



Scrutiny Topic:	Customer communication during a repair
Start / End Date:	August - October 2017
Board:	Thursday 7 th December 2017
Judgement:	A 'Good' Service

1. Introduction

'insight' is a committed group of volunteer customers interested to help improve services delivered by Great Places Housing Group (GPHG). The working group formed in July 2014; current membership is five full-time and one part-time member. The role of the group is to scrutinise specific services in detail, acting as a critical friend by reporting findings and suggesting recommendations to Board.

2. Review Service Area

We chose to look at 'customer communication during a repair' as the focus of our sixth scrutiny review for the following reasons:

- delivery of a reliable and robust repair service is important to customers and research shows repairs is the most valued by customers, as confirmed in a survey by the Tenants' and Residents' Organization of England in 2014. Communication is cited as being contributory to customer dissatisfaction emphasising the importance, to customers, of being kept informed.
- the repair service has undergone review and changed significantly over the last few years, hence it felt timely to test the service is performing satisfactorily from a customer perspective, and
- in 2016 this service was judged compliant with the HCA's Consumer Standards, although we recognised greater detail was required to enable a more informed judgement to be agreed. It was our aim to gather this detail during this review to assess if customers feel the service communicates effectively.

3. Aim and scope of our review

The aim of our review was to focus on customer communication during a repair to obtain customers' experiences of service delivery.

We set a clear scope to gather and consider intelligence relating to the following areas;

- Reporting a repair
- Use of the appointment system
- Communication during the repair
- Satisfaction survey - overall customer experience

4. Our Approach

We conducted our scrutiny of this service by gathering a range of evidence using a 3 point approach;

Where are GPHG?	Performance information (current position/baseline) customer feedback and insight from staff
Where do GPHG want to be?	Repairs strategy, customer access & experience strategy and the corporate plan (GP's vision and aspirations)
How does GPHG get there?	Recommendations based on evidence from findings

We agreed to gather evidence from key members of the team, review performance information for a 12 month period and customer feedback, which would be supported by a consultation of customers who reported a repair during a set three week period.

Listed below are the various ways evidence was collected:

a. Presentation by the Director of Repairs

The director of repairs presented a strategic overview of the service showing the services' current position using performance information and associated work to achieve this level of performance, work in progress and the vision for the service.

b. Presentation from Operation Centre Manager

We invited the operations centre manager to present an overview of the operational level of the service to help us understand the day-to-day functionality of the service and the effect processes have upon the customer journey specifically in regards to communication. Using this information, we were able to make an informed decision to agree a scope for the review, identifying points of contact for specific areas of the service and evidence to be collected.

c. Listened to Incoming Calls with Customer Service Officers

We listened to calls made by customers reporting a repair and arranging an appointment with the customer service officer at the operations centre.

d. Desktop Review

We completed a desktop review to familiarise ourselves with the basic functionality, purpose and scope of the service in relation to customer communication as outlined in the aims of the repairs strategy. We reviewed relevant documentation such as performance information, satisfaction surveys for both 2016-17 and during 2017, complaints, the new website as well as customer comments gathered from involvement activities such as 'call audits' and 'instant mystery shopping'.

e. Presentation by Customer Service Team Leader

The customer service team leader gave a summary of the way the operations centre functions on a daily basis, including service standards, performance information, demands on the service using different methods to report a repair and meeting customers' needs.

f. Surveyed the Customer Service Officers (CSO)

We offered the customer service officers the opportunity to provide feedback of 'what they feel works well' 'what doesn't work so well' and 'any ideas to improve communication to raise service.' It was felt officers' experience would provide significant insight of the service

g. Surveyed the Repair Operatives (RO)

Repair operatives were invited to feedback in relation to the service and potential improvements to raise the standard.' Feedback was gathered by Repair Field Managers at 'regional toolbox talks' following a briefing regarding the role of customer scrutiny, which was provided to explain the reason 'insight' were collecting the feedback and how it would assist with their scrutiny review.

h. Consulted with customers

We consulted customers regarding satisfaction with communication during a repair, employing the same method of data collection as business intelligence, which is to text the customer on the day as completion of the repair. Over a 3 week period 118 responses were received from the 338 text messages sent to customers.

5. Review of findings

Presentation by the Director of Repairs

Areas of good practice

- Great Places has a comprehensive repairs strategy in place for the period 2016-18, which is supported by a policy, outlining objectives for the effective and efficient delivery of the service and a procedure providing guidance and support to achieve the objectives of the policy
- Customer satisfaction has increased and an improvement of cost effectiveness, achieved by increasing the rate of first time fix jobs and productivity, a reduction of end-to-end times and contractor and material expenditure
- Investment in the development of the distribution centre, resource planning, training and implementation of contractor management systems and accurate performance measures

Summary of findings – work in progress

- Development of accurate repair analysis and links to the investment strategy
- Review resource scheduling and customer engagement systems to identify opportunities for improvement

Presentation from Operation Centre Manager

Areas of good practice

- Customers have choice of a number of channels to report a repair, such as telephoning the operation centre, online via Great Places website, by email, colleagues and by contractors
- Repair requests received from a customer or their advocate are validated through a series of key identification questions
- Good ethos within the team that excellent customer experience is reliant on each step being carried out correctly
- Trained and experienced CSOs use plain English and no jargon, offer, where possible to speak to staff who speak a range of languages, if not English alternatively language line can be used
- Customers are given a choice of a morning or afternoon appointment between 8am – 6pm, which will be confirmed by text. CSOs provide an estimated time for completion of the repair and confirm any preparatory work, which needs to be done prior to the operative attending
- An 'on route' message is text to the customer providing the name of the operative and the vehicle registration number. If the operative is running late for the appointment, a call is made to the customer to update
- Upon arrival operatives show their ID badge and confirm work to be carried out. If jobs can't be completed an explanation is given and the operative contacts the planning team to arrange an appointment whilst with the customer

- Once a job is completed customers are sent a text the same day to ask if they are satisfied with the repair. Responses are reviewed daily and customers who have expressed dissatisfaction are contacted to discuss their reasons, rectifications made, if necessary, which are logged, and used for learning purposes

Summary of findings

- Average time customers wait for an appointment is 5.83 working days and the average time to attend an emergency is 3.37 hours, the current target is within 4 hours
- On average 5000 calls are made each month to the operations centre and 800 emails. Calls are answered on average within 16 secs and 1.5% of calls are lost, emails are responded to within 24 hours of receipt
- Repair appointments to be carried out by a contractor aren't currently agreed with the customer at the 'first point of contact.' CSOs advise the customer that the contractor will be in-touch to arrange an appointment although it isn't possible to provide a timescale
- Recent investment to co-locate with CAT and the implementation of a new telephony system

Listened to incoming calls with customer service officers

4 members of our group each listened to an average of 2-3 incoming customer calls. We asked to carry out this exercise to gain an appreciation of the functionality of the role and the range of enquiries received by the officers - we were able to ask the CSOs questions between incoming calls

Areas of good practice

- Consistent delivery of a customer focussed service, which is supported by the Customer Service Team Leader who is on-hand to provide guidance and technical information
- CSOs ask a series of open questions to establish key facts allowing diagnosis of the repair, how and when the repair occurred to establish if it's customer responsibility, whilst assessing priority and reviewing repair history to determine whether it's a recall job. The CSO will ascertain any vulnerabilities or access requirements to inform the job instruction, then discuss customers' availability to schedule and agree a convenient appointment
- CSOs attempt to gather accurate up to date customer detail, during the call to update AXIS
- Regular team meetings and staff reviews are an opportunity to discuss and share experiences of good practice and/or learning and training requirements

Summary of findings

- We found all the CSOs we shadowed delivered a consistent service, which was polite and helpful guiding the customer through the call so an appointment could be agreed
- It was felt in regards to the calls we listened to that the customer experience of communication when reporting a repair met expectations, which is reflected in customer feedback collected via our review customer consultation
- Information on AXIS hadn't always been updated to show relevant information that the CSO needed to deal efficiently with the customer enquiry

Desktop Review

Areas of good practice

- The repairs strategy states Great Places' commitment to providing an excellent customer focused service, shaped and influenced by customer feedback. It promises to offer choice of appointments and methods of contact to meet customers' personal preferences whilst fulfilling the group's drive for value for money
- The strategy is supported with a comprehensive procedure, designed to ensure a consistent and timely response in an appropriate manner, ensuring scheduling is carried out in the most efficient and cost effective way to maximise first time fix

- A process of customer contact points when a repair has been reported forms a key element of the repairs procedure to ensure consistency of communication with customers
- Established customer involvement within this service that provides regular feedback and insight of customers' experience of the service such as 'instant mystery shopping' and 'call audits'
- Service related information on the Great Places website is easily accessible, clearly set out and provides guidance and informative instruction of how customer can report a repair
- Training given at Toolbox Talks to emphasis the '12 steps to the perfect customer journey' which incorporates amongst other points usage of the correct 'appointment status' and implications of closing a job if work is outstanding

Summary of findings

- The methodology of customer satisfaction collection changed in April 2017; the process currently in use is to send a text message to customers on the day a repair is completed, to capture a more timely response, which reflects their experience and increase the rate of customer response
- Analysis of dissatisfaction feedback from April 2017 showed jobs had been closed on PDAs whilst work was outstanding, which caused confusion for customers when asked to provide satisfaction feedback relating to the outstanding repair
- During 2016-17 satisfaction feedback of 1263 responses shows 92.3% of customers were satisfied with the overall service, 93.5% with their experience of contacting the repairs team, 92.1% said a convenient appointment was agreed whilst 96.2% of customers were satisfied with the interaction with the operative whilst in their home
- Up to September 2017, customer satisfaction with overall repair service is at 93.5% based on over 1500 responses – a 24% response rate of the 6300 texts sent to customers
- Customer audit information of 'incoming calls' showed satisfaction of 91% of 260 customers with the 'overall service provided when reporting a repair' and 88% were satisfied with 'the ease of reporting the repair' - analysis data was for the period October 2016 to June 2017
- Mystery shopping data of 157 jobs showed 82% of customers were satisfied with the overall service, 91% reported the appointment was confirmed, 92% received an 'estimated time of arrival', 90% of operatives explained 'what had been done' and 19% of 2nd appointment were confirmed before the operative left, however 100% of these customers who required a 2nd appointment were advised 'what would happen next.'
- Analysis of feedback of customer call audits and mystery shops showed an element of customer dissatisfaction with 'being kept informed'. In particular, it was noted 'changes to appointments' and 'confirmation of appointments for follow on-work' were given as reasons for dissatisfaction
- For a 12 month period 15 NIP complaints of 139 logged related specifically to communication were for the repair service. For the same period, 82 closed 'right first time' complaints 5 relate to communication in the repair service. Customers reported issues such as timeliness of responses, keeping the customer informed, providing clear and accurate information, not leaving a 'no access' card and the standard of service provided by the 'OOH' service

Presentation by Customer Service Team Leader

Areas of good practice

- Clear service standards in place used to monitor performance, which is discussed in team and staff review meetings
- Customers are offered choice of different ways to contact Great Places to report a repair, which will meet their preference, currently the majority of customers contact the operations centre by telephone.

- When agreeing an appointment the customer will be asked if a morning (8 am – 12 pm) or afternoon (12 pm – 6 pm) would be convenient, the CSO then informs the customer of the next available slot, which will be booked and confirmed, if agreed suitable
- Call demand is monitored to ensure adequate resources are available to deliver the service to the agreed standard
- Alternative appointment confirmation is offered to customers who don't have access to mobile phone or email
- Great Places' employ a diverse workforce who can speak different languages including Urdu, Punjabi, Gujarati, Bengali, Hindi, Spanish and Portuguese. The team has access to language line
- Everyone is responsible for ensuring their contact is accurately recorded to maximise 'first time resolution' of enquiries to the operations centre
- Best practice is shared at team meetings, staff reviews and email (to celebrate compliments)

Summary of findings

- Customers choices of ways to contact Great Places are advertised on vehicles, the website, in customer newsletters, during conversation with staff and at sign-up of tenancy
- The introduction of a new telephony system has enabled better reporting and more functionality making the service more accessible to more customers, ultimately improving their experience
- Flexible approach to calls with customers to avoid sounding scripted, although for consistency each call will open with the CSO providing their name and company name and before ending the call key points are summarised and the customer is given a chance to add further detail.
- Use of plain English without jargon in any correspondence / interaction with customers
- A clear, positive and open tone when speaking with customers is encouraged within the team.
- CSOs listen to customers, then repeat back so the customer knows they were listened to and ask relevant questions, whilst updating notes
- Reasons for customer dissatisfaction provided by CSTL are listed in appendix one

Surveyed the Customer Service Officers (CSO)

Areas of good practice

- Good ethos within team to listen to customers to understand their needs and how having access to relevant up to date information contributes to delivery of a 'first time response'
- Positive culture to provide and maintain a friendly and timely response to customers summarising throughout the call, which is re-enforced at team meetings and staff reviews
- Access to policies and procedures to enable delivery of a consistent service, applying flexibility if the circumstances require

Summary of findings

- CSOs don't always have easy access to relevant information, which may relate to customers, the property, planned or outstanding work or staff, causing avoidable delays in delivery of a timely service or 'first time response'
- Managing customer expectations can cause challenges for the CSOs during telephone calls, it's important to provide clarity of service offer and provide a consistent service to customers
- Sound understanding demonstrated by the team of the importance of delivering quality customer service to customers and the contribution this makes towards satisfaction
- Comprehensive customer service training that staff recognize is valuable to their role, which is re-enforced at team meetings, staff reviews and performance management

Surveyed the Repair Operatives (RO)

Areas of good practice

- Regular regional 'Toolbox Talk' meetings hosted by Repair Field Managers provide an opportunity for operatives to meet up, discuss issues and share experiences. These meetings serve as a platform to discuss the service performance, deliver training and support as well as provide updates to operatives of corporate information, to ensure inclusivity.
- Delivery of tailored training such as 'the 12 steps to the perfect customer journey' which outlines the service standard to operatives and the implications of the importance of the process
- Operatives access workloads on PDAs and support from RFM for technical support
- Customers are asked by the operative whilst in their home, if there is anything else the operative can help with. The operative will i) attend to the repair, ii) arrange an appointment or iii) inform the customer what they need to do or guidance if the repair is the customer's responsibility
- Arriving on time to appointment and updating customer if running late for the appointment
- Always be respectful when in customers' homes being courteous and polite

Summary of findings

- Contact details aren't always relevant i) out of date or ii) wrong person, if customers has a relative or friend sitting in at home
- Operatives feedback demonstrated a good understanding of 'keeping the customer informed' using the 'on-route' text message, showing their ID badge upon arrival, confirming to the customer the detail of the repair then summarising the work carried out. Many customers will provide further detail about the repair to the operative.
- If the repair couldn't be completed first time, the operative knew to organise a 2nd appointment before leaving the customer's home and explaining what would happen next
- Operatives fed back that specific instructions relating to customer availability isn't always clearly shown on PDAs
- Confirm with customers that a morning appointment is from 8.00 am, occasionally customers aren't ready when operatives attend
- A 2nd appointment isn't always confirmed with customers before leaving their home
- Customers not always informed when there are changes to appointment times, ie) rescheduled or cancelled appointments
- Clear communication relayed back to office regarding planning jobs and timescales for completion of work
- Better manage customer expectations, re-enforcing 'repairs not replace' where relevant and provide clear communication to customer if work is to be carried out on a planned program

Consulted with customers

Summary of findings

We commissioned the Customer Involvement Team to consult with customers of their experience of getting in contact with Great Places when reporting a repair to book a convenient appointment, as well as being contacted and kept informed until completion of the repair.

We agreed to adopt the same methodology to collect satisfaction information from customers, as is used by the Business Intelligence team to capture real time responses in relation to the service. Customers were sent a text on the day their repair had been completed to enquire 'whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied with communication when contacting or being contacted by Great Places.' Customers were invited to comment of their experience to provide greater understanding and context. Any comments of dissatisfaction were passed to the repair team to follow up.

Text messages were sent to 338 customers who'd had a repair completed and 118 customers commented giving a response rate of 35%. Of these 118 customers 95% reported being satisfied with the communication during their repair, appendix two. The 5% (6 customers) who expressed dissatisfaction were contacted by the repair team to follow-up and find out reasons for their comments, which are outlined in appendix three. We found reasons for dissatisfaction in customer feedback gathered from call audits and mystery shops also reflected these comments.

In addition to this consultation, we surveyed a sample of 100 customers who had reported a repair to the 'out of hours' service, which is delivered by Orbis after 6.00 pm. We received responses from 9 customers, who rated their satisfaction an average of 8.3 / 10 with the overall communication associated with the service. Customer comments provided appraised the service focusing on the whole on delivery of a timely response. A number of comments highlighted the service doesn't have access to the Great Places' computer system.

We agreed it would be useful to consider views of customers who'd received a service from a contractor, to find out about their experience of contact with contractors in particular to timescale to agree an appointment. At the time of analysis of feedback 1 customer had responded, therefore we're not able to report any findings. It was felt further investigation of this area of the service would provide valuable insight of customer satisfaction with contact by contractors.

Summary - customer satisfaction with communication during a repair

95% of the 118 customers who responded to our review consultation were satisfied with this area of the service. Feedback collected by other channels such as satisfaction information, call audits and mystery shops support this view. We found the policy and procedure for this service to be comprehensive with clear processes and guidance for teams to enable delivery of an efficient and timely service to all customers.

During our desktop review, we noted a minority of customer comments outlining the customer hadn't been kept informed in particular with changes to appointments and follow-on work or not having had clear communication.

6. Recommendations

Based on evidence findings from our review, we propose the following recommendations for service improvement

1. Promote more widely the various ways of reporting a repair, using customer insight to a) carry out targeted and focused promotion, and b) encourage increased usage of digital reporting methods. Monitor reporting methods to ensure consistency of service across all channels
2. Support and develop consist collection of up to date information from customers to ensure we can deliver an efficient timely service and 'maximise' resolution at the 'First Point of Contact'
3. Ensure CSOs have access to all relevant information so a 'right first time' service can be provided. This will assist operatives to give clarity to customers when on site about what will happen next without the need to hand off to other teams
4. Ensure CSO training includes the importance of collecting specific information provided by the customer when raising a repair, such as access arrangements or availability, etc. This detail is to be recorded in AXIS so operatives have clear visibility on PDAs and will enable planners to consider this when reviewing diaries

5. Improve the monitoring and performance framework to ensure customers are always kept informed of any changes of appointment status, such as when appointments are cancelled, rescheduled or if an operative is running late
6. Include in the 'operative on route' message to the customer a repair description (to provide clarity to customers, who have more than one repair booked) and an estimated time of arrival, to allow customers to plan their time
7. Refresher training delivered to operatives regarding the correct use of PDA appointment status options, to minimise closure of jobs when there are outstanding works. Review the effectiveness of the training
8. Develop a 'no access' policy to ensure a consistent approach, which outlines both operative and customer responsibilities. In addition, raise awareness with customers of the implications of missed appointments on the ability to deliver an efficient service
9. Review and promote an updated 'service standard' influenced by and fully accessible to customers. This will act as Great Places' promise whilst emphasising the service is 'repair not replace' as outlined in the repairs strategy
10. Ensure customers are fully informed of any communal repairs such as 'out of use lifts' or 'erection of scaffolding' clearly outlining relevant information, potential implications for the customer and where necessary, access to a point of contact
11. Review the communications associated with the 'out of hours' repairs service, including the website, recorded messages and the communication delivered by call handlers, to ensure customers are clear on the level of service to be expected and what will happen next
12. Agree a timescale with contractors for the arrangement of repair appointments with customers and introduce a system to monitor that timescales are met

7. Overall Judgement

In order to provide context to our review, we used the evidence gathered to score 5 customer focussed criteria as 'poor, fair, good or excellent' to enable agreement of an overall service judgement

Criteria	Score
Ease of access to service	Good
Timeliness of communication	Good
Quality of communication	Fair
Overall level of customer service	Good
Customer satisfaction of experience	Good

The relative weighting of the 4 point scale in each of the customer focus criteria were considered to agree an overall judgement for the standard of service relating to customers' communication experience during a repair. This is shown using the following scale.

					X		
Poor		Fair		Good		Excellent	

Overall, 'insight' awarded 'Communication in the repair service' a strong 'Good' status

8. Acknowledgements

Insight would like to thank all the Great Places management and staff who gave their time to support our scrutiny activity, including the support and guidance of Tracy Gregory, customer involvement co-ordinator.

Appendix One – Customer Dissatisfaction, CSTL

Not being kept informed with updates / changes to appointments	Keep promise to contact customer even if the information isn't available to confirm as agreed – contact customers of progress and timescale when expect an update
Lack of clarity	Managing customer expectations by providing clear communication of work to be actioned, such as customer expects replacement of a door when a repair can be carried out and has been ordered
Last minute communication resulting in insufficient time and inconvenience for the customer	A voicemail left confirming an appointment scheduled for the next day, when the customer may require time to make arrangements or prepare for the appointment Short notice of a cancelled appointment when arrangements have been made such as time off work
Method of communication	Not using the customer's preferred method of contact, for example calling when the customer has asked for an email
Specific customer request not acted on	Instruction given to call or attend before or after a specific time due to other commitments
Timing of appointments	Some customers work nights so prefer an afternoon appointment

Appendix Two - Customers Satisfaction comments

- ✓ Lady on phone was great, the engineer was great
- ✓ Repairs carried out in the time frame - an excellent service
- ✓ Polite and well mannered, the repair was fixed in no time
- ✓ The appointment was earlier than the date given, which was great
- ✓ Very helpful staff
- ✓ Excellent service great & very polite plumber
- ✓ They kept their promises
- ✓ Very polite and professional in his role excellent service
- ✓ Communication was good, received a text and the CSO on the phone was lovely.
- ✓ Prompt efficient service
- ✓ The communication was very fluid and I received all information necessary
- ✓ Great communication skills
- ✓ Polite and helpful telephone communications.

Appendix Three - Customer Feedback from text, dissatisfaction

The repairs team contacted customers who responded that they were dissatisfied with the service to enquire of the reasons for their response, which are outlined in the table below

Customer Comment of Dissatisfaction	Update following contact with Customer
Not happy	Customer wanted a new door, not a repair. It was agreed it was possible to repair the door at the time and place on the investment program for future replacement – lack of clarity / manage expectations
Got passed from person to person to get the sewage sorted that was all over my garden when they sent someone out he did nothing so had to ring around to find someone myself to sort it. Absolutely disgusting service	Customer called CAT who then spoke to Yorkshire Water, and attended to resolve the issue with drains backing up and jet washed the area. Operative who attended job should have advised customer to contact Yorkshire Water instead of saying Great Places couldn't carry out the repair - operative failing
Appointment slot given was 8am to 12pm. I had to stay up following a 12 hour nights, I was dissatisfied when no one attended and I had to ring up Great Places to check the appointment.	<p>Tenant stayed up to allow access for the repair, mixer shower required ordering it is a non-standard part, customer re-booked after they returned from holiday. Job incorrectly closed prompting text survey to be sent before repair carried out.</p> <p>Several properties just out of defects in this zone have non-standard parts fitted; mixers, extractor fans, light fittings. This issue is known and being addressed by Distribution Centre to ensure correct parts are sourced for van stock going forward. If we had been aware of these items we could have stocked vans accordingly and many of these jobs would have been FTF's.</p> <p>Adequate van stock to allow FTF for Sheffield new builds - DC are aware and customer not sufficiently kept informed during the repair leading to confusion</p>
The work was not completed how I was told it would be, they were supposed to put more paving slabs down but haven't and I've told them. I was informed, he would contact his manager not good enough, I've stayed in all day for this to be completed correctly	<p>This matter was dealt with by RFM who was already in the process of organising further works. Customer believed removal of wall was end of works when in fact further works were being organised.</p> <p>Better communication was required to make sure customer is clear what was happening in relation to the repair...</p>
Was informed that I didn't need to be available. As it happened I had just arrived home	<p>Planning tried to get hold of tenant but no answer.</p> <p>Text message should have been sent if unable to speak to tenant.</p>
They never came was in all day.	<p>Tenant adamant she never made the comment about the roofer. She said there were no issues with them or the gutter clean carried out. She did say her friend \ neighbour had issues but had no access to her phone, will follow up separately</p>