



# Customer Focus Strategy 2008 - 2012

# NOTTINGHAM CITY HOMES CUSTOMER FOCUS STRATEGY

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## **OUR STRATEGY**

### **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Strategy outlines our future vision for customer service. The focus is around customer needs, the ease of accessibility to our services and the quality and speed of response that is provided, whilst also recognising the diverse range of requirements of our existing and future customer base.
- 1.2 We aim to have services that are:
- customer focussed
  - accessible
  - integrated
  - prompt, efficient, responsive and high quality
  - cost effective
- 1.3 We will make sure that we respond to people's needs appropriately, on time and first time, by developing a customer focused culture, using new technology and modernising our office accommodation portfolio to provide clearly identifiable modern working environments for service delivery and employees.
- 1.4 This Strategy aims to set out our vision for 2008 – 2012. It supports our 10 Year Strategy and links together with our other key strategies for Equality and Diversity, Accommodation, Information Communication Technology, Tenant and Resident Participation, Value for Money, Procurement and Asset Management.
- 1.5 This Strategy and the projects and initiatives arising from it aim to improve significantly the quality of customer experience we provide.

### **2 Our Vision and Aims**

#### **2.1 Customer Focused**

We aim to create an organisation with the skills, processes and culture to deliver an excellent customer experience. We are developing a vision and company culture that places listening to, understanding and involving our customers at its core. We know that that for us to do that we need to ensure we have good information about our customers, their views on our services and their future aspirations. We need to use feedback and findings from our range of surveys, comments, compliments and complaints to develop our services.

## 2.2 Our aims are:

- To ensure the governance of the organisation is customer focused, open and transparent
- To be informed about our customers, their profile, current views and future needs and develop and manage services which are responsive to these
- To set, monitor and keep up to date service standards and policies which are appropriate for customers and can demonstrate value for money
- To have leaders, managers and staff who are customer driven
- To improve satisfaction with all of our customers, especially by promoting equality and responding to their diverse needs
- To work in partnership with service providers including Nottingham City Council (NCC), Nottinghamshire Police and other key agencies from the voluntary and community sectors to ensure an overall customer focused response.
- To have a more efficient, joined up approach to service delivery.

## 2.3 Accessible

All customers should have equality of access to the services we provide and we recognise that people have different needs and requirements. We aim to open up all means of access and communication to our customers. We currently offer many different ways for customers to access services but we need to continually review and modernise these options based on opportunities arising from customer feedback, new technology and re-engineered working practices.

2.4 Customers should be able to contact us through their preferred access channel, at a time and from a location of their choosing. We will make sure that responses to customer requests remain consistent irrespective of the access channel used.

## 2.5 Our aims are:

- To create a 24/7 single customer contact centre to provide a holistic service to our customers
- To create a city centre Housing Services Centre and Property Shop
- To create a city centre Tenant Resource Centre
- To complete a full options appraisal of our accommodation portfolio
- To ensure all offices which are open to the public are DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) compliant.

- To utilise the latest technology to develop alternative and innovative ways for customers to contact us and vice versa.
- To utilise the latest hand held technology to enable staff to spend more time visiting people in their homes and other local contact areas
- To identify customers who do not access NCH services and take action to remove any potential barriers to access.

## 2.6 Integrated

Our services will be presented to customers as a cohesive portfolio with services provided by partner agencies seamlessly integrated. As many services as possible should be capable of delivery through a single contact whether face to face, by telephone or any other access channel.

- 2.7 Customers can expect our staff to access comprehensive, accurate and up to date information about them and their interactions with all areas of the organisation and associated agencies.
- 2.8 When services from the single contact centre, housing services centre and area housing offices are fully integrated the first member of staff contacted will be able to resolve multiple service requests. When an enquiry needs to be referred elsewhere within the organisation the initial contact will become the customer's advocate and own the enquiry until it is resolved.

## 2.9 Responsive

We aim to provide more responsive, more reliable and more satisfying services that meet the expectations of our customers. Once customers access the service courteous and knowledgeable employees who want to help and take pride in their work will greet them. The Strategy aims to enable a customer to have an enquiry handled at the first point of contact in the most efficient, cost effective and consistent way.

- 2.10 Questions should only need to be asked once, as all previous information will have been captured centrally, including information about accessible formats customers may need such as Braille, large print, audio or a particular language need. We will have a history of each customer's contacts, regardless of where or when they contacted us. Staff will record any actions they take or advice they give in response to enquiries. Scripts will help staff answer queries accurately and consistently and then take appropriate action.
- 2.11 Information will be used in the interest of the customer wherever data protection legislation allows and the customer will be allowed to opt in or out where legislation is unclear whether or not information about them should be shared

2.12 We will publish a comprehensive set of key service standards at the beginning of each financial year that have been developed in full consultation with our customers. These will cover the areas of service that our customers have indicated mean the most to them. For 2008-09 they cover the following:

- Aids & Adaptations
- Allocations & Lettings
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Caretaking
- Customer Care
- Domestic Violence & Hate Crime
- Empty Property Management
- Equality & Diversity
- Estate & Garage Management
- Leaseholder Services
- New Tenants
- Nottingham on Call
- Rents
- Repairs
- Sheltered Housing
- Tenancy Management
- Tenant & Leaseholder Participation
- What We Expect of You

2.13 Cost effective

Customer service will be the focus of our plans to deliver improved services. We will need to initiate specific linkages and projects with key partners and agencies. We will learn from best practice elsewhere and look for key partners whether in the public, voluntary or private sectors to work with us on specific initiatives. We will need to promote and enable the most cost effective access channels to as many customers as possible.

### **3 Information**

3.1 We recognise the importance of good information and the need to be seen both internally and externally as an organisation that is both open and informative. We also recognise the need to respond to the changing way in which we communicate with our customers in line with changing aspirations and new technology.

### 3.2 We aim to:

- Provide clear and accessible information on our services; in appropriate languages and formats on request
- Ensure regular and timely information on all aspects of our work.
- Provide all tenant based information in accessible formats and languages on request, and use IT as a means of disseminating information to both staff and customers.
- Systematically include tenants and leaseholders in the production of information.
- Provide all our staff with good quality, easily accessible information to enable them to respond to customer queries.

## 4 Involvement

4.1 We aim to harness the commitment and enthusiasm of our customers to support us to deliver what they want. We will involve our customers in the decisions that directly affect them, and will encourage them to get involved in the strategic decision-making and running of the company if they want to.

### 4.2 We aim to:

- Have housing services where tenants and leaseholders have meaningful opportunities to be involved in influencing, developing and delivering all services in their local areas and across Nottingham
- Provide the support and clear structures that tenants and leaseholders need to become effectively involved at a level that they choose
- Support tenants and leaseholders who wish to manage themselves either wholly through a Tenant Management Organisation or partly through Local Management Agreements
- Move forward together and develop a relationship with all of our customers based on trust and openness.

## 5 Compliments, Comments and Complaints

5.1 We recognise that a key component of our customer service is to respond appropriately to customers and to learn from compliments, comments and complaints in order to improve our services.

### 5.2 We aim to:

- Have a robust and consistent compliments, comments and complaints policy which customers will find easy to use.

- Consult with service users over our compliments, comments and complaints policy on an annual basis and changes to ways of working and to continue to receive and share feedback on compliments, comments and complaints received.
- Analyse compliments, comments and complaints and learn from them, using them to drive improvements to services.
- Have well trained, customer focussed staff that own and proactively deal with all complaints received.

## **DELIVERING THE STRATEGY**

### **6 Organisational Change**

#### **6.1 To Develop and Implement a Customer Focused Structure**

An outcome of delivering this Strategy must be that our service delivery mechanisms are organised around the needs of our customers and not around our internal structures and traditional practices.

6.2 The creation and implementation of a comprehensive and fully integrated Customer Relations Management (CRM) solution will help to optimise service delivery mechanisms, enable a better understanding of our customers needs and provide a more joined up service.

6.3 This will support a front/back office split that not only maximises the proportion of resources dedicated to directly serving the customer but will also enable employees with the best customer facing skills to spend more of their time using those skills.

6.4 Creating a single contact centre for all enquiries, a city centre housing services centre supported by local one stop shops within the framework of three joint service centres and an expanded local surgery provision will support this organisational change.

#### **6.5 Develop and Create Capacity**

Customer service must become an integral part of the existing roles that employees carry out and not be seen as an additional requirement of the day job. To achieve this the projects and programmes of work required to drive forward this Strategy will need to be effectively planned, co-ordinated and managed to ensure the overall integrity and coherence of the programme.

- 6.6 The success of this Strategy will be determined by the effectiveness of its dissemination and understanding throughout the organisation. Customer Service Champions should be identified at all levels and be sufficiently influential to enable managers and staff to make sure that their working practices support both the customer and organisational needs above those of individual teams. These champions will form a cross functional Customer Services Team chaired by the Director of Housing Operations to support the delivery of this Strategy.
- 6.7 Successful delivery will depend on the effective management of issues, conflicts, priorities, communications, resources and personnel. Throughout the programme the Director of Housing Operations will report progress back through the Executive Management Team and on a quarterly basis to Board.

## **7 Cultural Change**

- 7.1 A key element of this Strategy will be the development and implementation of Customer Relationship Management (CRM). CRM is not a computer system, although it will incorporate ICT systems and other supporting technology to facilitate the delivery of business objectives.
- 7.2 CRM requires our service delivery mechanisms to be organised around the needs of the customer rather than our internal structures and organisation. To achieve this we will need to become focused on providing a consistent resolution to as many of our customer requests as possible from the first point of contact. Front and back office staff will work together to make sure they communicate with customers clearly and give a seamless service.
- 7.3 CRM will enable our staff to work to their strengths with those with the best customer facing skills spending most of their time interacting with customers and acting as their advocate.

## **8 Process Change**

### **8.1 Integrated Service Delivery**

Integrated service delivery solutions are inextricably linked to the implementation of our Accommodation Strategy that is currently being developed in consultation with all key stakeholders. Proposals include:

- a single telephone contact number for all customer enquiries, managed through a single customer service centre via which all calls will be either answered at the first point of contact or re-routed to the necessary point within the organisation
- a single e-mail contact address located at the customer service centre

- a single minicom access point located at the customer service centre
  - a single fax number located at the customer service centre
  - a single SMS located at the customer service centre
  - a comprehensive service wide appointment system
- 8.2 Traditionally the majority of our 'site based' staff operate from a fixed office base from which they commence work at the beginning of the day and return to at the end of the working day. The main historical rationale behind this practice is the need to collect and download the working information required to carry out their site based duties. Cultural issues around managing and supervising workloads and health and safety issues also influence this practice.
- 8.3 The opportunities afforded through developments in Information Technology, tele-working, home working and business process re-engineering offer significant options to improve the effectiveness of these front line services across every area of the organisation.
- 8.4 In addition the implementation of a comprehensive appointments system managed through the single customer service centre will deliver further improvements in efficiency gains and effectiveness.
- 8.5 Business Process Review and Re-Engineering
- A comprehensive review and re-engineering of our business processes and working practices will be the single biggest and most far reaching project in delivering the aims and ambitions of this Strategy. This project will offer almost unlimited opportunities for transforming the way services are delivered in new ways that meet our customers' needs.
- 8.6 This will also provide significant opportunities to explore the way we work in partnership with other organisations to investigate the potential of sharing best practice and common processes.
- 8.7 As a general principle any efficiency or financial savings arising from changes implemented as a result of this work will be used to improve front line customer services.

## **9 Technological Change**

- 9.1 Technology is key to the delivery of this Strategy and technological solutions must be developed simultaneously to support the business re-engineering process outlined above. Excellent customer services can only be delivered by staff who have been provided with excellent and easily accessible information.

## 9.2 Our investment in technological solutions should broadly aim to:

- Invest in systems that place the customer at the centre of the organisation.
- Develop web enabled business throughout the organisation – which will provide easy access to information and services via the Internet/Intranet using interactive web/multi channel services, as part of the e-government agenda and industry best practices.
- Develop a sustainable business infrastructure which will ensure that our ICT business systems are up-to-date, cost effective and fully integrated.
- Develop a sustainable technical infrastructure which will ensure our ICT systems are up-to-date, cost effective and fully integrated  
Implement a training and education culture to maximise and exploit the investment in technology.
- Implement efficient modes of working and develop working partnerships with other organisations to maximise business delivery of ICT in a collaborative environment and exploit mobile based technologies.
- Develop an internal resource management capability to provide IT expertise, lead, develop, promote, drive and exploit all the other strategic initiatives.

## 10 Equality & Diversity

- 10.1 We believe and recognise that the diversity of Nottingham's communities is a huge asset that should be recognised and seen as one of the organisation's great strengths.
- 10.2 We aim to ensure that equality and diversity are at the heart of everything we do, and this has a close synergy with Customer Focus. As a significant social housing employer in Nottingham and the main provider of social housing, we are committed to providing equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination, harassment and intimidation and disadvantage. We are also committed to achieving the highest standards in service delivery, decision-making and employment practice. Equality of opportunity for all sections of the community and workforce is an integral part of this commitment.
- 10.3 We are in the process of developing our customer profile database to enable us to gear our services to our tenants' specific needs and requirements.

10.4 The term 'hard to reach' is a term often used to describe groups and communities who experience social exclusion and disempowerment. A hard to reach group can be any group or section of the community who are prevented from accessing services by barriers such as:

- Timing of meetings (e.g. young people, working parents)
- Physical inaccessibility (e.g. disabled people, older people, parents with pushchairs)
- Language (e.g. first generation migrants to the UK)
- Cultural perceptions and traditions (e.g. Asian women)
- Social expectations (e.g. young people may feel that they would not be taken seriously).

10.5 We recognise that in many of our communities there are individuals and/or communities who would fall under the definition of 'hard to reach' and action must be taken to offer a wide variety of ways of reaching out and including these groups in our future.

## **11 Customer Feedback**

11.1 We have a comprehensive range of ways we obtain customer feedback which include

- An annual perception survey
- VMS surveys
- Tenant Inspection and Mystery Shopping
- Customer Complaints, Compliments and Comments
- Review of Applicants' satisfaction

11.2 A key element of delivering this Strategy will be to ensure that the lessons learnt from this feedback are comprehensively captured and action taken to improve services accordingly.

## **12 Training & Development**

12.1 We recognise that managing a large and complex social housing company in a city with high levels of deprivation requires staff at different levels who are: skilled housing officers, good partnership workers, flexible and creative managers, self aware and resilient, committed to a customer focus and equality and diversity.

12.2 We have a comprehensive training programme to support all of our staff in delivering excellent customer care and this will be developed as part of the implementation of this Strategy.