

# Gloucester City Homes



## Mystery Shopping Evaluation

## Neighbourhood Services

### 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 via the phone and customer service in the request for and experience of a Neighbourhood Management Officer's visit.

### Timing of Exercise

The mystery shop exercise was conducted between 25<sup>th</sup> October 2007 and 8<sup>th</sup> November 2007.

### Executive Summary

Five trained tenant mystery shoppers carried out the mystery shop.

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**

**Footnote:** Two tenants completed scenario 1  
One tenant completed scenario 2  
Two tenants completed scenario 3  
Four tenants completed scenario 4

In summary, the Customer Services and the Neighbourhood Services Teams in the first two scenarios gave generally good advice although the third scenario was dealt with poorly. Customer service was on the whole good, with telephones usually answered promptly and in the correct manner. Staff, with one exception, were found to be polite and friendly and, with two exceptions, asked if they could help with anything else before the call was ended. The home visits by a Neighbourhood Management Officer received positive feedback apart from one appointment that was not kept. Points for improvement have been identified and will be actioned via staff training. The Performance and Quality Assurance Manager will be responsible for ensuring the actions for improvement are fed into the relevant team's project plan and are subsequently completed.

### Results

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

When the mystery shopper contacted Gloucester City Homes, they asked to be put through to the Neighbourhood Services team. If the Customer Services Officer advised they would deal with the query, the shopper proceeded with the scenario with the same member of staff.

### Results of enquiry

|  |               |      |
|--|---------------|------|
| How quickly was the call answered?   | After 1 ring  | 0    |
|  | After 2 rings | 0    |
|  | After 3 rings | 1    |
|  | After 4 rings | 1    |
| Did the staff member confirm you have got through to Gloucester City Homes?  | Yes 2         | No 0 |
| Did the staff member give you their name?  | Yes 2         | No 0 |
| Did the staff member ask if they can help you?   | Yes 2         | No 0 |
| Was the staff member courteous?  | Yes 2         | No 0 |
| Were you transferred to Neighbourhood Services?  | Yes 2         | No 0 |
| <b>Tenant comments</b>   |               |      |
| a) First call to Customer Services did not go well – I was told bluntly that I could not be put through to Neighbourhood Services as I did not provide enough information. |               |      |

Scenario 1 results continued on next page.

The mystery shopper then informed the staff that they have a friend or 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 staff member was then asked the following questions.

### Results of enquiry

|   |       |      |
|---|-------|------|
| Does your friend/relative need to ask Gloucester City | Yes 2 | No 0 |
|---|-------|------|

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Homes for permission to sub-let their home?  |  |
| 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 2                                  |
| 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 2                                    |
| Does your friend/relative need to tell anyone else about the lodger?   | Housing benefit 2<br>Other response: Council tax |
| At the end of the conversation, did the staff member ask if there was anything else they could help with?  | Yes 2      No 0                                  |
| <b>Tenant comments</b><br>a) Staff helpful and polite  |  |

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

When the mystery shopper contacted Gloucester City Homes, they asked to be put through to the Neighbourhood Services team. If the Customer Services Officer advised they would deal with the query, the shopper proceeded with the scenario with the same member of staff.

### Results of enquiry

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

Scenario 2 results continued on next page.

The mystery shopper then informed the staff that they have a friend or 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 staff member was then asked the following questions.

### Results of enquiry

|   |                           |      |
|---|---------------------------|------|
| How does your friend/relative get a transfer? | Complete application form | 1    |
| If the NMO advises your friend/relative to    | Yes 1                     | No 0 |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| complete a transfer application form, ask if he/she can get help with this.                      | Other response: help can be obtained either from Southgate House office or a local project office.                                   |
| What happens after the application form is completed?  | Visit within 28 days to identify needs/provide further advice 1  |
| What type of property would your friend/relative be entitled to?                                 | The NMO will request information about their household and will advise on entitlement 0<br>Other response: one bedroom property only |
| Is there anything that might prevent your friend/relative from moving?                           | Rent arrears 1<br>Other tenancy breach 1   |
| How long might a transfer take?  | Depends on:<br>Number of points 0<br>How much demand there is for the area 0<br>Other response: possibly 3 years if mutual exchange  |
| At the end of the conversation, did the NMO ask if there was anything else they could help with? | Yes 0 No 1   |

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

When the mystery shopper contacted Gloucester City Homes, they asked to be put through to the Neighbourhood Services team. If the Customer Services Officer advised they would deal with the query, the shopper proceeded with the scenario with the same member of staff.

**Results of enquiry**

|   |                 |
|---|-----------------|
| How quickly was the call answered?  | After 1 ring 1  |
|   | After 2 rings 1 |
| Did the staff member confirm you have got through to Gloucester City Homes? | Yes 2 No 0      |

|   |     |   |    |   |
|---|-----|---|----|---|
| Did the staff member give you their name?       | Yes | 2 | No | 0 |
| Did the staff member ask if they can help you?  | Yes | 2 | No | 0 |
| Was the staff member courteous?                 | Yes | 2 | No | 0 |
| Were you transferred to Neighbourhood Services? | Yes | 0 | No | 2 |
| <b>Tenant comments</b>                          |     |   |    |   |
| None  |     |   |    |   |

Scenario 3 results continued on next page.

The mystery shopper then informed the staff that they have a friend or 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 staff member was then asked the following questions.

### Results of enquiry

|   |                 |   |   |                                       |
|---|-----------------|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| Will your friend/relative be eligible for compensation for the fitted bathroom?   | Yes             | 1 | No  | 1 <b>(ignore remaining questions)</b> |
| Explain that your friend/relative did not obtain permission before the work was carried out. Ask if this will prevent compensation. | No compensation | 1 | <b>(ignore remaining questions)</b><br>Customer will need to gain permission in writing before decision 1 *see comment a) |                                       |
| When can your friend/relative apply for compensation?   | N/A             |   |   |                                       |
| What information will your friend/family need to supply in the application?   | N/A             |   |   |                                       |

|  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| How will the compensation be worked out?   | N/A             |
| What is the maximum amount of compensation?  | N/A             |
| Can compensation also be claimed for labour?   | N/A             |
| At the end of the conversation, did the NMO ask if there was anything else they could help with?   | Yes 1      No 1 |
| <p><b>Tenant comments</b></p> <p>a) I was initially told by the CSO no compensation would be given but after I asked again I was told she doubted very much that compensation would be allowed but a request would be needed in writing and a surveyor sent out to assess work. I asked for advice from Neighbourhood Services but was told I would be given the same information. I did not continue with the questions as I felt the conversation had been drawn to a close at this point.</p> <p>b) CSO did check to see if the information was correct. They were very helpful and polite.</p> |                 |

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

The mystery shoppers contacted Gloucester City Homes and, when they were connected to the Customer Services team, requested a home visit from a Neighbourhood Management Officer. If asked for a reason, they said they have a few issues they would like to discuss face to face but do not want to go into detail over the phone.

**Results of enquiry**

|   |               |      |
|---|---------------|------|
| How quickly was the call answered?  | After 1 ring  | 0    |
|   | After 2 rings | 2    |
|   | After 3 rings | 0    |
|   | After 4 rings | 0    |
|   | After 5 rings | 2    |
| Did the staff member confirm you have got through to Gloucester City Homes? | Yes 4         | No 0 |
| Did the staff member give you their name?                                   | Yes 4         | No 0 |
| Did the staff member ask if they can help you?                              | Yes 4         | No 0 |
| Was the staff member courteous?   | Yes 4         | No 0 |

|   |       |      |
|---|-------|------|
| Were you transferred to Neighbourhood Services?   | Yes 1 | No 3 |
| <b>Tenant comments</b><br>a) Staff were very helpful and polite.<br>b) Staff were polite but I was pushed a bit by the CSO as to why I wanted a home visit. |       |      |

Scenario 4 results continued on next page.

When the NMO visited, the mystery shopper thanked them for attending but said there were no longer any problems in order to protect their mystery shopper identity.

### Results of enquiry

|  |       |                            |
|--|-------|----------------------------|
| Did the NMO arrive at the correct time and day?  | Yes 2 | No 2 * see comment a) & b) |
| Did the NMO show you their identity card?  | Yes 1 | No 2 * see comment c)      |
| At the end of the conversation, did the NMO ask if there was anything else they could help with?   | Yes 3 | No 0                       |
| Was the NMO courteous and friendly?  | Yes 3 | No 0                       |
| <b>Tenant comments</b><br>a) NMO 15 minutes late but reason given was acceptable.<br>b) Had to wait until November 2 to get an appointment (8 days after phoning for the appointment) and noone turned up. I had no phone call or a card through the door. I was disappointed.<br>c) No need for identity card as NMO known to me (both tenants).<br>d) Still had a useful chat even though I told NMO the problem was sorted.<br>e) NMO showed concern about me even though I said the problem was resolved. Advised me to call any time if I had a problem in the future. Stayed for friendly chat about estate. |       |                            |

## Results Analysis

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

Both mystery shoppers had their call answered within the Service Standard of five rings and the Customer Service Officers (CSOs) all answered the telephones in the required manner. However, one shopper had a negative experience when they first called following the request to be put through to Neighbourhood Services. They felt the Customer Service representative answered “bluntly”. Despite this, the subsequent enquiries – both dealt with by Neighbourhood Management Officers – were all answered correctly and both asked if they could help with anything else at the end of the conversation. In addition, it was noted the staff were polite in their approach.

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

The one shopper who carried out this exercise did not have their call answered until six rings, just outside the Service Standard. However, the CSO did answer the telephone in the required manner. The CSO continued to deal with the enquiry and correctly advised the shopper regarding completing a transfer application form and the help available with this. The CSO also correctly advised the customer would be visited within 28 days to identify their needs and provide further advice. When asked what type of property the customer might be entitled to, the CSO advised a one bedroom property, which is likely due to the customer being a single person. However, the CSO should have said the Neighbourhood Management Officer will request information about the customer’s household and will advise on entitlement.

When asked if there could be anything that might prevent the customer from moving, the CSO correctly answered rent arrears and any other tenancy breach. However, when asked about the waiting times for a property, the CSO answered a possible three years, referring to mutual exchange. The CSO did not refer to the transfer list waiting time which can be dependent on the number of points the customer has and how much demand there is for the area requested. Furthermore, the CSO did not ask the shopper if there was anything else they could help with at the end of the conversation.

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

Both mystery shoppers had their call answered within the Service Standard of five rings and the Customer Service Officers all answered the telephones in the required manner. The following enquiry regarding possible compensation for an improvement, both dealt with by the Customer Service team, was not dealt with correctly. Although one CSO said compensation might be possible for the bathroom, they then informed the shopper it would not be given because the customer did not obtain permission before the work was completed. The other CSO initially responded negatively to the first question but when asked again, correctly informed the shopper

the customer would need to put the request in writing and a surveyor would then be sent out to assess the work. This should have led onto further questions about entitlement but the mystery shopper felt the CSO had effectively drawn the conversation to a close with this response. Only one of the CSO's asked if there was anything else they could help with before the enquiry ended. Despite offering incorrect advice, one shopper did find the CSO to be helpful and polite in their approach.

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

All four mystery shoppers had their calls answered within the Service Standard of five rings and the Customer Service Officers all answered the telephones in the required manner. The shoppers remarked that the CSOs were helpful and polite. Three of the visits by the NMO took place on the correct day although one was 15 minutes late (there was an acceptable reason given). The three shoppers who had the visit found the Officer to be courteous and friendly with one shopper remarking that the NMO showed concern and stayed for a "friendly chat" about the estate, even though they had said the problem was resolved. On two of the visits, the NMO did not show their identity card but it was pointed out by the shoppers they knew the officer so this was not necessary from their perspective. However, the fourth mystery shopper was dissatisfied with their service as not only were they given an appointment for the visit eight days after the phone call, but also the NMO failed to arrive without any notification.

### **Remedial Action**

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

On one occasion a Customer Service representative was perceived as responding to the mystery shopper "bluntly".

**Action:** This will be addressed with the Customer Services team in a team meeting alongside a review of the mystery shop feedback.

**Responsibility:** Customer Services Team Leader

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

The CSO failed to advise that the Neighbourhood Management Officer will request information about the customer's household and will advise on entitlement regarding a transfer. The CSO also did not offer full advice regarding the transfer list waiting time which can be dependent on the number of points a customer has and the existing demand for the area requested. Furthermore, the CSO did not ask the shopper if there was anything else they could help with at the end of the conversation.

**Action:** Transfer application and points system awareness session to be delivered to the Customer Services team.

**Responsibility:** Neighbourhood Services Manager/Neighbourhood Services Team Leader

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

The mystery shoppers were not given correct advice by the Customer Service team regarding possible compensation for an improvement. One of the CSO's failed to ask if there was anything else they could help with before the conversation ended.

**Action:** Information on compensation for improvements to be circulated to the Customer Services team.

**Responsibility:** Customer Services team leader.

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

One mystery shopper was dissatisfied with being given an appointment eight days after the initial phone call and, moreover, the NMO failed to arrive without any notification that they were unable to attend.

**Action:** Customer Services team to ensure that appointments are made within 5 working days and to book with another NMO if necessary to meet service standard. Issue of non-attendance at booked appointments to be raised in the next neighbourhood services team meeting.

**Responsibility:** Customer Services Team Leader and Neighbourhood Services Manager.

## **Conclusion**

The Customer Services and the Neighbourhood Services Teams in the first two scenarios gave generally good advice although the third scenario was dealt with poorly. Customer service was on the whole good, with telephones usually answered promptly and in the correct manner. Staff, with one exception, were found to be polite and friendly and, with two exceptions, asked if they could help with anything else before the call was ended. The home visits by a Neighbourhood Management Officer received positive feedback apart from one appointment that was not kept. Points for improvement have been identified and will be actioned via staff training. The Performance and Quality Assurance Manager will be responsible for ensuring the actions for improvement are fed into the relevant team's project plan and are subsequently completed.