Next steps**

An action plan has been developed in response to the Panel's recommendations. Due to the potential unknown impacts of Welfare Reform on the service, service managers were unable to give exact dates by when the recommendations can be implemented. Outcomes of the review will still be shared with all key senior members of staff and promotion on the Intranet to ensure all members of staff are aware will also take place .

The Panel have requested a future update from the service manager in relation to how Welfare Reform will impact. From this confirmations of when recommendations will be implemented will be agreed.



## Action Plan

	Recommendation	Reason	Action	Additional comments	Who	When
1	More colour and style choices for furnished customers (including white goods)	Feedback from a variety of sources including interviews with staff, the Panel assessment of the choices along with survey feedback suggested customers were sometimes dissatisfied with the current choices of furniture and colours that are available	Service is currently under review due to the impact on Welfare Reform. Recommendations will be considered in the future once the team are more fully aware of the impacts of Welfare Reform of Furnished Service.	NA	J Ruse/ S Mackenzie	31/03/13
2	Conduct further investigations on the furniture and the numbers of repairs to ascertain if the goods demonstrate good value for money, for example if more expensive furniture lasts longer and needs less repairs.	Feedback during the staff interviews conducted by the Customer Inspectors highlighted that more could be done in terms of the quality of furniture and value for money		NA	J Ruse/ S Mackenzie	31/03/13
3	There should be a clear set of service standards for furnished accommodation	On review of current service standards the Panel felt they were sometimes difficult to understand. They should be worded clearly and highlight the promises made to the customer.		NA	J Ruse/ S Mackenzie	31/03/13
4	Inclusion of Furnished Accommodation service standards within the Customer Charter	The Panel noted that the service standards were not included within the Customer Charter whilst they acknowledged only 4% of tenants are furnished customers they considered that all Helena service standards should be in one place.		NA	J Ruse/ S Mackenzie	31/03/13
5	Recycle where possible the carpets for Empty Properties	Considered the costs at the moment to customers they panel were keen that furniture be reused where possible they were particularly keen that this occurs especially in relation to carpets which are generally a big expense.	The costs to do this outweigh the benefits	NA	NA	NA

	Recommendation	Reason	Action	Additional comments	Who	When
6	Ensure plenty of time is given to each customer at sign up to allow the information and restrictions of becoming a furnished tenant is fully understood and expectations are clear	The interviews with related staff as well as the survey highlighted that sometimes information is complex and customer expectations may not match the limitations of the service.	Service is currently under review due to the impact on Welfare Reform. Recommendations will be considered in the future once the team are more fully aware of the impacts of Welfare Reform of Furnished Service.	NA	J Ruse/ S Mackenzie	31/03/13
7	Introduce a reward scheme for furnished tenants who look after their furniture	The evidence provided highlighted that furniture use is best value for money when its use can be maximised therefore encouraging customers to look after the furniture in their home will be beneficial.		NA	J Ruse/ S Mackenzie	31/03/13
8	Implement a regular satisfaction survey and gather feedback on the furniture choices available	In order to collect feedback about how the service is performing the Panel suggested that a regular satisfaction survey would help to identify how customers felt and service improvements can be implemented to improve overall customer satisfaction		NA	J Ruse/ S Mackenzie	31/03/13
9	Introduce a definite end to the scheme to ensure those who require such intensive support are prioritised	Changes as a result to welfare reform led to Panel to suggest that the most vulnerable customers should be priorities and customers in real need and encourage those who can manage without support to do so		NA	J Ruse/ S Mackenzie	31/03/13