



## Tenant Inspectors

### Short Notice Inspection of Repairs Service

Summer 2013



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**Preface**

Soha's Tenant Inspector project started because of an idea from the Audit Commission that they may go lighter on inspections if an RSL had tenant inspectors in place. The Chair of the Tenants' Forum was concerned that they must be able to show an ability to do the work properly as they would want the proof that the inspectors were capable of doing a good job.

This led to a bid to Soha's *Excellence Fund* (the re-investment of efficiency savings) which was successful. The first Tenant Inspectors' training took place in October 2006.

Tenant Inspectors help Soha Housing to understand and put the views and needs of tenants first.

We carry out detailed and robust assessments of the services and functions provided by Soha Housing and its partner agencies to check do they do 'what it says on the tin'. Our aim is to help them improve.

We promote and develop the role of tenants in Soha Housing's business, working towards a joint approach to regulation.

There are currently 12 inspectors who decide the service area they will inspect and how they will go about this.

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## **1. Scope of the inspection**

In April 2013 the Tenant Inspectors planned their programme for the year ahead and agreed to conduct a Short Notice Inspection (otherwise known as Open Door Inspection) of the repairs service as a follow up to their inspection of the service a year earlier.

The purpose of the 2013 inspection was to check what progress had been made with implementing the recommendations set out in the Inspectors' May 2012 report. Those recommendations were:

1. Data Capture should update on a live basis. I.e. As soon as someone tells you about a change, other staff should be able to see it. All staff should have access to be able to make updates.
2. The prize draw needs to be advertised better and we recommend an increase in the incentive scheme to encourage more people to return them. We recommend at least £25.00 monthly.
3. We would like to see continuous customer services training across the organisation.
4. We would like to see the repairs customer satisfaction form on the webpage so that people can complete it at their leisure.
5. We would like to see an increase in the amount of satisfaction surveys completed over the phone as people are more likely to complete it.

## **2. The inspection team**

The team comprised four of the five Inspectors who had carried out the 2012 inspection. They were:

Trevor Brewerton  
Edwina Lamond  
Ken Meek  
Janice Trevillion (Lead)

## **3. The Inspection programme**

The team agreed a programme of work that included:

- Desktop review of documents and the Soha website
- Interviews with Soha and repairs contractor staff
- Work shadowing the customer services team

Unusually, this Short Notice Inspection was carried out in two stages, the first in June and the second in August.

## **4. Findings**

The findings of this inspection report on the evidence we found of progress made in implementing the recommendations made in the May 2012 inspection report. Our findings are listed under those recommendations.

### **4.1 Data capture should be updated on a live basis.**

We are confident that tenant profile information is being updated on HRCM as it comes in.

We are confident that other Soha staff and repairs contractors can access the information they need in order to deliver a service which his appropriate to the needs of individual tenants.

**Evidence:** job shadowing, proof of the flagging system, data capture information, notes made on works orders, interviews with customer services staff member, customer services manager and director of customer services.

### **4.2 The prize draw needs to be advertised better and we recommend an increase in the incentive.**

We understand that that the monthly prize draw payment has not increased to £25 as per our earlier recommendation.

We were told this was because the budget had not been increased to allow for this increase.

We did see evidence that payments are being made to winning tenants and the Assistant Director Customer Services did confirm he soon hoped that all surveys would be undertaken in real time by phone which would negate the need for a monthly draw and would also save paper, postage costs and our tenants time.

Evidence: information provided by the communications team, interviews with Assistant Director of Customer Services and Customer Services Manager.

### **4.3 We would like to see continuous customer service training across the organisation.**

Overall we are very impressed with the amount of customer services training within the customer services team. This includes coaching, e-learning, training courses and opportunities to gain NVQs. Customer Service staff are also doing informal training on basic repairs. This allows the advisor to talk residents through basic faults to prevent an unnecessary visit from an operative.

We were told that all Jeakins Weir repairs contractors completed the Mary Gober training but that there is no specific requirement for the new repairs contractors, Mears, to undertake Mary Gober training however it was noted that Mears had been awarded customer services excellence accreditation (formerly Chartermark) and they were just one of twelve Contractors to be awarded the TPAS Quality Kite Mark for quality tenant engagement. All Mears managers are also trained to a minimum of NVQ3 in Customer Service. Finally it should be noted that all Jeakins Mary Gober trained operatives who currently work on our contract will be transferring to Mears under TUPE.

Evidence: Minutes of contractor meetings, records of staff training plans, interview with Assistant Director of Customer Services, Customer Services Manager, Jeakins Weir Project Manager.

#### **4.4 We would like to see the repairs customer satisfaction form on the website so that people can complete at their leisure.**

The satisfaction form is not available on the website. We were told that it is not being done to avoid duplication with postal and telephone surveys.

Evidence: Interview with Assistant Director of Customer Services and our own website review.

#### **4.5 We would like to see an increase in the number of repairs satisfaction surveys completed over the phone (rather than returned by post) as more people are more likely to respond.**

We were told in 2012 that Soha was moving towards all satisfaction surveys being done by phone but the Jeakins satisfaction survey reports for 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 show that only around 10% of surveys are being completed over the phone.

The Assistant Director Customer Services informed us that the switch to 100% phone surveys was initially delayed as the customer services team was awaiting approval from IT to have Jeakins operatives diaries displayed on their computers. The Customer Services Advisors can now view Jeakins operatives diaries on their computers however with only a couple of months left on the contract the decision was taken to

postpone switching over to 100% phone surveys until the new Mears contract had bedded in.

**Evidence:** Interview with Customer Services Manager and Assistant Director Customer Services, satisfaction survey reports.

## **5. Conclusions**

Of the five recommendations the Tenant Inspectors made in 2012, only one has been fully implemented (capturing tenant profile data).

We accept the explanation that the satisfaction form should not be put on the website.

We would like to see progress on the remainder of our 2012 recommendations.

## **6. Recommendations**

- 6.1 Increase the number of telephone satisfaction surveys. Achieve by the end of March 2014 the 100% target to which Soha committed in 2012
- 6.2 Send a report on progress with the telephone surveys to the Tenant Inspectors in April 2014, by which time Mears will have been providing the repairs service for 6 months.
- 6.3 Promote the prize draw for completing the repairs customer satisfaction survey (including completion over the telephone) more visibly and review the level of incentive to encourage people to respond
- 6.4 Mears should be required to put in place a programme of customer service training within three months of starting the contract to make sure they are working to the same high standard as Soha staff.

## **7. Acknowledgements**

We would like to express our sincere thanks to all the Soha staff and contractors who helped us with this inspection and to compile this report.