

# Gloucester City Homes



## Mystery Shopping Evaluation

## Neighbourhood Services

July 2009

### Introduction

Gloucester City Homes currently gains feedback from customers in various ways such as satisfaction surveys, focus groups, resident groups, block and street representatives, compliments, comments and complaints. Mystery shopping enables us to identify where our service standards and procedures need to be developed.

On this occasion, we evaluated our Neighbourhood Services with our customers. We did this by testing tenancy advice provided by staff over the telephone and customer service in regards to a home visit.

### Timing of Exercise

The mystery shop was conducted between 6<sup>th</sup> July 2009 and 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2009.

### Executive Summary

Six trained tenant mystery shoppers carried out the exercise.

There were four scenarios:

- **Scenario 1 – Request of tenancy advice: lodgers**
- **Scenario 2 – Request of tenancy advice: transfer request**
- **Scenario 3 – Request of tenancy advice: compensation for improvements**
- **Scenario 4 – Request of a home visit by a Neighbourhood Management Officer**

Scenarios 1-3 were each completed by two tenants and all six shoppers completed scenario 4.

In summary, this mystery shop found a mixed response in regards to customer service, adherence to service standards and advice provided on tenancy issues. Key strengths include:

- Telephone calls were generally responded to in the prescribed manner.
- Generally good information was provided regarding lodgers (scenario 1) and regarding a transfer application (scenario 2).
- The home visits by Neighbourhood Management Officers were dealt with extremely well. The mystery shoppers found the NMOs to be friendly and helpful in resolving the various issues raised.

Weakness identified include:

- One staff member was perceived as rude and particularly unhelpful.
- One mystery shopper was promised a ring back to provide the information requested and this failed to happen.
- Poor customer service was shown by one staff member by excusing their lack of knowledge as they “only work in the call centre”.
- Scenario 3 (compensation for improvements) was dealt with poorly on both occasions: both Customer Service Officers gave wrong advice by denying any compensation would be available for the tenant who has fitted a new bathroom and is approaching the end of their tenancy.

Please refer to the corresponding Reaction Report to view remedial actions taken as a result of this report's findings.

## Results

### Telephone answering technique

The scenarios involved the mystery shoppers contacting the Customer Services Team to ask advice on various tenancy issues and to arrange a home visit by a Neighbourhood Management Officer. The results of how the calls were answered are as follows:

How quickly was the call answered?	After 1 ring	1		
	After 2 rings	6		
	After 3 rings	3		
	After 4 rings	1		
	5 rings+	1 (16)		
Did the staff member confirm you have got through to Gloucester City Homes?	Yes	12	No	0
Did the staff member give you their name?	Yes	8	No	4
Did the staff member ask if they can help you?	Yes	11	No	1
Was the staff member courteous?	Yes	11	No	1
<b>General comments</b>				
None				

## Scenario 1 - Request of tenancy advice: lodgers

The mystery shopper explained that they have a friend/relative who is a Gloucester City Homes customer and is considering sub-letting one of their rooms in their three bedroom house to a lodger. The following questions were then asked:

Question	Staff response
Does the friend/relative need to ask Gloucester City Homes for permission to sub-let their home?	Yes 1      No 0
The friend/relative has children living in the property: a boy aged 10 and a girl aged 12, currently in separate rooms. They will be moving into the same room if the lodger moves in. Is this allowed?	Yes 0      No 1
If over-crowding is identified by the staff member as a problem, ask what the consequences of this might be if the friend/relative still goes ahead.	Prosecution n/a (overcrowding not identified)
Does the friend/relative need to tell anyone else about the lodger?	Housing benefit 1
At the end of the conversation, did the staff member ask if there was anything else they could help with?	Yes 0      No 1
<b>General comments</b> a) I was told that someone would call be back as reception staff "don't know about this sort of thing". No one called me back.	

## Scenario 2 - Request of tenancy advice: transfer request

The mystery shopper explained that they have a friend/relative who is a Gloucester City Homes customer and is considering transferring from one area of Gloucester to another to be closer to family. The Customer Service Officer (CSO) was then asked the following questions:

Question	Staff response
How does the friend/relative get a transfer?	Complete application form 1 Other: a) Would have to "go on a list". I had to prompt the staff member to tell me I needed to complete an application form.
If the CSO advises the friend/relative to complete a transfer application form, ask if he/she can get help with this.	Yes 2 No 0
What happens after the application form is completed?	Visit within 28 days to identify needs/provide further advice 1 Other: a) Form will be transferred to a housing officer.
What type of property would the friend/relative be entitled to?	The NMO will request information about their household and will advise on entitlement 1 Other: a) Couldn't answer - "I am not a housing officer - I only work in the call centre" b) Dependent on homes available in the area
Is there anything that might prevent the friend/relative from moving?	Rent arrears 1 Other tenancy breach 1 Other: a) Unsure b) If no homes suitable for an elderly person
How long might a transfer take?	Depends on: Number of points 1 How much demand there is for the area 1 Other: a) Depends on number of homes available
At the end of the conversation, did the CSO ask if there was anything else they could help with?	Yes 1 No 0
<b>General comments</b> a) Not helpful at all – staff member could not answer my questions. I also felt the staff member was rude when talking to me.	

### Scenario 3 - Request of tenancy advice: compensation for improvements

The mystery shopper explained that they have a friend/relative who is a Gloucester City Homes customer who had a new bathroom fitted at their expense two years ago and they are now thinking of ending their tenancy. The following questions were then asked:

Question	Staff response
Will the friend/relative be eligible for compensation for the fitted bathroom?	Yes 0 No 2 Other: a) No compensation available for this kind of thing.
Explain that the friend/relative did not obtain permission before the work was carried out. Ask if this will prevent compensation.	No compensation 1 Customer will need to gain permission in writing before decision 0 Other: a) No compensation would be paid as permission not obtained and could possibly have to pay Council for removing the fittings.
When can the friend/relative apply for compensation?	When the tenant informs GCH of their intent to leave 0 Within 14 days of end of tenancy 0
What information will the friend/relative need to supply in the application?	Details of improvements 0 Cost of improvements 0 Date of works 0 Invoices/receipts 0
How will the compensation be worked out?	The value of any grant given towards the cost of the improvements will be taken off 0 Relative to how old the improvement is (depreciation) 0 Less compensation if the cost of the improvement was too much or the quality is higher than it would have been if GCH/Council had done it themselves. 0 Relative to the current condition of the improvement. 0 Arrears or other money owed to GCH will be subtracted from compensation value 0
What is the maximum amount of compensation?	£3000 0
Can compensation also be claimed for labour?	Yes 0 No 0
At the end of the conversation, did the CSO ask if there was anything else they could help with?	Yes 0 No 2
<b>General comments</b> None	

## Scenario 4 - Request of a home visit by a Neighbourhood Management Officer

The mystery shoppers contacted Gloucester City Homes and requested a home visit from a Neighbourhood Management Officer (NMO). If asked for a reason, they were to explain they had some issues on their estate that they would like to discuss face to face. When the NMO attended the home visit, the mystery shopper thanked them for attending but said there were no longer any problems in order to protect their mystery shopper identity. The results of the visit are as follows:

Did the NMO arrive on the correct day?	Yes	6	No	0
If no were you advised beforehand and the meeting rearranged?	Yes	n/a	No	n/a
Did the NMO arrive at the correct time?	Yes	5	No	1
If no were you advised beforehand?	Yes	0	No	1
	Other: a) NMO arrived 20 min late - very sorry for not letting me know beforehand.			
Did the NMO show you their identity card?	Yes	5	No	1
At the end of the conversation, did the NMO ask if there was anything else they could help with?	Yes	6	No	0
Was the NMO courteous and friendly?	Yes	6	No	0
<b>General comments</b>				
a) NMO offered me help with the removal of my washing machine; arranged quickly. Very pleased as I have no one else to help me.				
b) NMO very understanding of my concerns on my estate.				
c) I raised several issues as I am a block representative and they were all dealt with.				

## Results Analysis

### a) Customer service

#### Strengths

- In general, telephone calls were answered by Customer Services in the manner prescribed by the customer service standards:
- All calls except one were answered within the Service Standard of five rings and all members of staff confirmed the caller had come through to Gloucester City Homes.
- The staff members asked how they could help and were courteous with one exception in each case (see weaknesses).

#### Weaknesses

- In four instances, Customer Service Officers (CSOs) failed to give their name when answering the telephone.
- In four instances, CSOs failed to ask if there was anything else they could help with at the end of the call.
- One CSO was perceived as rude and unhelpful as they could not answer the questions.

### Scenario 1: Request of tenancy advice: lodgers

#### Strengths

- Correct responses were given in the following:
  - The tenant would need to ask permission from GCH to sub-let their home.
  - Permission would not be granted for the two children to move into the same room (they are over the age limit to live in the same room).
  - Housing benefit would need to be informed in addition to GCH.

#### Weaknesses

- One mystery shopper commented, "I was told that someone would call be back as reception staff 'don't know about this sort of thing'. No one called me back."

### Scenario 2: Request of tenancy advice: transfer request

#### Strengths

- Correct responses were given in the following:
  - Tenants need to complete an application form to apply for a transfer.
  - One CSO correctly advised help with the form was available on request.
  - A staff member would visit the applicant within 28 days to identify housing needs and provide advice. The second CSO did not advise the caller of the timescale but did advise that a housing officer would be dealing with the application.
  - Regarding the type of property the tenant would be entitled to, the NMOs will request information about their household and will advise on entitlement. One mystery shopper was advised that it is also dependent on the homes available in the area requested.

## Weaknesses

- Poor responses were given in the following:
  - When asked about how a tenant should apply for a transfer, one caller was told they would have to “go on a list” – they had to be prompted to advise the mystery shopper of needing to complete an application form.
  - Regarding advice on the type of property the tenant would be entitled to, one caller was told by the CSO, "I am not a housing officer - I only work in the call centre".

### **Scenario 3: Request of tenancy advice: compensation for improvements**

#### Strengths

- None identified

#### Weaknesses

- Both mystery shoppers were advised that no compensation would be available for the tenant either because permission was not granted before the work had been carried out or that “no compensation is available for this kind of thing”. Both responses are incorrect.

### **Scenario 4: Request of a home visit by a Neighbourhood Management Officer**

#### Strengths

- The Neighbourhood Management Officers (NMOs) all attended their appointments on the correct day and time apart from one instance in which the officer was 20 minutes late. However, in the latter case, the NMO was apologetic for the extenuating circumstances.
- Three out of the four NMOs showed their identity card to the tenant.
- All the NMOs asked if there was anything else they could help with at the end of the visit and were all perceived as courteous and friendly.
- Customer comments include:
  - “The NMO offered me help with the removal of my washing machine; arranged quickly. Very pleased as I have no one else to help me.”
  - “NMO very understanding of my concerns on my estate.”
  - “I raised several issues as I am a block representative and they were all dealt with.”

#### Weaknesses

- None identified

## Conclusion

This mystery shop found a mixed response in regards to customer service and adherence to service standards and advice provided on tenancy issues. Telephone calls were generally responded to in the prescribed manner although there were several exceptions and, notably, one case where a staff member was perceived as rude and particularly unhelpful.

Advice given on various tenancy issues varied. Generally good information was provided regarding lodgers (scenario 1) although one mystery shopper was promised a ring back to provide the information and this failed to happen. Good answers were also provided regarding a transfer application (scenario 2) although poor customer service was shown by one staff member by excusing their lack of knowledge as they “only work in the call centre”. Scenario 3 (compensation for improvements) was dealt with poorly on both occasions: both Customer Service Officers gave wrong advice by denying any compensation would be available for the tenant who has fitted a new bathroom and is approaching the end of their tenancy.

The home visits by Neighbourhood Management Officers were dealt with extremely well. The mystery shoppers found the NMOs to be friendly and helpful in resolving the various issues raised.

Please refer to the corresponding Reaction Report to view remedial actions taken as a result of this report’s findings.

## End of Report

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**28 July 2009**