

NETWORK STADIUM HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED

**SCRUTINY PANEL REPORT:
CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE**

CONDUCTED NOVEMBER 2014 – MARCH 2015
FOR PRESENTATION TO THE HUB ON WEDNESDAY 20 MAY 2015
FOR PRESENTATION TO DMT ON FRIDAY 17 APRIL 2015

PREPARED BY

Network Stadium and Riversmead Housing Association Scrutiny Panel. Panel members involved in this scrutiny:



The Panel was assisted by [redacted] Network Stadium Community Engagement & Investment Officer and [redacted], Riversmead Co-Regulation Manager. The Panel thanks them for their work.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This Report is produced for Network Housing Group by the Panel. It details the Panel's work, methods used, and conclusions reached during its scrutiny of NHG's Customer Service Centre.

This Report is accompanied by a service improvement report produced by the Head of Customer Service Centre, detailing how her department will respond to the Report's recommendations.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The resource implications of the Scrutiny Report will be limited due to the Report recommending an alteration to the way resources are allocated within the Customer Service Centre

Resource implications include:

- Raising the level of job satisfaction amongst the Call Advisors
- Call Advisors able to provide a more customer-focused first time fix service
- Better and more increased usage of the CRM system

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

- Utilising the upcoming Customer Service Strategy to improve the service for the foreseeable future

RISK: FINANCIAL, OPERATIONAL AND REPUTATIONAL

Potential implications if the recommendations within this Scrutiny Report are not implemented:

Financial

- Future financial risk due to poor service, which leads to more complaints

Operational

- The Scrutiny Panel feels NHG needs to work on its operational improvement to ensure its customers receive a more resident-focused service;

Reputational

- Lower satisfaction figures, which may lead to residents feeling aggrieved
- NHG will miss opportunities to further its reputation across the housing sector:

Customer excellence;
Technological innovations;
Modernisation;
Industry leadership and trend setting;
Exceptional employer

SUMMARY OF RESIDENT AND DIVERSITY IMPACT

None conducted.

RECOMMENDATION

That The Hub considers the Report and implementation plan and endorses both if in agreement.

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1. PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide an investigative report on the Network Housing Group (NHG) Customer Service Centre (CSC) and make any necessary recommendations for improvements, which will increase customer satisfaction and allow NHG to provide a more customer-centric service. The scrutiny was scoped as follows:-

Scrutiny Project Definition

1.1 This project will scrutinise the current strategy, procedure and customer experience of Network Housing Group's Customer Service Centre. The project will focus specifically on the effectiveness of the Customer Service Centre, but may include additional identified issues.

1.2 Key lines of enquiry:

- **Customer contact options**
 - Are there any communication channels that we do not offer?
 - Are opening hours suitable?
 - Are peak contact hours adequately staffed?
 - Do we contact customers who do not contact us?
 - Is non-telephony communication handled effectively? (email, web, letters regarding CSC, social media, etc.)
- **CRM**
 - Is customer contact logged correctly?
 - Where cases are referred outside of CSC, is information detailed enough to help officer replying?
 - Is customer contact analysed to identify service improvement requirements?
- **Customer Satisfaction of the Service Centre**
 - How is this collected?
 - Is it accurate?
 - How is Customer Satisfaction with CSC collected where customer is referred outside of CSC?
- **Customer Service Strategy**
 - Is there a strategy?
 - Does it reflect customer expectations?
- **Communication with other departments**
 - How are issues identified?
 - How are issues discussed?
 - How are issues resolved?

Business Reasons for the Scrutiny Project

- 1.3 The Hub commissioned the scrutiny of the Customer Service Centre in May 2014.
- 1.4 The Hub recommended scrutiny of this topic to help improve the Customer Service Centre Policy and Procedure implemented in 2014 and inform service improvement activities for the future.

Scrutiny Project Objectives

- 1.5 Identify areas for improvement/change in the Customer Service Centre.
- 1.6 Recommend improvements/changes to the Customer Service Centre that will lead to improved efficiency.
- 1.7 To produce a service improvement plan.

Project Deliverables

- 1.8 Scrutiny report to be produced by the Scrutiny Panel, outlining the methods of investigation used in the project, evidence considered, outcomes and recommendations for service improvement.
- 1.9 Customer Service Centre Improvement Plan to be produced in consultation between the Scrutiny Panel and the Head of THE Customer Service Centre.

This report will:-

- Explain how the scrutiny was conducted;
- Identify issues arising; and
- Make recommendations for improvements to the Customer Service Centre.

Resident Quality Inspectors (RQI) commissioning

- 1.10 It is not envisaged that the RQI's will be commissioned for this project.

Mystery Shopping (MS) Commissioning

- 1.11 Mystery Shoppers are to be commissioned by the Panel to conduct a mystery shop to support the Scrutiny Project and provide further intelligence to support recommendations and the resulting service improvement plan.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

Since the new Regulatory Framework was introduced under the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008, the role of an external Regulator of Registered Providers has diminished and it is expected that ensuring all Standards are met and exceeded is achieved through *co-regulation* undertaken by Registered Providers and their residents. To embrace the opportunity that this presents, Network Stadium (NS) has established the resident 'Scrutiny Panel'.

The Scrutiny Panel conducts in-depth investigations into Network Housing Group (NHG) services and makes recommendations for service improvement to the NSHA Board for approval/ implementation and subsequent monitoring by NSHA’s central resident body ‘The Hub’. The Customer Service Centre will be the Scrutiny Panel’s fifth investigation.

- 2.1. Between November 2014 and March 2015, the Panel scrutinised Network Housing Group (NHG) Customer Service Centre (CSC), following a scrutiny commissioning from The Hub. The Hub felt that a review and improvement of the service would increase customer satisfaction and allow Network Stadium to provide a more customer-centric service.
- 2.2. The Scrutiny Panel reviewed the current strategy; practice and procedure; communications (NS residents); and the views of the Call Advisors who answer the calls, together with senior NS Management responsible for the Customer Service Centre.
- 2.3. The Hub recommended scrutiny of this topic to help improve the Customer Service Centre Policy and Procedure implemented in 2014 and inform service improvement activities for the future.
- 2.3 It was not envisaged that the Resident Quality Inspectors (RQI) would be commissioned for this project.
- 2.4. This report relies on evidence based observations following document review; staff interviews; job shadowing and comparative studies of the call centre service offered by other housing associations and businesses.

3. THE SCRUTINY PROCESS

The Scrutiny Panel were supported by an independent external advisor who provided scrutiny training and understanding, service review training, however there was no further support from Network Stadium, (apart from the Customer Engagement and Investment Team, who provided administrative support).

This section gives a brief overview of some elements of the scrutiny process. The Head of the Customer Service Centre, Senior Advisor Team Leader, CRM Manager and a selection of the Call Advisors were all interviewed to ascertain their views on service delivery. A full transcript of all interviews is available, upon request.

Detailed below are the elements that are included / not included within the Scrutiny project remit.

What is included	What is not included
<p>Document Box: (Please note that this list is not exhaustive and additional items may be added during the course of the scrutiny)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer Service Centre Strategy 2015 (Draft) • Customer Service Performance Indicators • JSP Terms of Reference • Suggested areas for scrutiny 	<p>Review of processes and procedures pertaining to Customer Service Centre</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggested methods for scrutiny • Overview of Customer Service 	
<p>Interviews with key personnel who deliver the Customer Service Centre service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of Customer Service • Advisor Team Leaders • Customer Service Centre Advisors • CRM Manager 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mystery Shopping exercise 	

4. MYSTERY SHOPPING

Mystery Shoppers were commissioned by the Scrutiny Panel to conduct a mystery shop to support the Scrutiny Project and provide further intelligence to support recommendations and the resulting service improvement plan.

Mystery Shopping overview

The Mystery Shoppers were commissioned to conduct a ‘mystery shop’ analysing the resident experience of the Customer Service Centre (CSC) process. This exercise included existing Mystery Shoppers conducting ‘shopping’. Scenarios for the Mystery Shopping will be focused on the following six (6) questions:

- A repair that is the residents’ responsibility
- How to make a complaint about the service
- Methods of contact being offered
- Data Protection (requesting rent details for another person)
- How to report an ASB issue
- Communication problem with contacting the landlord

Unfortunately, the Mystery Shopping research suffered from minimum involvement from the Mystery Shoppers. Conclusions were therefore drawn from a sample which the Scrutiny Panel felt was too small to be statistically valid. Nevertheless, the Scrutiny Panel has received the report and noted its conclusions.

The Scrutiny Panel would like to extend their thanks to the Mystery Shoppers, for their input and make the following comments from the report.

4.1 30 calls were made during the Mystery Shopping benchmarking instead of the planned 240 calls. The Scrutiny Panel felt that the responses received would not be reflective of the CSC Team as a whole.

4.2 In over 46% of cases, calls took between four and ten minutes to be answered however the satisfaction experience of residents with the CSC, (83.3%), correlates with the NHG service standard of 80-85%. The figures reflected what the callers overall experience was, rather than their call waiting time as it was customary for callers to be happy their issue had been dealt with and ignore the length of time they spent waiting for their call to be answered.

(Mystery Shopping Report – 04 March 2015)

5. BENCHMARKING

The Scrutiny Panel also conducted a number of benchmarking exercise, looking at how Network Stadium services compares with other external organisations, both within the Housing Sector and other service delivery businesses.

(Benchmarking Report – March 2015)

Customer Access Benchmarking

The Scrutiny Panel looked at benchmarking Network Stadium (NS) services with other Registered Providers and external organisations in terms of customer access.

Telephone and email are still the most popular ways of contacting customer service centres according to *Dimension Data’s 2013/2014 Global Contact Centre Benchmarking Report*. However, customers are increasingly looking to interact with organisations through other channels - smart phones, social media and web chat – so customer service centres need to provide the channels to facilitate this.

Below are the customer contact options offered by six organisations - *Paradigm Housing, Genesis Housing, Homes for Haringey, Marks & Spencer, John Lewis and Network Stadium*

Methods	Paradigm Housing	Genesis Housing	Homes for Haringey	M&S	John Lewis	Network Stadium
Telephone	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
E-mail	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
In person	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Self-service (web contact forms)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Voicemail	No	No	No	No	No	No
Twitter	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Facebook	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
LinkedIn	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
YouTube	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Mobile Apps	No	No	Yes	Yes**	Yes	No
Instant Chat	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Post	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fax	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Text Alerts	No	No	Yes	Yes***	No	No
Pintrest, Instagram, Google+	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Home visit	Yes	No	No	No	No	No

****Free mobile apps available to customers enabling them to shop on the go, receive exclusive vouchers on mobile phone, plus women can take advantage of a Virtual Makeover Counter.**

*****Text alerts to customers regarding special offers**

5.1 Whilst the benchmarking highlighted minimal usage of ‘Instant Chat’ it is felt by the Scrutiny Panel that ‘Instant Chat’ is widely available across many other organisations and would be of benefit to NHG in relieving some of the pressure from the Customer Service Centre. This was in addition to the widely publicised text alert systems, utilised by the Customer Service Centre (CSC) to inform residents of a repair service, for example.

- 5.2 Whilst many organisations utilise various forms of digital applications, it may prove to be difficult to utilise all social media for residential use, for example, for reporting repairs.
- 5.3 The use of 'YouTube' for minor repairs, such as dripping sink taps or bleeding radiators, was also identified from the benchmarking. However, it should be noted that there may be Health and Safety issues related to encouraging the use of 'YouTube' by residents if the video is not supported by NS. Allowing residents to access general videos may cause disputes between residents and NS, should there be an error in following the video.
- 5.4 Despite the high use of digital and social media, phone and email continue to be the main avenue for customer contact.

Customer Service Strategy

The Network Housing Group (NHG) Customer Service Strategy is in its draft form at present and this was reviewed by the Scrutiny Panel and benchmarked against other Registered Providers and external organisations.

- 5.5 Overall the Scrutiny Panel felt the draft Customer Service Strategy was robust and solid, although it was noted that there was a lack of target dates. However it is understood that such target dates will be added prior to finalising the strategy.
- 5.6 It is Network Housing Group's ambition to increase overall customer satisfaction to 90% and maintain it, at least, at that level however it is felt that to achieve such targets would need NHG to ensure they take their residents with them. In order to deliver on this, it would be prudent to ensure resident involvement throughout any future plans to restructure access and service delivery for customers.

6. INTERVIEWS

The Head of the Customer Service Centre, Senior Advisor Team Leader, CRM Manager and a selection of the Call Advisors were all interviewed to ascertain their views on service delivery. The Scrutiny Panel also conducted Job Shadowing with a selection of the Call Advisors in order to actively see the delivery of their work. A full transcript of all interviews is available, upon request. The following provides a number of outcomes from the interviews conducted.

Interview with Head of Customer Service Centre (CSC)

- 6.1 The Customer Service Centre (CSC) is viewed by Network Stadium (NS), external stakeholders and residents, as the front-line of the organisation and the first point of contact for customers.
- 6.2 Joint working across departments will improve the relationships and has allowed better understanding between colleagues. Have previously felt that a lack of understanding by colleagues on how the CSC operates may put additional pressures on the Call Advisors,
- 6.3 The Head of the Customer Service Centre (CSC) feels that the 'customer experience' is improving with every month in the right direction, despite its recent launch. There has also been an increase in the number of emails being utilised by residents and this will require further training and support for our Call Advisors.
(CSC Satisfaction Report, July – December 2014)

- 6.4 Social media, eg: Facebook, Twitter, are all now receiving a higher number of queries. This requires the organisation to allow for further in-depth training for the Call Advisors, in order to continue providing a wider range of contact for customers.

Interview with Senior Team Leader (CSC)

The interview with the Senior Team Leader focused on challenges which may be hindering the further development of the CSC. A selection of comments is below.

- 6.5 The main focus is to match the resources of Network Stadium (NS) with the demands of its customers.
- 6.6 Additional work is required by Network Stadium to allow training and education for residents, so that they understand the type of service NS provides, especially the CSC. It is felt that many residents understand what to expect from the CSC, however there are a few who feel the CSC needs to provide additional services that are not the responsibility of the CSC.
- 6.7 Further work is also required to bring the requirements of Leaseholders and residents closer together. The CSC understands that Leaseholders may feel they have additional requirements than residents, however all customers who call the CSC are treated the same and receive the same customer-focused service.
- 6.8 Continuous meeting with Network Stadium external contractors has also proven highly beneficial for the CSC Team. A better understanding of how each works has allowed for an improvement in the service provision.

Interview with CRM Manager (CRM)

Unfortunately at the time of interviewing the CRM Manager, the CRM system was not operating at full capacity and thus could not provide a visual demonstration of how the system works.

- 6.10 It was also noted that there was continuous 'note-taking', rather than transferring customer information directly onto the CRM system. 'Note-taking' occurs at busy times within the CSC, however this is strongly discouraged by management
- 6.11 Another area where the CSC is proving a little weak is having up-to-date contact numbers for residents.
- 6.12 The most regular calls received are always regarding repair issues, however we are working closely with [REDACTED] (**Director of Asset Management**) and [REDACTED] (**Head of Repairs**) to improve systems. This is an on-going process which will bear fruit continuously.
- 6.13 The CRM system is also used to monitor call, which require transferring to other departments, however this is not recording all the required information. All calls to the CSC are recorded and traceable.

Interview with Customer Service Centre Advisors

The Customer Call Centre Advisors who spend the majority of their time answering and providing the service to residents were interviewed by the Scrutiny Panel and took part in job shadowing.

A number of the Call Advisors felt that their Line managers were quite supportive of the work they do, however they felt this was not reciprocated amongst senior management.

6.15 Advisors also felt that they would like to have more in-depth training, especially in areas which would allow Advisors to resolve more problems from residents at the first point of contact. This was more of an issue with rent queries as Call Advisors were confident with repair queries.

6.16 Many call Advisors felt that the CRM system was not user-friendly and that the Advisors were required to continually change screens in order to identify the required information for callers.

6.17 The biggest challenge for Call Advisors appeared to be:-

- Communication – A problem in getting other departments to take their calls and resolve resident issues.
- Contractor Relationship – A large amount of calls received at the CSC involved chasing repair contractors or Surveyors to obtain information for residents

7. CONCLUSION

Having interviewed a number of staff members from the Customer Service Centre (CSC) and reviewed the satisfaction report from the CSC, it is felt by the Scrutiny Panel that there is an impression the 'customer experience' is improving with every month in the right direction, (*Customer Service Centre Satisfaction Report, July – December 2014*).

The Scrutiny Panel is aware the Customer Service Centre (CSC) is relatively new, having been just launched, however it was also felt that this scrutiny project was a learning curve for everyone and that more time would be required to totally get a better view of the service. The Scrutiny Panel believe that a review of the CSC should be carried out in approximately 18 months.

The Scrutiny Panel note that the CSC is viewed by Network Stadium (NS), external stakeholders and residents, as the front-line of the organisation and the first point of contact for customers.

The Customer Service Centre utilises an automatic answering system which offers callers the choice of having their calls re-directed relating to either repairs or rent. Option 1: automated payments, which goes straight through to Allpay; Option 2: report a repair, although not all calls go through to repairs; Option 3: warranty/new build goes straight through to the Aftercare Team. Option 2: should not say 'report a repair' but rather 'to speak to a Call Advisor'

Customer Access

7.1 It was felt that the interviewing and job shadowing of the Call Advisors was done, unintentionally, during quiet periods for the Call Centre.

7.2 Whilst the Scrutiny Panel has some reservations regarding the time it takes to get through to a Call Advisor, the Panel felt the Customer Service Centre (CSC) worked very well, once you were through.

7.3 Following interviews with the Call Advisors, it was felt that more visibility from Senior Management and Board Members would be of benefit to Call Advisors, showing closer teamwork with the rest of the organisation.

- 7.4 The Scrutiny Panel felt it would be interesting to look at records showing whether calls to the Customer Service Centre (CSC) regarding various issues were first-time calls, or repeat calls on the same issue.
- 7.5 Call Advisors felt that they would like to have more in-depth training, especially in areas which would allow Call Advisors to resolve more problems for residents at the first point of contact. This was more of an issue with rent queries as Call Advisors were confident with repair queries.

CRM

- 7.6 During the interview sessions with the Call Advisors, the CRM system was not operating at full capacity and thus could not provide a full visual demonstration of how it works.
- 7.7 Continuous note-taking', rather than transferring customer information directly onto the CRM system. 'Note-taking' occurs at busy times within the CSC however this is strongly discouraged by management.
- 7.8 The CRM system is also used to monitor calls which require transferring to other departments however this is not recording all the required information. All calls to the CSC are recorded and traceable, however when callers leave message to be forwarded onto other departments, their calls are sometimes not returned. Whilst this is not the fault of the CSC, it does reflect on their satisfaction figures. Where external departments or colleagues are advised a customer has called and that they should return the call, the Call Advisors are not informed if or when the return call is made.
- 7.9 The CRM system allows Network Stadium to capture customer preferences and behavioural data and could have a major influence over the way an organisation markets, serves and supports its customers. The Scrutiny Panel were advised that the current CRM system does offer this facility however NHG staff are not aware of it and do not utilise it to its full potential.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 Alter the recorded automated answer service which says, 'some calls are recorded.....' to 'all calls are recorded....'
- 8.2 Provision of extra time, (perhaps 30 seconds), for Call Advisors to enter information onto the CRM system.
- 8.3 Instigation of a 'reply email system' to customers who contact NHG via email advising them that their email has been received, passed onto the relevant named department/individual, a CRM reference number for their email and that they should receive a response within a specified time.
- 8.4 All staff members across the organisation to continually update the CRM system. Perhaps the use of a hand-held device which could be utilised to update the CRM system for staff who are out in the field.
- 8.5 Call Advisors to be surveyed to ascertain what additional training, on which areas of the business, they would like in order to provide more first-time fix service to customers.

- 8.6 Call Advisor incentives, perhaps judged by Senior Management, on new and best ideas for each month.
- 8.7 The introduction of an 'instant chat' system in order to speed up assistance to the resident and take some of the pressure off the Call Advisors.
- 8.8 The use of YouTube videos to offer real-time information on minor repairs is recognised as a good tool for Network Stadium use. Health and Safety issues will need to be identified and actioned prior to this initiative being launched.
- 8.9 The use of the Network Housing Group (NHG) intranet to report repairs by NHG staff, which will alleviate some of the pressure on the Call Advisors. Staff would be able to utilise the intranet to report repairs that, at times, come their way.

9. THANKS TO NHG STAFF

The Scrutiny Panel wishes to thank all the Network Housing Group (NHG) staff involved in this scrutiny project for their time, commitment and the honesty of their feedback. In particular, [REDACTED], who supported the Riversmead Housing Association members of the Scrutiny Panel, [REDACTED] for overseeing the Mystery Shoppers and for producing a Mystery Shopping report and the input from the Call Advisors who deliver the first point of contact service on behalf of NHG.

END