



Insight - Customer Scrutiny Group

Scrutiny Report & Recommendations

Planned Improvement Work

Influence of Comms on Customer Experience

Final report – Thursday 13th November 2025

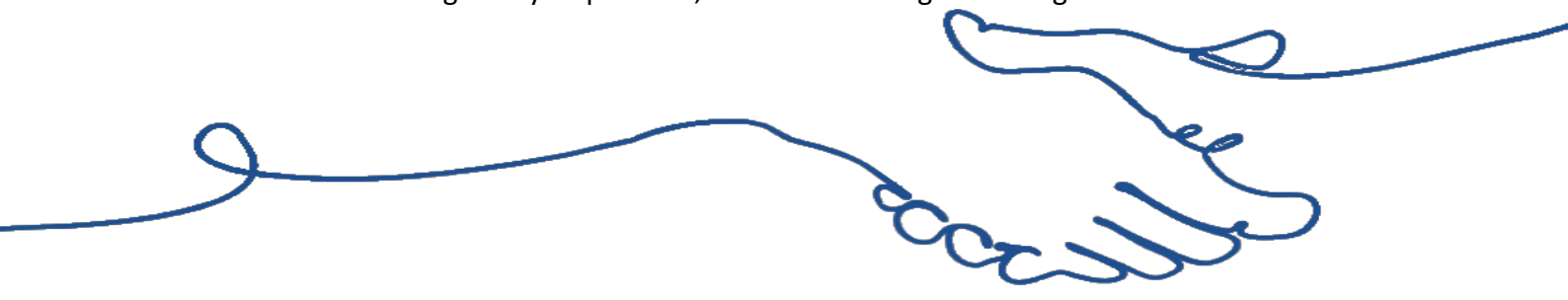
Introduction

Our scrutiny focus reviewed how communication can influence customers' experience, when planned improvement work to replace a kitchen or bathroom is carried out in their home. This report summarises our findings from service data, customer feedback, and discussions with Great Places colleagues, and a main contractor delivering improvement work. The information gathered informed four recommendations to help deliver quality and needs-focused customer communication experiences, see Appendix One.

Background and Scope

The Regulator of Social Housing's Quality & Safety Standard requires registered providers to set timescales for the completion of repairs, maintenance, and planned improvements, and clearly communicate them to tenants taking appropriate steps to deliver to them. Registered providers must also keep tenants informed with clear and timely communication ensuring delivery of service is informed by the needs of tenants and provide value for money.

Great Places planned improvement work is delivered on a condition-based approach with the Decent Home Standard set as the minimum backstop. Component lifecycles are based on the DHS lifecycles or sooner, dependent on the anticipated usable life of the component specification. If components fail sooner than either the lifecycle or DHS they will be replaced on a planned programme or as part of ad-hoc replacement. Property condition information is updated every five years through cyclical stock condition surveys, as well as via observations of the repairs team, contractors conducting safety inspections, and other colleagues during scheme or home visits.



In 2024, a new contractor framework for capital investment was procured, which includes a reduced number of partner contractors across the service. We felt a strong sense from Great Places colleagues this has been positive in relation to contract management, enabling real team working with partners, and producing benefits to achieve greater customer satisfaction.

We were keen to scrutinise this area of planned work to assess how communication influences customers' experience, particularly given the level of disruption that is involved to identify opportunities for improvement. This scrutiny supports the Customer Experience strategy objective of listening to and acting on customer feedback to drive service improvements.

Summation

Our scrutiny highlights a strong customer-first commitment to offer choice, understand needs and practicalities, and support vulnerabilities, while it recommends improvement to feedback mechanisms, data consistency, and communication to enhance service delivery. Following our scrutiny, we believe engaging customers early before work begins to confirm suitability of timescales and identify specific needs, that would support improved planning and enhance service delivery. It would also act to reassure customers their views matter and encourage greater involvement in the work carried out in their homes.

Our recommendations were agreed to support meaningful communication with customers, ensure consistent recording of interactions, and monitor follow-up actions to effectively evaluate performance and capture the customer voice.

Scrutiny Objectives

We chose to explore these following areas to inform our scrutiny:

- **Explore customer expectations and needs** when informed their home is part of a renewal programme, including next steps if work proceeds.
- **Assess customer communication experiences** with both the GP and contractors.
- **Review delivery and operational oversight** of planned investment works to understand how well-informed customers felt during home improvements.
- **Evaluate how customer experience is monitored**, including the use of data to track service performance and drive improvements.

Scrutinising service – our approach

We scoped our scrutiny and chose to source data as follows:

- Presentation delivered by the Director of Asset Management and the Head of Investment Delivery, outlining key aspects of the service.
- Walk through of customer touchpoints with the Contract Support Manager.
- Desktop review of relevant service data and customer feedback.
- Met with representatives from Emmanuel Whittaker, partner contractor.



- Focus group with Contract Delivery Officer and Customer Liaison Officer.
- Shadowed several handover inspection visits.
- Gathered further feedback of customers' experiences.

Detailed observations and learning

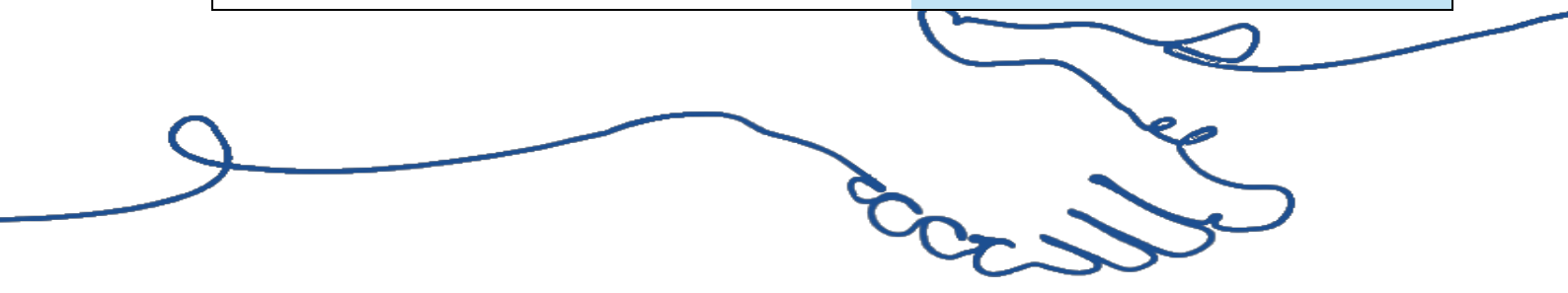
• Asset Management - Contract Delivery Service

- Our scrutiny considered two of six strategic objectives of service:
 - colleagues / contractors will deliver excellent, customer focussed service,
 - services are influenced by and meet the needs of customers.

Key observations noted.

- We observed a flexible, customer-first approach is being applied that aims to tailor service to individual circumstances such as work schedules, childcare, and mental health needs.
- The programmes are shared with neighbourhood teams to help identify customers who may need additional support, while the effective use of profiling data has enhanced the quality of customer interactions.
- We recognise that planned works involve both component renewal and direct customer interaction. We were reassured by the approach taken and noted that, following a team restructure, training workshops have been arranged to uphold customer service standards.

Observation	Recommendation
The customer notification process for upcoming work could be improved by providing clearer, more engaging information to commence earlier customer engagement in the process. We found the current letter is formal, it lacks a friendly tone, offers only limited detail and it uses inconsistent terms such as 'home' / 'property'. Furthermore, we found half the content focused on customer responsibilities related to pets. The feedback gathered through the survey reflected these concerns, suggesting room for improvement.	We recommend redesigning the letter so it is more personable and includes a graphic roadmap to provide a visual of the process to aid understanding for customers. The roadmap should clearly define the relationship between the customer, Great Places, and contractors, outlining roles and responsibilities that will serve as a practical and visual guide throughout the process.
While contractor documents are comprehensive, we discussed the potential to simplify in order to demonstrate consistency across contractors. We believe it is essential all communications clearly outline what customers can expect during any investment activity.	We discussed offering customers an option to access online resources and timely reminders ahead of scheduled works that may support some efficiency and flexibility.
Great Places website contains only limited detail about planned improvement work.	Other landlord websites offer a range of information, images, and videos sharing valuable, accessible resource available at customers' convenience.



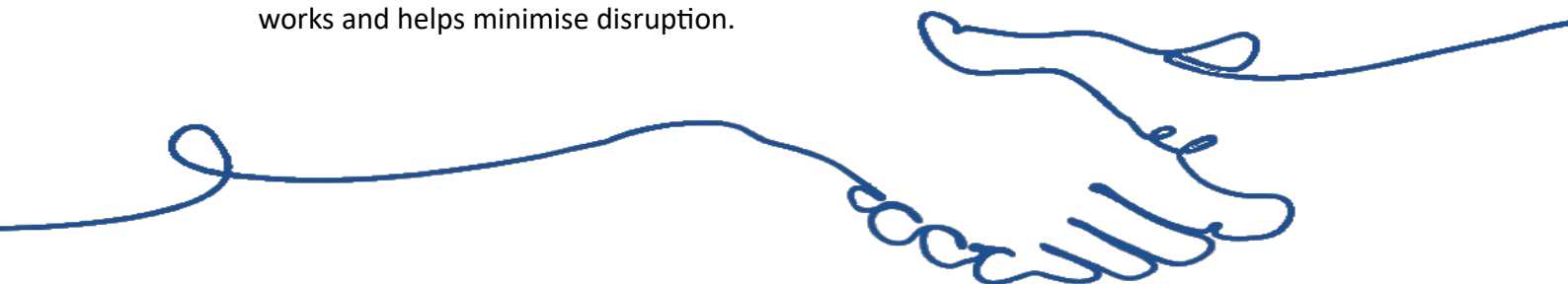
- Procurement of the Investment Framework in 2024 used customer consultation to frame quality questions, KPIs (schedule 6) and the Customer Care & Communication Service doc. (3a). Great Places colleagues viewed this positively recognising it allows for closer working, better contract management, and benefits to improve satisfaction. We found the contractor KPI framework is reassuringly strict, particularly in regard to Health & Safety.

Observation	Action
<p>Communication and feedback is gathered via a variety of touchpoints over the course of work, including the liaison officers, contract delivery officers during spot-checks, daily contractor contacts, and monthly progress meetings, plus customer satisfaction surveys.</p> <p>While these channels offer valuable insights, we felt formal feedback could be collected more consistently throughout the whole process. We understand that record-keeping processes are in place across the business, and as part of the 'Investment into QL' project these will be aligned with the rollout of tablets and digital forms.</p>	<p>The service agreed to explore methods for gathering formal feedback during the process, as we believe this will enhance oversight and help monitor contractors' performance against both the Customer Care & Comms service standards and Great Places' customer principles; <i>Get it right first time, keep promises and do what we say we will, provide a timely response, keep customers informed, show listening, empathy and understanding and access services at your convenience.</i></p>
<p>The service aims to inspect 100% of contractor-led work ensuring customers have opportunity to discuss work and raise any snagging issues. We observed inspections where customers confirmed the value of clear and timely comms. However, we noted that customers were not informed when the defect period expired, which could lead to missed snagging opportunities, inefficient use of resource, and inaccurate performance data.</p>	<p>We discussed and agreed with the service team to explore options for automating notifications as reminders. Defects will continue to be monitored and addressed through our contractor performance management process.</p>

• Emanuel Whittaker Contractor

Observations noted about sharing service-related information:

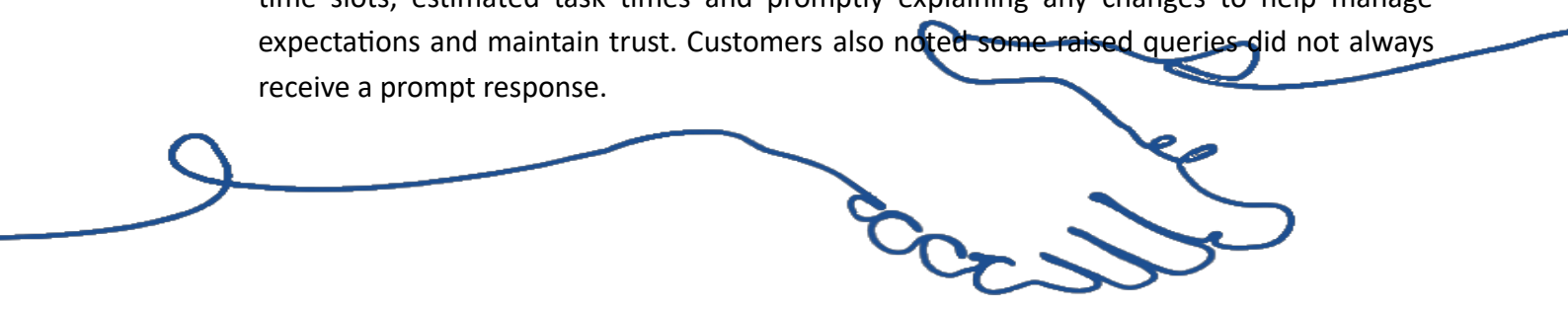
- We met with Emanuel Whittaker, who we found to be open and keen to convey their values to deliver quality customer-centred service to Great Places and customers.
- We found Emanuel Whittaker to be personable and accommodating to ensure effort to listen and understand to deliver service to meet customers' requirements. We heard about a range of positive practices offered to manage expectations, provision of clear friendly and informative customer communications, which also at times exceed expectations.
- We reviewed customer correspondence and newsletters from three key contractors, used to inform customers and gather insights into their needs. This supports better coordination of works and helps minimise disruption.



- **Customer Experience**

Observations noted from customer feedback.

- We reviewed feedback from 329 customers who received planned work in the duration 2024-2025 delivered by 3 contractors. Currently the survey asks customers to score **five** aspects identified during a consultation to explore what matters most to customers. We examined data relating to the question that asks customers to score satisfaction **they received good comms and information** such as detail of appointment times and what work would happen.
- **Customer Satisfaction and Feedback Clarity**
The data shows an average satisfaction score of 8.24 out of 10, indicating generally positive feedback. However, the question used to generate this score combines two distinct elements **communication and information**. To improve clarity for customers and reliability of future responses, we would suggest to separate these aspects into two distinct questions:
 - One to focus on whether **information helped set expectations**.
 - A second to ask whether **communication made customers feel well-informed**
- A new approach was piloted recently aiming to increase the rate of survey responses. Now customers are asked to feedback at the handover inspection, which so far has been successful to increase numbers of survey responses. We recommend offering customers a digital option during handover to allow impartial feedback to be given confidently. Furthermore, we feel valuable insight could be collected to inform, if lower satisfaction scores were followed up with to investigate themes of dissatisfaction.
- **Common themes we noted given in feedback comments relate to:**
 - Providing customers sufficient time to plan / make arrangements for work.
 - Listen to customer circumstances and accessibly needs to plan work accordingly.
 - Be reliable and keep promises agreed with customers.
 - Keep customers informed whilst working in their homes.
 - A mismatch between communicated plans and actual delivery of work.
- **Main reasons for dissatisfaction we observed were:**
 - Customer is avoidably inconvenienced / time wasted.
 - Customer is not keep informed during work to enable them to plan effectively.
- To support this feedback, we also contacted an additional 170 customers via email and included a survey link in the e-News. We received 17 responses, which we acknowledge is a small return though insights shared were consistent with themes in other feedback sources.:
 - Customers highlighted benefits of clear communication early in the process.
 - The pre-entry visit gives customers opportunity to select a kitchen or bathroom design, gain a better understanding of what to expect, and ask any questions they may have.
- A key source of dissatisfaction was unclear appointment times, whilst it's recognised daily work plans may shift due to various factors, we recommend clearly communicating AM/PM time slots, estimated task times and promptly explaining any changes to help manage expectations and maintain trust. Customers also noted some raised queries did not always receive a prompt response.



- **Improving Customer Communication Records**

Following our review of customer feedback, we discussed formalising processes to support consistent and reliable recording of customer communications. This recommendation aims to strengthen data management and enable accurate performance measurement against the standards set out in the Customer Care & Communication document.

Conclusion – SWOT analysis

We feel encouraged to hear the extent of work that has been conducted, so far and were reassured additional resource will assist to support customers, including a contract support manager role. We used a SWOT analysis to summarise our key observations, which formed our four recommendations.

Strengths

- Strong commitment to offer flexible tailored service aligning with Great Places promise: ‘Doing the right things, in the right way, at the right time.’
- Openness of the team to review and learn from challenges to continuously improve.
- Comprehensive contractor documents and pre-entry visits help with understanding.

Weaknesses

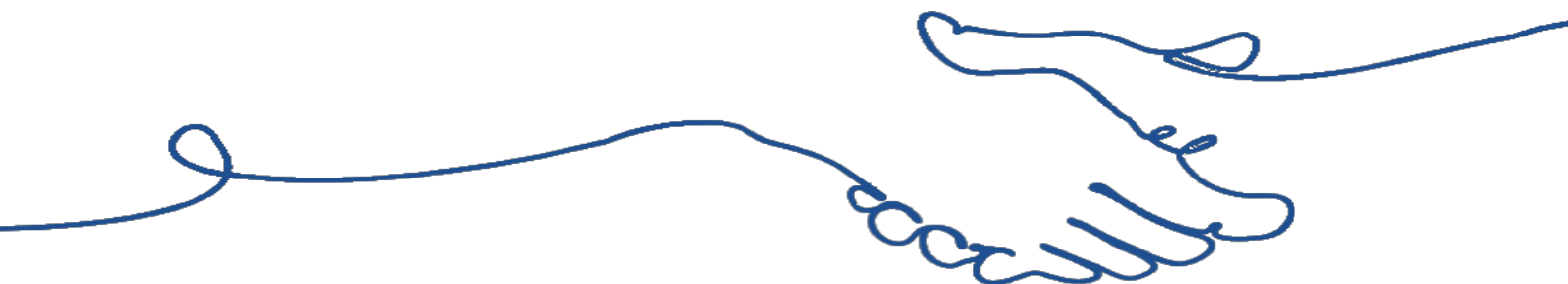
- Earlier notice of work to inform, set the scene, and engage with customers.
- Inconsistencies practiced by contractors.
- Reliable recording of customer communication to support an audit trail and track service.

Opportunities

- Share programme of work early with teams, cross-referencing detail on QL to prioritise contact, if no recent contact, or profiling information recorded.
- Develop a graphic roadmap – outline key info. and timescales / duration of individual work.
- Formalise processes to reliably record customer communication.

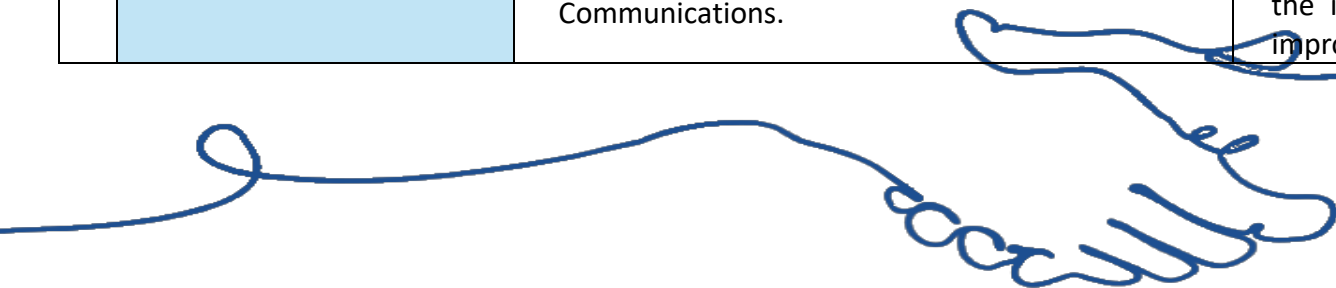
Threats

- Lack of a formal process to track work stages, flag overdue or missed actions.
- Low feedback rates to satisfaction surveys – formalise a process to consistently record customer communication throughout the period of work.
- Customer refusals – monitor if delivery of the proposals agreed within the recommendations lead to improved refusal rates.



Appendix One - Scrutiny Action Plan & Recommendations

	Context / Comments (specific)	Recommendation (measurable)	Team Response – action (attainable / relevant)	Lead (relevant)	When timebound
1	<p>Before work commences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> informing customers of work, and on-boarding advising what to expect to plan for work provide sufficient notice. <p>Customer comments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>more info. inv. customer / not do quick visits / more informative at visit as the letter says / deal as ind. and people not 'the property' or 'a Door No.'</i> <i>literally just told you are having a new bathroom someone will be in touch.</i> <i>make it easier to get online to get in touch</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Redesign a less formal notification letter to set the scene, create a visual roadmap of stages and useful info; principal contact, roles / responsibilities, how to raise complaints, timescales, GDPR reminder, and highlights feedback to influence service which acts as a visual checklist for customers. Invite customers to contact assets early, if wish to refuse work, and update of requirements that may need to be considered to plan delivery of work, if known early this can aid the planning process. Create website content with images to explain planned work / offer alt. format if requested. Standardise all contractor comms documents for consistency outlining service standard customers can expect and, which reinforces messages. Where relevant offer customers a local hub to meet contractors and view components to inform and support customers' experience. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Agreed – a review of early communication with customers will be undertaken by the team to include the items listed. Agreed - to reduce likelihood of a customer refusal new processes to include early work to understand existing tailored requirements and explore any unmet requirements that would enable work to continue as planned. This will include earlier engagement with the Tenancy Coaching Team. Agreed - this will include images, photos, text, diagrams or video as appropriate. Agreed - team will seek to work with larger contractors to trial adopting a common approach either through branded templates, or style / content guides. Agreed - this does already happen however, we'll update guidance to ensure consistency. 	Rob Collier HOID	TBC
2	<p>During work – monitor perf.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> formalise data collection. progress meetings / WIP keep the customer inf'd. <p>Customer comments</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Establish formalised processes for effective data management to support performance monitoring and ensure consistent, accurate communication records throughout the work period, in accordance with Appendix 3a: Customer Care & Communications. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Agreed - we will investigate ways to collect formal feedback throughout duration of work. Record keeping processes do exist across the business and as part of the project 'Investment into QL' these will be introduced to align with the introduction of tablets / forms allowing improved record keeping and reporting. 	Rob Collier HOID	TBC



	Context / Comments	Recommendation (measurable)	Team Response – action	Lead	When
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>unhelpful / no empathy for long-term impact</i> • <i>better timescales</i> 	2. Provide clear detail of appt slots, timely updates to inform of change that would negatively impact customers.	2. Agreed - this forms part of our contractor performance management approach. We will ensure that the standard employees' requirements are updated and issued for each new contract.	Rob Collier HOID	TBC
3	<p>On completion of work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • handover insp. / snagging • feed back on experience. • reporting repairs / defect <p>Customer comments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>jobs signed off at DOOR / I am still unhappy about bathroom</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To ensure customers have opportunity to feedback, arrange a suitable time to inspect on completion of work, record sign-off, snagging work, and ask customer for feedback – develop an online survey as an alternative feedback option during handover. 2. Formally notify customers of the 12-month defect expiry date, how to report repairs, and formalise data collection to monitor work post contract. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agreed - this is already in place, through the 'Investments into QL' project we will ensure the process is fully systemised enabling improved record keeping and reporting. 2. Agreed – we will explore options to be able to automate customer notifications for reporting defects during the final month of the defect period. Defects will continue to be monitored as part of the contractor performance management. 	Rob Collier HOID	TBC
4	<p>Satisfaction survey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding customer service experience <p>Customer comments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>care is taken to listen to accessibility needs and to respect my home.</i> • <i>different contractors with different attitudes</i> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Revise survey so it informs of customers exp. We found Q3 unclear we suggest asking if info. was useful to understand what to expect, separately, ask if customers felt informed throughout. 2. Consider offering customers a choice to feedback, ie) gather qualitative feedback to ask what may of improved customers' exp, and max. opp. to record customer comments throughout work, see rec 2. 3. Discuss value of customer feedback at pre-entry visit sharing questions customers to mystery shop work and feel involved in shaping service, providing accurate and reliable feedback. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agreed - the survey will be reviewed in full including implementing of Toucan for in-person and remote surveys. 2. Agreed - we will offer customers choice to complete a survey either in-person, or at a time of their own choosing. 3. Agreed - customer feedback to be discussed during pre-entry visits, giving customers the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and prepare their responses. We will also explore methods to gather formal feedback throughout the process. 	Rob Collier HOID	TBC

