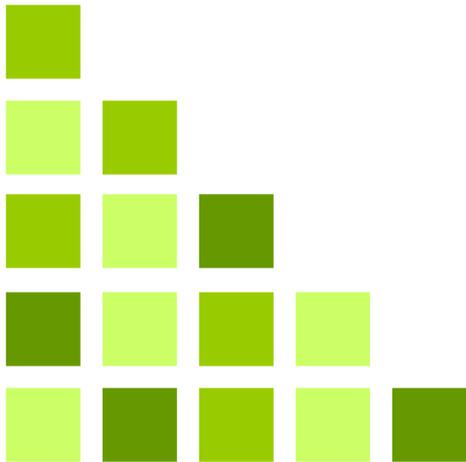




Customer First



Customer Service Strategy and Action Plan 2011 – 2013





Welcome

We have developed our Customer Service Strategy and Action Plan in partnership with customers and The Gateshead Housing Company's Board, as part of our commitment to continually improve the way we deliver customer service.

Our strategy will ensure that everyday excellence in customer service is achieved and becomes an integral part of the culture of The Gateshead Housing Company.

This Strategy is central to the Company's aim of providing excellent services that meet customer expectations. By concentrating on customers needs and on their experience rather than processes and procedures, we aim to provide customer service that is relevant and effective.

The structure and organisation of The Gateshead Housing Company are not important to customers trying to access services. What is important is ease of accessibility, quality and speed of response received. In essence, this strategy and the projects and initiatives arising from it aim to improve significantly the quality of the customer experience in Gateshead.

Bill Fullen, Chief Executive

Barbara Dennis, Board Chair



Photo of the SIG

Foreword from Customer Service SIG

The Customer* Service Service Improvement Group (SIG) was formed in January 2008 as a high level involvement mechanism to give us the power to influence some of the important decisions about the services affecting us. Through the SIG, we have shared our views and opinions about the services we receive, made suggestions for improvements, developed standards and monitored and scrutinised the services we receive.

We were involved in the development of the company's first Customer Service Strategy 'Customer First' in April 2008, and again in this review. Our views have informed not only the priorities and actions within the strategy but also its content and design.

We felt that it is essential to be able to review the strategy more regularly to reflect not only our changing needs but also the changing environment in which the Housing Company operates. As a result, the strategy will be reviewed annually by the SIG and the action plan that accompanies it will be produced on a year by year basis.

We thought it is important that the strategy should feel personal, produced in a way that is easy to understand and should reflect our experiences and expectations for the services you deliver.

Our aim for the strategy is to ensure that, no matter who you are, where you live or what service you receive, customer service should be delivered to a consistently high standard by all employees working for or on behalf of The Gateshead Housing Company.

We will be involved in monitoring the Company's progress and scrutinising performance against the strategy. The Company will continue to involve customers through a range of methods to make sure they are not only aware of changing needs and priorities but also checking customers' satisfaction with how they deliver the aims and objectives of this strategy.

*This strategy uses the word 'customer' to mean anyone who requires, requests, receives or can receive a service from The Gateshead Housing Company whether that service is provided by us or someone working on our behalf.



Contents

Customer First

Customer Service Strategy and Action Plan

Welcome

- From our Chief Executive and Board Chair

Foreword

- From the Customer Service SIG

The Gateshead Housing Company Vision, Mission, Values, Objectives

Introduction

Our Customers

The Strategy

- Aims, Impact, Success Factors
- Customer Involvement in the Strategy
- Achievements
- Future Priorities
 - Independent Tenant's Organisation
 - Customer Relationship Management – MyPortal and the Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions module
 - Complaint Scrutiny Panel
- Improvement Action Plan 2011-12
- Customer Service Charter
- Customer Service Standards

The strategy is available on our website at gatesheadhousing.co.uk, in hard copy format and in a range of accessible formats and languages on request. To request a copy please contact our Customer Services Team on 0191 4336156

Corporate vision and mission

The Company's Customer Service Strategy will assist the Gateshead Local Strategic Partnership to achieve the overall vision for Gateshead, which is set out in the Community Strategy and Vision 2030: "Local people realising their full potential, enjoying the best quality of life in a healthy, equal, safe, prosperous and sustainable Gateshead".

The Gateshead Housing Company manages Gateshead Councils housing stock and provides access to council owned housing services. This includes responsibility for local housing offices, neighbourhood relations, rent and income, leasehold services, investment, repairs and maintenance and other housing management services.

Our vision, mission and values, demonstrate our intention to keep customers at the core of our activities. These values underpin all of our actions and continue to be an intrinsic part of every employee's role within the company.

Vision

The company's vision is:

To provide excellent homes and housing services

Mission Statement

To work in partnership with residents and the community to create homes and neighbourhoods that meet the aspirations of the people of Gateshead

Values

- Being a listening and learning organisation
- Being honest, accountable and transparent
- Being motivated, trained, and committed
- Being customer focused, innovative and professional
- Caring and respecting
- Embracing equality
- A commitment to all our employees

Objectives

Our key objectives are set out in the Business Plan for 2009-13.

- Deliver excellent housing services, shaped around our customers' priorities

- Effectively manage housing assets to achieve sustainable homes and neighbourhoods
- Secure adequate resources, both human and financial, to effectively support our business.

These objectives were informed by: the experience of the company in the 5 years leading up to the plan; the involvement of customers, **stakeholders*** and partners, including the Council, and an analysis of our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. These objectives give the focus to our work up to March 2013 and are supported by an annual delivery plan, agreed between the company and the Council, which will provide the detailed actions needed to achieve our aspirations.

Introduction

The Customer Service Strategy was first developed with our customers in 2008 to develop our approach to customer service up to 2011. We have built on the excellence we have achieved so far and updated the strategy to take the vision forward to 2013. The strategy sets out The Gateshead Housing Company's vision, priorities and commitments over the next two years and explains how we will meet our legal and ethical duties. It outlines:

- Our commitment to customer service
- Our achievements to date
- What actions we will take over the next two years

It is complemented by our Customer Service Charter which is included as Appendix 1 and outlines our commitment to our customers.

There were a number of key actions achieved through the 2008/11 strategy;

- **Introduction of 'A guide to services you can expect from The Gateshead Housing Company'**

We launched in July 2010 of 'A guide to the services you can expect from The Gateshead Housing Company' which tells customers about the services we offer, the standards of service they can expect from us and how we will make sure we are meeting those standards.

The guide is based on a customer journey from applying for a home and becoming a tenant and all the services you can access right through to either ending your tenancy or finding a new home. We also developed a guide for **leaseholders***.

- **Provision of Guides to your Role**

The standards set out in the above guide to services filters down to front line staff through a series of documents called 'Guides to your role'. The guides demonstrate how employees contribute towards the company's objectives, provide an outline of the responsibilities of the role and set out the standards of service expected.

The guides are not only a useful tool for existing employees to help ensure consistency of delivery across front line services but they also play an essential part in the induction of new employees.

- **Introduction of an extended service**

An extended hours service was implemented in September 2008 to ensure customers can access high quality housing services in ways and at times which are convenient to them. This service enables customers to access Customer Service Assistants and Rent and Income Officers outside of normal office hours.

Opening times were developed with customer input to ensure demand for services could be met outside of the standard working day. The service can answer housing queries up to 7pm Monday to Friday and from 8am to 12 noon on Saturdays.

The extended hours service compliments the existing HomeRepairs service so that all customer enquiries can either be dealt with at the first point of contact or passed on to the relevant service in preparation.

- **Development of Customer Service Charter**

The Customer Service Charter was developed with the company's Customer Service Service Improvement Group to set out the standards of customer service the company will deliver around the five main customer service methods.

It ensures that employees are aware of their responsibilities in delivering excellent customer service and sets out exactly what customer can expect from us no matter how they access our services.

The strategy links with our values 'Being customer focused, innovative and professional' and 'Caring and respecting' and also 'Being a listening and learning organisation'. It helps meet our vision: ***"To provide excellent homes and housing services"***. With a customer service ethos of ***"My customer, my responsibility"***, we never underestimate the importance of effective customer service. It is central to everything we do. Above all else we are interested in our customers' experience because an excellent customer experience is about feelings and emotions as well as how processes and procedures help to achieve this.

This strategy includes an Action Plan that will help us to deliver better outcomes for customers. We will consult residents so their opinions and experiences help to shape our policies and the way we deliver services. We will monitor our services so that we can be sure that we are meeting all of our residents' needs. We will publish the results of this consultation and monitoring, so that our residents, partners and employees are informed about what we are doing and can hold us accountable for our performance.

The Gateshead Housing Company is not just about housing, it is about people and the homes and communities they live in. It's about our customers being at the centre of everything we do.

Our Customers

Gateshead has a population of 191,151 with 87,659 households – 24.6% being Council houses managed and maintained by The Gateshead Housing Company. It is a borough of contrasts, with an urban centre and a large rural hinterland. It stretches almost 13 miles along the south bank of the River Tyne and covers an area of 55 square miles. Gateshead is among the 88 most deprived local authority areas in England. The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000 shows that of the twenty two wards in Gateshead, nine wards fall within the top ten per cent most deprived in England.

The Gateshead Housing Company is responsible for the day to day management of just over 21,000 tenancies and around 820 leasehold properties. The main concentrations of housing managed by The Gateshead Housing Company are in the central, east and south areas of the borough, with some wards having over 50 per cent of households renting from Gateshead Council. There is a healthy demand for social housing. The housing register has steadily increased since April 2000.

Knowledge of our existing – and potential - customers is vital and continues to shape services to meet their needs. Continuous updating of our customer profile shows us that:

2% of our tenants are from a Black and Minority Ethnic background
More than 1 in 4 of our homes has someone with a disability living in it
1 in 5 tenants are over 75 years old
58% of our tenants are female

Our customers' top three service priorities identified in the Annual Tenant Survey in 2010/11 are:

- Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour
- High-quality, timely repairs
- Having well-maintained estates

Our customers' top three service priorities identified in the Annual Leasehold Survey in 2010/11 are:

- Value for Money Service Charges
- Well Maintained Estates
- Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour

Our Customers told us in the 2010/11 Annual Tenant Survey that 90.1% of customers are satisfied with the services we provide. 72.9% of leaseholders are satisfied with the services offered by The Gateshead Housing Company.

Our customers want:

- To deal with well trained and knowledgeable employees who are proactive in establishing their needs
- The company to review customer service best practice to ensure we maintain our excellent service to customers
- To be involved in shaping customer service training to ensure it addresses their needs and priorities
- Flexibility in the implementation of our policies and procedures to ensure we meet the diverse needs of our customers
- More feedback on the improvements made to our services as a result of their views and input
- Improved communication in the delivery of repairs and investment services
- Queries to be dealt with right first time
- To contact us by telephone and would prefer to have one main telephone number to speak to someone in a contact centre rather than reaching an automated service or having individual telephone numbers for each department
- Consistent high standards of customer service from all those working for or on behalf of the company and that this should be tested through **scrutiny*** methods such as mystery shopping

Customer Involvement in the Strategy

The Customer Service Strategy has been developed with the involvement of a range of residents and stakeholders across the Borough. Customers have identified their priorities via the Annual Tenants and Leaseholder Surveys, through satisfaction surveys throughout the year and through the Customer Service Improvement Group (SIG).

SIG's exist for every service area in TGHC and consist of a membership from 5-30 tenants. They ensure that customers can really influence decision-making processes across the organisation; that involvement takes place across all services; that residents can get involved in the decision making processes and that residents are involved in monitoring and scrutinising services. In short they ensure residents are involved in real decisions about the future direction of the organisation and can get involved in the monitoring and scrutinising progress. In addition to identifying specific customer service priorities, the Customer Service SIG have made recommendations on what they consider should be company priorities which are reflected in this strategy.

Examples of the impact in services of the SIG's include:

- Service reviews have been regularly undertaken by the Value For Money SIG to ensure services are performing to an efficient and effective standard.
- Home**Choice** members have undertaken mystery shopping around the lettable standard.

- The 'Guide to services you can expect from The Gateshead Housing Company' was developed following consultation with all SIG's.
- The 'Guide to services you can expect from The Gateshead Housing Company as a leaseholder' was developed following consultation with leasehold SIG members.
- Customers were involved in the development of service standards for Anti-Social Behaviour.
- Members in the Tenancy and Estate management SIG were involved in developing surveys including the Home Welcome and 'In your Neighbourhood' survey.
- Involvement SIG members have scrutinised representation on the Involvement database and were involved in future plans for mystery shopping in the company and planning our involvement week in 2009/10 'Opportunity knocks again!'
- Decent Homes SIG carried out an end of year satisfaction review and agreed targets for 2010/11 schemes.
- The first Multi Storey SIG was held during this period where customers made plans for future meetings and were involved in developing satisfaction surveys.
- Home**Repairs** SIG scrutinised the service provided by Morrison and were involved in developing service standards.

The Strategy

This Strategy sets out to address those issues our customers have prioritised. Our aim is to deliver greater satisfaction with services, with greater access and better quality to our customers, delivered right first time, in a consistent, co-ordinated and proactive manner. We will have a greater percentage of enquiries resolved at first point of contact and we will give responses that are consistent, not solely dependent on an officer's individual knowledge, and are supported by technology.

We will do this by:

- Ensuring we have an organisation which is fit for purpose and can adapt to the changing environment whilst maintaining the service levels we provide to our customers
- Work with Gateshead Council to develop a **co-regulation*** model which gives customers the ability to design and scrutinise the housing services delivered by both the Council and the Company.
- Introducing Customer Relationship Management technology for the monitoring of Customer Complaints and Compliments.
- Develop a Complaints Panel with customers to scrutinise the company's complaints performance and identify trends and opportunities for service improvement.
- Reviewing out of hours provision to ensure the service continues to meet the needs of customers and is delivered efficiently, effectively and consistently.

All of this will help improve how The Gateshead Housing Company interacts with customers leading to increased rates of customer contact resolution and customer satisfaction.

Achievements to date

We already provide excellent customer service. In November 2008 the company was assessed by the **Audit Commission*** as providing an excellent 3 star service with excellent prospects for improvement. The Inspection Report stated that service delivery in the organisation is underpinned by a strong commitment to customer care.

The strengths with customer care across the organisation outweighed the weaknesses, with inspectors highlighting high satisfaction rates, easy access to services and customers being kept well informed as ways in which the service meets the needs of the local community and users.

During the early part of 2011 the company will be taking this one step further by embarking on the Government's Customer Service Excellence accreditation, a 'charter mark' awarded to organisations that can demonstrate their commitment to delivering excellent customer service. The accreditation has a strong focus on the development and learning an organisation undertakes. Achieving the standard will demonstrate our competence but will also identify key areas for improvement that we can develop.

In March 2010, the company and Gateshead Council achieved the Centre for Housing and Support's (CHS) Code of Practice for their support for older people's services - a first for the region. The Code demonstrates that the company and Council's housing-related support services are of the highest quality, are **person-centred*** and are delivered consistently.

In June 2010 the company along with its partners were awarded the highest level of the Cleaner Safer Greener (CSG) Quality Mark by the Keep Britain Tidy campaign for targeted work in the south of the borough. The Exemplar level achieved demonstrates that we have a high performing partnership in place to achieve residents' vision for their neighbourhood.

In July 2010 we launched 2 key documents about the services we deliver, one for customers and another specifically for leaseholders. 'A guide to the service you can expect from The Gateshead Housing Company' tell customers about the range of services we offer, the standards of service they can expect from us and how we will check the business is meeting those standards.

Satisfaction surveys are one way to test how well our customers think we're performing against our standards. The company has reviewed its approach to satisfaction measurement, coordinating activity from across the company to implement a customer satisfaction programme. The programme includes an overall annual survey to capture the high level views and priorities of

customers and a number of themed surveys to obtain views on specific service areas including customer service. Feedback from these ongoing methods will continue to determine the focus of our work.

2010 saw the first Annual Report specifically for our customers in line with the **Tenant Services Authority*** (TSA). The report, developed with the involvement of our customers, details the work the company has done between April 2009 and March 2010 and sets out how we meet the TSA's six standards. The report details our future plans and the local offers that we will continue to develop through customer consultation.

Monitoring the strategy

We recognise that the strategy should be a 'living' document to be effective. It will be reviewed on an annual basis and all action plans, guidance and standards set out in the scheme will be subject to monitoring and assessment:

- Every three months to the Customer Service Service Improvement Group and to the company's senior management team
- Every six months to all customers in the customer newspaper and on our website
- Every six months to the company's Customers and Communities Committee

Responsibility for ensuring the strategy outcomes are achieved will be managed by Corporate Services.

The Customer Service Service Improvement Group will be responsible for monitoring progress and scrutinising the company's performance against the strategy objectives. The SIG will also be central in reviewing the document and its priorities alongside our customers and employees.

We will continue to utilise customer feedback mechanisms such as surveys to check that the strategy delivers improved outcomes.

Publishing the strategy

The strategy will be available on our website, in hard copy format and in a range of accessible formats and languages on request. Copies will be sent to known community organisations, groups and forums.

Achieving Outcomes

This strategy identifies the key developments in Customer Service for the Company over the next two years – the action plan outlines the detail of our targets for 2011/12.

Our main outcomes are to ensure that we continue to provide excellent customer services and that we deal with our customer's right first time. Our customer's will be able to access our services when and how they want to. We will provide our customers with information which is relevant to them and that this is provided on a timely basis. Our customers will see that the information we collect from them is used to shape both the services we provide and our interactions with them.

Value for money will be a consideration throughout the delivery of the strategy to ensure we provide excellent levels of customer service that are cost effective, reliable and efficient. It is important that we are aware of the costs of delivering customer service and continually identify opportunities to reduce costs without impacting on quality and customer satisfaction.

Future Priorities

There are 4 key themes upon which this Strategy is built; **1** Customer Focused Culture, **2** Understanding our customers, **3** Accessible and timely services and **4** Consistency of service delivery.

We want all of our customers to be able to get in touch in ways and at times that are more suited to lives in the 21st century; we want our staff to be highly trained so that tenants and leaseholders are delighted at the response when they contact us, and we believe that the implementation of this programme will help us in the quality of our frontline contact with customers.

Action Plan 2011/12

The action plan has been built around four key areas in relation to customer service.

Customer focused culture – making excellent customer service a part of everything we do

From our corporate vision and values, to the support and commitment at a leadership level, right the way through to front line service delivery, our focus is centred on our customers. Our employees are the key in being able to demonstrate this. From recruitment through to delivery, this means having the right people with the right attitude and professionalism who feel empowered to deliver on the company's customer focused vision.

Understanding our customers - ensuring we understand the specific needs of our customers and tailor our services to meet specific needs.

We continue to collect customer profile information to enable us to tailor the services we provide so that they are relevant and required by our customers. Customer information should be captured in one central location to enable us

to better identify needs and preferences and evidence how we have changed our services as a result of our improved understanding.

Accessible services – giving our customers the services they want, when they want it

Giving customers' choice in how and when they access our services is important to us. We regularly review how customers interact with us through the different access channels to make improvements and ensure our resources are used effectively. We will work with customers to ensure that we meet their expectations in the delivery of our services.

Excellent service delivery – ensuring the same high level of service and the same information is available to our customers irrespective of how they access our services

We need to make sure we get the balance right between providing timely services whilst also maintaining quality. Quality assurance checks should be built into our work as well as being tested with customers who have received a service from us.

There are three main areas of work which contribute toward the goals outlined. These complement the ongoing programme of customer service work, for example Customer Service training, online web-based enhancements and involvement of customers through our network of Service Improvement Groups. They will be major contributors in assisting us to realise our vision for Customer Service.

The development of tenant involvement and co regulation

With the abolition of the Tenant Services Authority (TSA), the body responsible for regulating the social housing sector, the Government wants tenants' panels to monitor how well landlords develop and deliver service standards. They also want tenants to have a greater say in how landlords perform, as well as driving service improvements. Key to the success of this new approach will be the influence tenants have on services.

A Gateshead Council project managed by Wood Holmes and Gentoo has examined how best to develop the influence that tenants and residents have on services. This project has looked at what works for tenants in other parts of the country and also involved people in Gateshead by asking their views on what form tenant influence in the borough should take.

From this work it is clear that there is a wish to form a tenants' panel for The Gateshead Housing Company's tenants and residents. Based on discussions to date the vision for the new co-regulation group is:

“Customers with the skills, opportunities and support to empower them to challenge, influence and shape decisions that affect their lives and contribute to active and sustainable communities”

Customers have also said:

- The panel should have a real role to play and will look at services themselves
- Any panel should not overlap any existing activity or groups, for example with Service Improvement Groups or Tenant and Resident Associations
- The panel should build upon the excellent work that existing groups do and to strengthen opportunities for tenants and residents
- Any panel should provide tenants with the ability to look at the housing company and Gateshead Council services and make recommendations for improvement.

The detail of the model will be the subject of consultation during 2011 with the final model developed by a working group involving customers and then approved the Councils Cabinet and relevant Committee within the Housing Company.

Customer Relationship Management – MyPortal and the Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions module

The company has utilised Gateshead Council's corporate system to log and monitor all complaints and compliments since its set up in January 2004. Recent changes to the company's complaints policy means the Council system is no longer able to meet our needs in monitoring performance against our targets. It was therefore agreed that a new system was needed that could not only monitor performance more effectively, automate manual processes and give us the ability to analyse trends in complaints about our services.

In terms of improving access to information about our customers, a new system called MyPortal based on Northgate Housing, will be developed over the coming year to offer employees a clearer view of our customers.

Like a dashboard, it will bring together information about our customers into one central point, making the answer to any query more easily available.

Both systems will help to improve customer service and offer improved systems for our employees.

Complaint Scrutiny Panel

As part of our local offers to improve services we committed to developing a Customer Complaint Panel by April 2011. We set out this offer in our annual report to customers in 2010. The aim of the panel is to scrutinise the company's complaints performance and to identify trends and opportunities for service improvement.

The panel will give customers the influence to challenge the company about performance in a meaningful way and increase the company's accountability to its customers.

The panel will meet on a bi monthly basis with officers and partners to look at how well we perform against our targets and to agree ways forward to improve our services.

Our action plan sets out what we will achieve within this Customer Service Strategy, based on our four key areas of Customer Focused Culture, Understanding our Customers, Accessible Services and Consistency of Delivery, and continuing our ongoing day to day development and project work.

Glossary

Stakeholder – a person or group with an interest in our organisation

Leaseholder –

- A tenant who has bought their flat from Gateshead Council - they own their own property but not the block it's in, or the land its built on
- Someone who has bought a flat from a leaseholder of Gateshead Council and takes over the lease
- Someone who inherits the lease in a will.

Scrutiny – To examine something closely

Co-regulation - involving customers in designing services and then scrutinising the company's performance

Audit Commission – the independent organisation which was responsible for inspecting housing organisations

Person-centred – an approach that views the customer as their own best authority on their own experience and as being fully capable of fulfilling their own potential for growth

Tenant Services Authority – set up in 2008 as the regulator for social housing with their full range of regulatory powers coming into force in 2010. The TSA have now been abolished and their role will be carried out by the Homes and Communities Agency

Customer Service Improvement Action Plan 2011/12

1

Customer focused culture - Making excellent customer service a part of everything we do

		Objective/Milestone			Intended Outcome		CMT Lead
		Work with the Council to develop a co-regulation structure within the Housing Company.			To develop a co-regulation structure to ensure that our services meet customers expectations		NB
Status	Ref / Evidence	Action	Target date dd/mm/yy	Resource implications	Responsible Officers	Progress + date	Complete? Y/N
		Assist the Council in developing the vision for co-regulation	30/04/11	None	Louise Taylor		
		Support consultation on the options for the set up of the co-regulation body	31/03/12	Funding required for set up costs	Louise Taylor		
		Provide support for the co-regulation body	31/03/12	Funding required for support	Louise Taylor		

		Objective/Milestone			Intended Outcome		CMT Lead
		Further develop a culture of delivering excellent customer service with highly motivated and knowledgeable staff			To enable staff to deliver an excellent service to our customers		JMB
Status	Ref / Evidence	Action	Target date dd/mm/yy	Resource implications	Responsible Officers	Progress + date	Complete? Y/N
		Undertake an employee survey to understand employee satisfaction	31/12/10	None	Jennifer Aston	Employee survey has been undertaken and results will be used to develop our internal services and will be used in our IIP reassessment.	Y

		Prepare for IIP Reassessment	30/06/11	Cost of IIP assessment	Jennifer Aston		
		Ensure that the appraisal system is used to support employees to highlight any training needs	30/06/11	None	Jennifer Aston		
		Monitor the regularity of 1-2-1's and encourage managers to use these sessions as a tool to ensure that employees are delivering excellent customer service.	31/03/12	None	Jennifer Aston		
		Review the current employee reward and recognition scheme to ensure that this engenders a culture of excellent customer service.	31/12/11	None	Jennifer Aston		
		Implement any changes to the current employee reward and recognition scheme once options have been discussed and agreed with staff.	31/03/12	None	Jennifer Aston		

		Objective/Milestone	Intended Outcome			CMT Lead	
		Develop and deliver a customer service training programme	Customers receive a consistently excellent service from well trained and knowledgeable staff			JMB	
Status	Ref / Evidence	Action	Target date dd/mm/yy	Resource implications	Responsible Officers	Progress + date	Complete? Y/N
		Identify all customer service training provided by the Housing Company	30/04/11	None	Andrea Foreman		
		Identify the training requirements from employee appraisals	30/06/11	None	Pamela Lamming		
		Involve customers in developing a customer service training programme.	30/09/11	None	Andrea Foreman		

		Develop a customer service training programme to encompass all the training requirements	30/09/11	None	Andrea Foreman/ Pamela Lamming		
		Deliver the customer service training programme	31/12/11	Funding for an external trainer	Andrea Foreman/ Pamela Lamming		

		Objective/Milestone	Intended Outcome				CMT Lead
		Further embed our Guide to Services – ‘A Guide to the Services you can expect from The Gateshead Housing Company’ as our service standards.	Ensure that we are providing excellent customer service and our service standards can be monitored and measured				JMB
Status	Ref / Evidence	Action	Target date dd/mm/yy	Resource implications	Responsible Officers	Progress + date	Complete? Y/N
		Review our Guide to Services in consultation with our customers and ensure that this meets the expectations of our customers and is achievable.	31/03/12	None	Heads of Service/ Involvement Team		
		Report performance on current service standards to customers	30/06/11	None	Head of Support Services		
		Review the improvements made as a result of our performance or the actions needed to deliver the standards and report these to customers	30/06/11	None	Head of Support Services / Liz Simpson		
		Review the current service standards with SIG's and other customer groups	30/09/11	None	Head of Support Services		
		Develop any new service standards required and update ‘Guide to Services’ document	31/03/12	None	Andrea Foreman		

		Objective/Milestone			Intended Outcome		CMT Lead
		Embed and develop further our internal service standards.			Ensure that we are providing excellent internal customer service and our service standards can be monitored and measured		JMB
Status	Ref / Evidence	Action	Target date dd/mm/yy	Resource implications	Responsible Officers	Progress + date	Complete? Y/N
		Implement systems to enable the capture and measurement of our internal service standards	30/06/11	None	Naz Mehrdadi	We have developed systems to capture and measure the performance on our internal service standards for the Performance Department and Admin Department. This now needs to be rolled out to all departments	N
		Report performance on current internal service standards	30/06/11	None	Head of Support Services		
		Develop internal service standards for all areas of the Housing Company	30/09/11	None	Heads of Service/ Liz Simpson	Internal Service Standards have currently been developed for Finance, HR and Admin, Performance and Customer Services.	N
		Consult with service users on the proposed internal service standards	31/12/11	None	Heads of Service		
		Develop and implement any new service standards required	31/03/12	None	Heads of Service/ Liz Simpson		

		Objective/Milestone			Intended Outcome		CMT Lead
		Identify learning and outcomes from the Customer Service Excellence Accreditation and any additional accreditations undertaken by the Housing Company.			Ensure that we are providing excellent customer service and we are constantly learning.		NB
Status	Ref / Evidence	Action	Target date dd/mm/yy	Resource implications	Responsible Officers	Progress + date	Complete? Y/N
		Review the recommendations from the customer service accreditation and develop an action plan	30/06/11	None	James Moody		
		Review the learning from undertaking the accreditation and any actions arising from this.	30/06/11	None	James Moody		
		Undertake benchmarking with other Housing Organisations who have obtained the accreditation to learn from best practice in the sector.	30/09/11	None	James Moody		

Understanding our customers - Ensuring we understand the specific needs of our customers and tailor our services to meet those needs

		Objective/Milestone			Intended Outcome		CMT Lead
		Develop a strategic vision for accessing our customer's information and implement the systems that will be required.			Ensuring that we can access our customer information in one place and at the point of contact to ensure that we can assist our customers 'right first time'.		JMB/NB
Status	Ref / Evidence	Action	Target date dd/mm/y	Resource implications	Responsible Officers	Progress + date	Complete? Y/N
		Develop the vision for accessing our customers information including the systems we use	31/03/12	None	Head of Support Service/CMT		
		Implement MyPortal as a means of accessing customer data in one place on our Housing Management System	30/06/11	None	Head of Customer Service/ ICT		
		Implement Phase 1 of the Complaints system to enable complaints to be shown within our Housing Management System	30/06/11	None	Head of Support Service/ ICT		
		Develop Phase 2 – Step 3 complaints and suggestions for the Complaints system	31/12/11	None	Head of Support Service/ ICT		
		Further explore the wider use of our Customer Relationship Management system	31/03/12	None	Head of Support Service/CMT		
		Explore the development of a document management system	31/03/12	None	Head of Finance/ICT		

		Objective/Milestone			Intended Outcome		CMT Lead
		Develop the use of customer journey mapping			To understand the emotions felt by our customers during their contact with us.		NB
Status	Ref / Evidence	Action	Target date dd/mm/yy	Resource implications	Responsible Officers	Progress + date	Complete? Y/N
		Develop framework, model and guidance for services and customers to utilise when reviewing services and procedures	31/05/11	None	James Moody		
		Develop and facilitate coaching & briefing sessions for employees and customers	30/06/11	None	James Moody		
		Identify and deliver a programme of improvements with customer involvement	31/12/11	None	James Moody		

		Objective/Milestone			Intended Outcome		CMT Lead
		Extend the use of customer profiling to include all diversity strands and ensure that this data is being used when we have contact with our customers			To understand the needs of our customers		JMB
Status	Ref / Evidence	Action	Target date dd/mm/yy	Resource implications	Responsible Officers	Progress + date	Complete? Y/N
		Increase the customer profile data held by increasing the equality strands and data on how people prefer to access our services on the customer profile forms for tenants and leaseholders	31/03/11	Cost of customer profile forms + officer time to input	Louise Taylor/ Janice Adams	New customer profile forms have been developed to include all customer equality strands.	Y
		Collect customer profile data for our customers using the updated customer profile forms and update customers data in our Housing Management System	On-going	Cost of customer profile forms + officer time to input	Louise Taylor	Customer profile forms are currently being used for all new tenants and sent out with rent statements to obtain information for all tenants.	N

		Utilise the customer profile data to identify trends in relation to performance data by equality strand	31/03/12	None	Louise Taylor/ Andrea Foreman		
		Utilise the customer profile data when we have contact with our customers.	31/03/12	None	Heads of Service	Knowing your customer form has been developed which is used by employees who visit our customers. This needs to be further embedded.	N

Accessible services - Giving our customers the services they want, when they want it

		Objective/Milestone			Intended Outcome		CMT Lead
		Develop a strategic vision for customer contact			Providing customers with accessible contact points including how they want to contact us and when they want to contact us		JMB
Status	Ref / Evidence	Action	Target date dd/mm/yy	Resource implications	Responsible Officers	Progress + date	Complete? Y/N
		Develop the vision for customer contact	31/12/11	None	Head of Customer Service/Head of Support Services/CMT		
		Consult with customers as to how they want to be able to contact us	31/12/11	None	Head of Support Services		
		Undertake a review of our current contact routes and whether they meet our customers requirements	31/12/11	None	Head of Support Services		
		Review the use of our self service options by customers (such as on-line services)	31/12/11	None	Head of Finance		
		Develop solutions to our review in consultation with customers	31/03/12	Potential costs associated with solutions unknown	Heads of Service/CMT		

		Objective/Milestone			Intended Outcome		CMT lead
		Review our means of communication with our customers			Ensure our communication means meets the needs of customers, is accessible and is delivered efficiently, effectively and consistently		JMB
Status	Ref / Evidence	Action	Target date dd/mm/yy	Resource implications	Responsible Officers	Progress + date	Complete? Y/N
		Review our website content and design	30/09/11	Cost of website	Ian Clarkin		
		Review the newspaper content and design	30/09/11	Cost of Newspaper	Ian Clarkin		
		Review and update the on-line FAQ's for customers	30/09/11	None	Ian Clarkin		
		Review the various documents with our customers through a reader's panel to ensure they are accessible.	31/12/11	None	Ian Clarkin/ Customers		

		Objective/Milestone			Intended Outcome		CMT Lead
		Review the information booklets/ leaflets provided to customers regarding our services			Ensure that customers can access our information leaflets and that they meet their needs		JMB
Status	Ref / Evidence	Action	Target date dd/mm/yy	Resource implications	Responsible Officers	Progress + date	Complete? Y/N
		Review the A-Z of services booklet	30/09/11	None	Head of Support Services		
		Review the Welcome Pack for tenants and New Tenants Pack	30/09/11	None	Head of Neighbourhood Services		
		Consult with customers what they want from our information booklets/leaflets	30/09/11	None	Andrea Foreman/ Customers		
		Develop a new suite of booklets/leaflets following consultation	31/12/11	Cost of new leaflets	Head of Support Services		

4

Excellent service delivery - Ensuring the same high level of service and the same information is available to our customers irrespective of how they access our services

		Objective/Milestone			Intended Outcome		CMT Lead
		Ensure that we learn from complaints, compliments, survey feedback, dissatisfaction and any other customer contact.			Customers involved in scrutinising and challenging company performance. Improvements to service as a result of trends identified		JMB
Status	Ref / Evidence	Action	Target date dd/mm/yy	Resource implications	Responsible Officer	Progress + date	Complete? Y/N
		Develop a system for capturing our customer feedback from all sources.	30/09/11	None	Liz Simpson		
		Develop a mechanism for monitoring this feedback and enable learning to be carried out	31/12/11	None	Liz Simpson		
		Report to customers on the learning and the improvements that have been carried out as a result of their feedback from all sources.	31/03/12	None	Andrea Foreman/ Liz Simpson		
		Establish Customer Complaint Panel to undertake learning from complaints	31/03/11	None	Andrea Foreman	Customer complaints panel will terms of reference have been developed in consultation with the complaint panel working group and potential panel members will be interviewed in March 2011.	
		Report on the learning from complaints panel and the improvements carried out	31/03/12	None	Andrea Foreman		

Customer Service Charter

Our aim is to deliver excellent services and for you to be happy with the service you receive.

To help us to provide excellent customer service, customers who are members of our Customer Service Improvement Group helped to produce this Customer Service Charter which sets out standards around the five main customer service methods.

What you can expect from us

We will:

- Introduce ourselves by name, wear name badges and provide proof of identity when entering your home
- Be friendly, helpful and welcoming and provide you with a positive customer experience
- Be realistic and not make promises to you that we cannot keep
- Be patient and ask relevant questions to establish facts
- We will treat all information you give us confidentially and not disclose it to others without your permission unless required to do so by law
- Treat you fairly and according to your needs whatever your age, nationality, ethnic origin, disability, gender or sexual orientation
- Provide a translator, signer, or information in other formats such as audio, large print, Braille etc. if required
- Provide you with personal information that we hold about you if you request it
- Use written and spoken language that is clear, jargon free and easy to understand
- Offer you a home visit if you are unable to come to our offices
- Contact you if we are unable to keep an appointment as soon as we can to re-arrange it

1. When you telephone us we will....

- Answer your call within 20 seconds. When ringing our HomeRepairs service we will aim to answer your call within 60 seconds
- Greet you with Good morning / Good afternoon
- Inform you that you have reached The Gateshead Housing Company
- Tell you the name of the person you are speaking to
- Deal with your enquiry at the first point of contact, or put you through to the best person to deal with it
- Answer your questions immediately, or if this is not possible, call you back at a convenient time with a response
- Phone you back using our line if you would prefer and if it is appropriate
- Provide an answer phone service where appropriate, and get back to you within one working day

2. When you visit us we will.....

- Deal with your enquiry at enquiry counters within 10 minutes
- Ensure all offices are easily accessible
- Provide rooms where you can discuss things with us in private
- Provide information about The Gateshead Housing Company that is clearly visible and up to date
- Provide adequate seating for customers, and toys for children
- Provide a free-phone telephone within our offices so that you can contact services within TGHC and Gateshead Council

3. When you write to us we will.....

- Acknowledge your letter, fax or minicom message within three working days
- Reply to your letter or e-mail within 10 working days
- Make sure our responses are clear and easy to understand
- Provide an instant automated response to your e mails and text messages
- Give you the contact details of the person dealing with your query

4. When we meet with you we will.....

- Arrange a mutually convenient appointment
- Make sure you know you can bring someone to an interview to support you
- Meet with you on time if you have made an appointment
- Leave a calling card with a clear name and contact number if you are not in
- Speak to you in private if you wish

5. If you want to compliment, complain, or make a suggestion we will....

- Deal with your complaint within 10 working days
- Learn from compliments and reward and motivate our team with them so that we can continue to improve
- Learn from complaints
- Thank you for taking the time to contact us
- Make it easy and comfortable for you to contact us
- Keep our procedures straightforward and clear
- Take seriously complaints made about our services
- Deal with any complaint with impartiality
- Agree solutions with you and give you regular feedback while we are investigating your complaint
- Learn from any mistakes so they don't happen again
- Ask you for feedback after we have dealt with any complaints

What we ask in return....

Treat us with respect

- Be considerate and polite to our employees and other customers
- Be on time for appointments
- Supply us with more information if we ask you to

You can also help us by:

- Giving us all the information we need to help you
- Letting us know if you have any individual requirements
- Telling us how we can improve our service
- Asking us to explain anything you're not sure about

Customer Service Standards

We will;

- Answer your call within 20 seconds. When ringing our HomeRepairs service we will aim to answer your call within 60 seconds
- Deal with your query at enquiry counters within 10 minutes
- Reply to your letters and e-mail correspondence within 10 working days
- Deal with your enquiry at the first point of contact or put you through to the best person to deal with it
- Deal with complaints within 10 working days
- Give you regular feedback while we are investigating your complaint

How we will measure them;

- Check we answer calls within 20 seconds, or 60 seconds for our HomeRepairs service
- Ask customers if we deal with their enquiries quickly and effectively
- Check that we respond to letters and complaints within our target

We will report back to customers about our performance through our Service Improvement Group, in our newspaper and via our website