

Gloucester City Homes



Neighbourhood Services Strategy

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Bengali

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Chinese

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Gujarati

જો તમને આ દસ્તાવેજ બીજી ભાષા અથવા રચનામાં જોઈતો હોય, અથવા જો તમને ઇન્ટરપ્રિટરની સેવાઓ જોઈતી હોય તો, કૃપા કરી અમારો સંપર્ક સાધો.

Polish

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Urdu

یہ دستاویز اگر آپ کو کسی دیگر زبان یا دیگر شکل میں درکار ہو، یا اگر آپ کو ترجمان کی خدمات چاہئیں تو برائے مہربانی ہم سے رابطہ کیجئے۔

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APPROVED	
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Documentation Master Sheet
Amendments to this Document are Detailed Below

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1 ABOUT GLOUCESTER CITY HOMES

Gloucester City Homes (GCH) manages and provides housing services for our 4,900 tenants and leaseholders in the City. Since the company was launched in December 2005, we have continually improved your services by working with our customers to meet their priorities, service standards and targets, and taking into account their views through active involvement and feedback.

Since October 2007, we have delivered significant investment into our customer's homes, making excellent progress to meet the Government's Decent Homes Target. I am pleased to report that as at the end of March 2010, 81% of our stock is decent and we will be working hard to approach 90% decency in 2010. At the same time, we have achieved consistently high levels of tenant satisfaction in carrying out those improvements, often exceeding 98% through the excellent work of Lovell, our improvement partner.

Our aim is to achieve a 3* rating excellent service from the Audit Commission inspection in October 2010, which will provide a detailed independent assessment of our services on your behalf. Our Board, management and our teams look forward to working with you to improve your homes and services and make your communities better places to live.

Another key commitment is to develop a highly effective relationship with the Tenant Services Authority who became the regulator for all housing providers in April 2010. We will provide our first report in October 2010 setting out how we will deliver the 6 new TSA standards through our service offer to our tenants. It will also include local offers where our tenants want us to exceed the TSA standards.

Our vision is to take the company forward by expanding our management services; play a major role in the future regeneration of the housing stock and seek to develop new affordable housing in partnership with the Council.

2 INTRODUCTION

This document outlines the Neighbourhood Management Strategy that will be delivered by Gloucester City Homes over the next 3 years 2010-13 within a local, county and national context.

This strategy has been developed in line with the TSA (Tenant Services Authority) standards which states;

NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT

Required outcomes

Registered providers shall keep the neighbourhood and communal areas associated with the homes that they own clean and safe. They shall work in partnership with their tenants and other providers and public bodies where it is effective to do so.

Specific expectations

Registered providers shall consult with tenants in developing a published policy for maintaining and improving the neighbourhoods associated with their homes. This applies where the registered provider has a responsibility (either exclusively or in part) for the condition of that neighbourhood. The policy shall include any communal areas associated with the registered provider's homes

At GCH, we recognise that by providing a strong housing management service a real difference can be made to the quality of lives of local residents. We want people to feel safe and confident in their homes and in their communities.

GCH aims to ensure that tenants and leaseholders live peacefully and with pride within their own homes and communities. We recognise that failure to maintain standards in the way in which we manage our tenancies can substantially blight the quality of life for those people living in ill-managed estates, and can also damage our ability to develop sustainable communities.

3 THE AIM OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

We recognise that well managed estates within our communities can substantially improve the lives of tenants, leaseholders and the community and enable them to live peacefully and with pride in their own homes and their neighbourhood.

As a strategic partner in the City of Gloucester, GCH has a key role to play improving the local environment and ensuring that the lifestyle of our tenants does not have a negative impact on others. This is achieved through a wide range of action, recognising the very diverse nature of this service. It can range from advice on how to keep chickens without upsetting the neighbours, to tackling homes so full of clutter that they represent a health and safety issue to the occupiers and the neighbours and prevent us from carrying out vital maintenance and improvements to the property.

We have developed a range of partnerships but specifically working with Gloucester City Council across a range of their departments including Environmental Health and their Neighbourhood Management Team.

Additionally, we have developed partnerships with agencies, such as Knightstone and Guidepost, to provide support to tenants who may otherwise not be able to sustain their tenancy.

The aim of this strategy is to:

- Ensure that the correct people are occupying our homes and with a valid and appropriate tenancy.
- Give advice and guidance to tenants and others to ensure that they have the information available, in a format to suit their needs, which enables them to conduct their tenancy in accordance with the terms and conditions of their tenancy. Work in partnership with other agencies to provide sustainable solutions to anti-social behaviour
- Ensure that support services are in place to enable tenants to sustain their tenancy rather than risking eviction for breaches of tenancy.
- Undertake regular inspections of our estates in order to identify and remedy problems such as, although not restricted to, abandoned cars, fly tipping and repairs to communal areas that have not been reported by tenant.
- Work with tenant groups and individual tenants to identify improvements needed on our estates to ensure that those who live on or visit the estates can have a pride in the neighbourhood.
- Work in partnership to the Council's Streetcare Contractor (Enterprise), to ensure that landscaped areas are well maintained and kept clear of rubbish.

4 OUR VISION

The vision of Gloucester City Homes for the Neighbourhood Management service is:

“We are committed to ensuring that our tenants live in neighbourhoods in which they can take pride and enjoy sustainable tenancies, thereby developing sustainable communities.

Where instances occur that preventing these objectives we will remedy the problem either by us improving the local environment,, by supporting tenants to address problems with help, guidance and external support and encouraging partner agencies to bring about improvements that are within their remit. As a final resort we will take enforcement action against tenants whose actions or inactions blight the lives of, or put at risk the health and well-being, of others”.

5 ABOUT GLOUCESTER

The City of Gloucester has high proportions of children and people of parenting age (up to 45 years), with relatively small numbers of older people. 7.5% of Gloucester residents (at 2001 Census) were of Black or Minority Ethnic origin, compared to 2.3% across the South-West region and 2.9% in Gloucestershire.

Population projections suggest that the population of Gloucester is growing slowly, and that the population is 'ageing', with numbers of children and 'parents' falling. (From Office of National Statistics)

In terms of official measures of deprivation (Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2007) Gloucester City is ranked at 118 out of 352 Local Authority Areas in England, which places it within the more deprived half of areas in England.

The Indices of Deprivation 2007 has identified seven super output areas in Gloucestershire that appear in the national top 10% of those most deprived across all areas of deprivation, five of these are in Gloucester and in areas of the city where our tenants live:- Podsmead, Matson & Robinswood, Westgate (2), Kingsholm and Wotton. An area of Podsmead ranks the highest of those in Gloucestershire. Barton and Tredworth also ranks in the top 10 most deprived in Gloucestershire

National top 10% for high levels of crime and disorder includes areas of: Westgate, Matson & Robinswood, Podsmead, Barton and Tredworth, and Moreland.

6 NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT ON OUR ESTATES

Neighbourhood Management is a very broad title for wide range of sometime disparate services. The service is delivered primarily by the Neighbourhood Management Team consisting of 8 full and part time Housing Officers and their Neighbourhood Services Manager and the Estates Services Team consisting of 8 full- and part-time Estates Service Workers and their team Co-ordinator. During the summer, they are supplemented by a small temporary number of Estates Service Assistants.

The general role of the Housing Officer is to deal with an extensive range of issues. In practice it is easier to explain that their role it covers any issues with the exception of repairs, rental income, or serious anti social behaviour. However, in practice they do become involve in repairs where these may be due to a tenant causing damage or a refusal to allow tradesmen in or where the property is so poorly maintained by the tenant that it is unreasonable for a tradesman to work in the property.

We undertake the role in the following key areas:

6.1 Relets and managing Introductory Tenancies

Signing up new tenants and carrying out a number of visits throughout the first year of the tenancy. The Housing Officer will arrange to meet the customers at the empty property in order to show them around the property and to sign the relevant paperwork in order to make them the new tenant. We will be on hand to answer any queries they may have about the property or the tenancy they are signing up to.

We then complete the 4 month and 12 month visits as part of the first 12 months introductory tenancies and take the relevant actions if people are not adhering to their conditions of tenancy.

6.2 Tackling tenancy fraud

Undertaking Periodic Tenancy Audits to ensure that the tenant is still resident in the property and complying with the tenancy but also offer help and advice where required. These include a property and garden inspection, and are also is a way of collecting as much up to date information about the tenants residing in our properties as possible. The Housing Officers are tasked to carry out 70 visits per year or 35 if part time. All information is then recorded on our database as well as recording tenant satisfaction with our various services we provide.

Where we are unable to gain access into properties we have a legal route written into the procedure in order to gain possession of the property or to enforce tenancy conditions.

6.3 Maintaining conditions on our estates

We carry out regular Estate Walkabouts, with residents and other partner agencies to ensure that estates are well maintained and issues are addressed promptly.

By doing this on each area per month, we are able to keep on top of any estate issues that prove to be causing the estates to look unsightly. It also aids with picking up and reporting repairs needed and enables tenants to see the Officers out and about where they can stop them and ask questions or request services.

The Estates Services Team

The role of the Estates Services Team is to ensure that the external environment of our estates remain clean safe and provide an environment that residents can justifiably be proud to live in.

The key functions of the team are as follows

- Removing bulky items such as sofas and fridges disposed of by local residents (not exclusively our tenants).
- Undertaking maintenance work to shrubbed areas that are not included in the Council's grounds maintenance contract.
- Making regular checks of our blocks of flats to ensure that they remain free of major obstructions, to identify and repair requirements and ensure that notice boards display relevant and appropriate notices.
- Removal of graffiti
- Clearance of snow from sheltered schemes and other areas where there are vulnerable tenants.
- Removing leaves from walkways on our estates.
- Supporting the Council's recycling initiative by the appropriate disposal of waste.

The team works very closely with the Neighbourhood Services Team and each officer will ensure that they have an on-going discussion about what is required on each patch and how this can be carried out. The Estate Services team also bring information or suggestions to the Housing Officers in order to create a better environment.

It is crucial that this team approach is used as both team benefits from the dual approach. Sometimes a different set of eyes will see a certain situation in a new way and improvements for the customer will often follow. The Estate Services Workers will attend the monthly walkabouts alongside the Housing Officer and often this is a great time to share ideas and problems, by working together they will often come up with a raft of solutions for the problems being faced.

7 TACKLING NEIGHBOURHOOD ISSUES IN GLOUCESTER

Tackling neighbourhood issues is often dependent upon partnership working. We undertake joint working with other Registered Providers of Social Housing and jointly facilitate estate improvements where there is joint ownership of stock in an area.

We also work very closely with Support Agencies, such as Knightstone and Guidepost to help our tenants sustain their tenancies. This is a crucial area of our work, as a growing number of tenants in general needs housing have high levels of support need. Without those support agencies, the activities of the tenant would either lead to their eviction or the abandonment of the property by the tenant or cause significant disruption to neighbours.

Where there are incidents of fly tipping, graffiti or similar incidents of minor anti social behaviour, our Estates Service Team are available to remedy the problem at short notice.

One of the major problems on our estates has been over-grown gardens. In many instances, the tenant is unable to maintain the garden but this has caused conflict with neighbours. To remedy this problem our Estates Services Team will undertake garden work for the elderly and vulnerable, at no cost, to ensure that our estates remain tidy and our tenants can be proud of their homes. This is an example of how support is more positive than enforcement.

In locations where the local residents identify a need for an improvement, these can be achieved through our tenant led, Estates Improvement Programme. Each Tenants / Residents' group has an available budget so that their ideas can be put into practice. As an example, recently one group identified a problem of tenants leaving bicycles in communal areas of flats. Whilst enforcement action could have been taken, the Tenants group proposed the conversion of a disused drying area into a secure cycle store.

In addition to this, a safer Cleaner Greener programme exists with funds available to undertake a wide range of environmental and safety projects. For example major works to overgrown trees, improvements to parking provisions,

There is also an Estates Security programme, funded from the Decent Homes funding. This enables larger projects, which have included mechanical car park barriers, but this year (2010/11) will focus on the security of the entrances to blocks of flats and as such will look to improving door entry systems, security lighting and fire safety.

8 OUR COMMITMENT TO MAINTAINING GOOD QUALITY ESTATES

GCH shows a consistent commitment to Estates Management. The Estate walkabouts aim to involve every member of staff who works for GCH as well as other stakeholders. This is to emphasise that irrespective of the role an individual plays within our organisation, it is the outcomes for tenants on our estates that matters.

This level of accountability is consistent throughout the Neighbourhood Management and Estates Services teams with clear policies for dealing with estates based issues and staff are well trained to effectively deliver their role. There is a holistic approach to solving neighbourhood issues and to enhancing our estates with all the available tools utilised. Staff are engaged with partners at a local level and full use is made of interactions with other Social Housing providers to make use of best practice.

The Neighbourhood Services team are also encouraged to seek and replicate good practise locally, regionally and nationally. This is achieved through membership of various forums and organisations such as HouseMark.

9 DELIVERING NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

GCH have set clear objectives for delivering Neighbourhood services and these have been developed in consultation with tenants, leaseholders, residents and stakeholders.

These objectives will be recorded, measured and delivered through a performance framework that has a process of ongoing consultation with residents, tenants and partners and aims for a process of continual service improvement. The objectives will be delivered over a 3-year period and will be reviewed annually.

9.1 Accountability, leadership and commitment

GCH makes use of Focus Groups of tenants to examine the success, or otherwise of its services and there have been recent views of services such as the Estates Service teams role.

Staff visibility within our neighbourhoods is paramount and we understand the importance of being accessible to all of our customers. We have targets to be on our estates for 80% of the working week. We encourage most of our visits to be carried out within our customers' homes in order to collect as much up to date information as possible.

Objectives 2010/2011

- Continue to encourage, support and grow the existing customer focus groups, plus the review of existing, and the formulation of new (where appropriate), policies and procedures.
- Further develop links with all agencies that serve different parts of the community.
- Work in partnership with Gloucester City Council to deliver improved neighbourhoods.
- Further develop existing service level agreements with partner organisations.
- Develop information reported to through the Annual report to tenants.
- Take forward customer views on perceptions of GCH and our service standards, getting their opinions about what we do now, identify improvements and implement them. Publish revised Service Standards annually.
- Publicise and promote good work undertaken by the Neighbourhood Management and Estates Services Teams.
- Review the feedback from 'Your Views Count' cards to identify any areas of weakness.
- Introduce a new Neighbourhood Management database to enable more refined collection of performance data.
- Monitor the Cleaning Contract let in 2010 to ensure that high standards are maintained.

9.2 Empowering and reassuring residents

GCH actively encourages and embraces tenant and resident involvement in all aspects of the organisation. Through our Get Involved, Resident's Charter and active tenants and residents groups we continually involve tenants in shaping our services.

We hold yearly Focus Groups to review service delivery and the service standards for all of the services GCH provide.

The Neighbourhood Management Team works with the community to provide high quality service

- Estates Champion Estates Walkabout
- Have Your Say Days
- Supporting Community Pride Days
- Publications
- Supporting other community events

Customer satisfaction surveys are a valuable tool when assessing the quality of a service that has been provided. A customer survey is sent to all complainants of minor ASB to review their levels of satisfaction with the GCH service. This includes questions directly relating to the handling of a case and satisfaction with the actual outcome. Whilst it is notoriously difficult to provide satisfaction in all cases of minor ASB performance, targets are in place and these are reviewed annually.

Perception surveys are also a valuable tool for measuring customer views of their community and gaining a view of their perceived levels of local problems such as low level ASB. As reported in the introduction, ASB at all levels always features highly as a concern to residents. Within the Local Area Agreement (LAA) the Police and Council will conduct an annual place survey to measure how well we deal with crime and anti social behaviour

Objectives 2010/2011

- Continue to develop customer involvement with the Neighbourhood Management and Estates Services Focus Groups
- Work with Tenant and Residents Groups to develop their understanding of policies and procedures for improving the overall condition of our estates and managing tenancies within those estates.
- Work in partnership with other agencies to improve community confidence in reporting problems on our estate
- Communicate effectively to customers what is happening in their local area and what we are doing to improve it through improved communications and media campaigns

- Develop 'Have Your Say Days' and ensure that the whole community receive feedback of results
- Ensure partner agencies are aware of community initiatives and encourage their involvement on a regular basis.
- Encourage tenant feedback on the performance of the cleaning contractor via 'Your Views Count' cards

9.3 Pride in our homes and our environment

As a responsible landlord, GCH recognises that pride in our neighbourhoods is key to sustainable and safe neighbourhoods. It, therefore, undertakes a variety of activities aimed at developing pride in the neighbourhood, primarily through Community Pride Days but also through a wide range of community based activities. These embrace the following:

- Strengthening the community through positive engagement in panels, meetings and local events.
- Working closely with local councillors, residents, Police, the GCH anti Social Behaviour Team and partners to address local concerns and to bring about improvements
- By providing good Estate Management and a swift response to the removal of graffiti, litter, fly tipping etc
- By supporting local youth projects such as the YPOD
- Promoting community cohesion through local events and the engagement of residents through the Resident Involvement Team
- By supporting Community Pride Days to raise pride and ownership within the community
- Encouraging good neighbour agreements in hotspot areas or where minor ASB has occurred
- Work effectively with other teams within GCH to monitor introductory tenancies proactively.
- Having clear policies on Neighbourhood Services that manage residents and partners expectations
- Encourage Tenant Groups to actively develop their 5 Year plans for their areas and from those to instigate the Estate Improvements that flow from those plans
- In conjunction with the Asset Investment Team develop proposals for the Estates Security funding which enhance the appearance and safety on our estates.
- To use the Safer, Cleaner, Greener budget to enhance the physical environment of the open spaces on our estates

We intend to be working towards giving our neighbourhoods a red, amber, green rating in order to reflect the work carried out there and the condition of the communal areas. This will also focus on estate security such as external lighting, effectiveness of our door entry systems and fire safety within our blocks.

Objectives 2010/2011

- To assess the impact of the Have Your Say Days and to increase the 'local' focus of these events endeavouring to take them to the community rather than expecting them to come to us.
- To develop the use of the HUB estates database to gauge tenant perception on how they rate their estates.
- To develop a rating system for our estates and to use that rating to monitor improvements and to prioritise investment.
- To continue to develop action plans for hotspot areas and ensure all partner agencies are accountable.
- Ensure that fire safety assessments are undertaken in every block of flats.

9.4 Tailored services for residents and provision of support for tenants.

GCH understands that supporting tenants helps them sustain their tenancies and thereby develop settled communities.

In many cases without the help of complainants continually reporting problems on our estates, action could not be taken. The input of tenants and tenant groups is essential to supplement the work of Housing Officers and Estates Service Worker in identifying tenants who may be at risk of failing to sustain their tenancies. This is often in the form of a complaint but can lead to positive intervention.

- Referrals to the Support agencies (where appropriate)
- Introductory Tenancy visits
- Good Neighbour Award as part of the Annual witness recognition event

The Neighbourhood Management Team are continually trained and updated on best practice for supporting tenants at risk of losing their tenancy.

Objectives 2010/2011

- Develop support networks provided to residents
- Monitor the outcome of the Support provision.
- Continue to promote successes of the Neighbourhood Management teams to increase community confidence

- Develop out of hours reporting line to improve the opportunity to report minor ASB
- Carry out regular surveys and ensure customer feedback to improve future services
- Work with partner agencies such as Knightstone and Guidepost to improve support to vulnerable tenants and to assist those who make be adversely affected by the behaviour of the vulnerable tenant.
- As part of an annual witness recognition event, develop an annual Good Tenant award to recognise the support given to other by many of our community.
- Encourage a multi-agency approach to supporting vulnerable tenants.

9.5 Protecting neighbourhoods through swift enforcement

Enforcement action is usually the last resort in tackling neighbourhood issues and will only be used when it is proportionate and appropriate in the circumstances. It can also be used alongside other interventions to modify behaviour. Examples of the enforcement actions available to landlords are as follows:

- Notice seeking Possession
- Possession Order
- Demotion Order
- Undertaking to the Court
- Injunction (including ex parte)
- Anti-Social Behaviour Order
- Eviction
- Dispersal Order
- Individual Support Order
- Prosecution for fly tipping

Some enforcement action can be taken unilaterally; others require partnership support or involvement.

All enforcement action is carried out in consultation with GCH senior management team and where appropriate multi-agency partners.

Objectives 2010/2011

- To further develop partnership working to explore all opportunities presented by available legislation and Government policy
- To explore all available legal options when attempting to modify minor ASB, including in private or owner occupied properties that impact on our estates.

- To keep up to date with new legislation and case law to ensure that we are providing the best possible service
- To engage with partners locally, regionally and nationally to ensure that we are keeping updated of best practise and new developments.
- To ensure that staff are well briefed and regularly trained in all aspects of Estates Management to ensure that they provide the best possible service.
- To make full use of professional services, technical support, anonymous statements and impact statements to support enforcement action.
- To develop and encourage witnesses to become involved in witness forums and supporting each other to increase confidence across the City.

10 PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Partnership working is essential for us to prevent and resolve estates based issues quickly and effectively. GCH recognise that this is fundamental to providing a holistic approach to.

Our Partners include:

- Police
- Environmental Health
- Lovells, our Decent Homes contractor
- Lovells Respond, our responsive repairs contractor
- ICM, our cleaning contractor
- Health Services
- Children and Young People's Department
- Youth Offending Service
- Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership
- Support Services
- Mental Health Services

(This list is not exhaustive.)

As part of our commitment to Partnership working GCH attends and contributes to the Anti-Social Behaviour Steering Group, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership Board and Family Intervention Executive Board, all of which are multi-agency forums aimed at strategically planning and allocating the appropriate resources to resolve anti-social behaviour within Gloucester. Via these we are able to sustain tenancies whilst at the same time supporting those who experience to impact of a vulnerable tenant.

With our Partner Agencies we are signed up to an information sharing protocol, which enables us to share appropriate and relevant information with each other in line with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

11 LINKS WITH OTHER STRATEGIES

The Neighbourhood Services Strategy is developed in line with other strategies including:

- The GCH ASB Strategy
- The GCH Resident and Customer Involvement Strategy
- The GCH 'All of us together' Strategy
- Gloucester City Council's Housing Strategy

