

Committee(s)	Dated:
Housing Management & Almshouses Sub-Committee	26/09/2017
Subject: Customer Service Standards Review	Public
Report of: Andrew Carter, Director of Community & Children's Services	For Decision
Report author: Amy Carter, Projects & Improvements Manager Community & Children's Services	

Summary

We recognise that the majority of our residents are satisfied with the service that we offer them; this is evidenced by our very good satisfaction results in 2016.

We have undertaken a review at this juncture to build on the good work already being carried out and to develop a set of Customer Service Standards, to ensure the same high standards of service are being delivered across all estates.

The standards apply to how our services are delivered, rather than alterations to the services delivered.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Approve the implementation of the new Customer Service Standards.

Main Report

Background

1. There is a 'Code of Customer Care' built within our Tenancy Agreement and Handbook. This code sets out the principles of how we will treat our customers, with a particular emphasis on equality.
2. There is a Corporate Customer Service Standard which sets out a number of principles, including response times and meeting waiting times.
3. This review has been undertaken to create a new set of Customer Service Standards that are in line with the corporate standards, and build upon existing good practice.

Current Position

4. There are two key themes that have been addressed through this review:
 - Customer Expectation – we want our residents to feel confident that when they approach us they will be greeted, respected and helped.

- Service culture – this includes taking ownership of queries, maintaining good communications and high staff motivation to achieve good outcomes for residents.
5. The review has yielded five principles and a number of practical considerations. The full Customer Service Standards are listed in Appendix 1.

Options

6. This service review is optional. We are confident that we are meeting our statutory responsibilities and there is no cause for concern.
7. As members will note, the standards are not overly complex. This is for two reasons; firstly, the majority of our residents simply want us to deliver our services in a polite and appropriate way. Furthermore, we want to ensure all staff are trained and confident delivering these standards, before we build upon them in future years.
8. We have consulted with residents and staff on the proposed standards. The overwhelming majority of the responses have been positive. Most pleasingly, 82% of resident responses have indicated they would be willing to engage with us in monitoring the standards via 'mystery shopping' or equivalent.

Proposals

9. Following approval of the standards, there are three further steps involved in this review.
- Customer Service training will be provided for staff, to help them deliver the required level of customer service and support.
 - A 'launch' will be undertaken of the new service standards, with associated print material publicising the standards to residents.
 - A suite of monitoring will commence, which will include residents undertaking mystery shopping, and managers checking staff are delivering the standards – this will be done through 1-2-1 supervision meetings and the annual appraisal process. Furthermore, complaints received in the department will be monitored to assess whether any constitute a failure of the Customer Service Standards.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

10. This service review forms a key part of our Departmental Business Plan, contributing to one strategic priority:
'Homes and communities: We are developing strong neighbourhoods and ensuring people have a decent place to live.'
11. The review also forms part of the Housing & Neighbourhoods Service Plan:
'Housing Strategy Priority 2 – Making Better Use of Existing Homes: Develop and implement new Customer Care standards and protocols, to ensure a consistent, high quality experience for our residents and customers whenever they come into contact with us.'

Implications

12. Risk Implications: The overall project is been assessed at 'Green' for risk. Some detail explaining the opportunities and threats which have informed this assessment are outlined below.

Service Standards

Opportunity: Customers knowing what they can expect from us creates a sense of trust, and leads to a reduction in complaints, aggressive challenge and Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.

Threat: Customers may have higher expectations of service than we may provide at public service cost thresholds. Staff may feel the standards are restrictive or that they are too low-level.

Training for Staff

Opportunity: Staff are equipped with the knowledge and motivation to deliver better service.

Threat: Potential disillusion on the part of staff, for example those who are already performing well or those who do not adapt well to change.

Launch and monitoring of the service standards

Opportunity: Customer engagement with us, in recognition of the positive work and potential for a better relationship in future.

Threat: Some customers might use the standards as a way to raise historical matters or attempt to complain about staff behaviour in the past.

13. Financial implications: At this point, costs are not anticipated to be significant.

Many of the changes will be cost neutral, and where cost will be incurred, it will be carefully assessed first.

14. We anticipate that training costs will be in the region of £3,000 (included within existing 2017/18 training budget). Refresher training may be required, and circa £1000 within the future annual training budgets will be ring-fenced for this potential future requirement.

15. The launch of standards (including print costs) is anticipated to be £500.

Conclusion

16. In conclusion, this service review has been undertaken to consolidate the standards of service we provide to our residents. The outcome is intended to ensure a consistent approach across all of our services.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Customer Service Standards

Appendix 2: Equality Analysis

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