

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important principles of effective customer care is to create a corporate ethos towards providing excellent service. To work towards this, the Grand Union Housing Group (GUHG) and its subsidiaries Aragon Housing Association (AHA), South Northants Homes (SNH) and MacIntyre Housing Association (MHA)) will undertake full consultation with and involvement of staff at all levels in the development and implementation of this policy. Customer Care training will be provided for all staff across the Group in order to establish the principles and consider everybody's role.

It is of paramount importance to ensure that the Customer Care provided actually meets the service standards required by customers. A continuous improvement review of Customer Services has already been carried out in AHA and implementation of the action plan has led to improvements in services. A similar review will be carried out within SNH and involve considerable consultation with tenants. The Group's Customer Services Standards will be published and made available to all tenants and customers.

Customer Care is obviously an on-going process that will be reviewed and monitored regularly.

POLICY STATEMENT

Grand Union Housing Group aims to provide a quality of service that is considered excellent by its customers. This policy sets out the Group and its subsidiaries' position with regard to high quality customer service and how they aim to achieve excellence in this crucial area of business.

OBJECTIVES

- To create a corporate ethos that will reflect consistent excellence of service across the Group
- To set standards of service in all areas of work through the Corporate and Business Planning processes and provide feedback on performance to all staff
- To develop a greater awareness amongst staff at all levels about what Customer Care means to the Group and ensure staff are trained in customer service skills
- To identify its customers correctly in order to set priorities
- To recognise that effective internal customer services provide essential support to external customer services
- To meet and exceed customer expectations

- To review and update Customer Services Standards each time this policy is reviewed and seek ways of improving services
- To ensure that staffing resources meet service demands and that the right calibre of staff is attracted, recruited and retained, subject to budget constraints
- To improve working arrangements and communications between staff teams and departments across the Group
- To ensure that decision making and financial approvals can be given at the appropriate level to ensure speed of response.

To embrace any customer feedback as an opportunity to improve services

HOUSING CORPORATION REGULATORY CODE AND GUIDANCE

- 2.5 Housing associations must seek and be responsive to residents' views and priorities
- 3.3 Housing associations must aim to deliver continuous improvement and value for money in their services
- 3.5 Housing associations must provide good quality housing services for residents and prospective residents

RELEVANT KLOE

KLOE 5 – Resident Involvement
 KLOE 30 – Access and Customer Care
 KLOE 31 - Diversity

OTHER RELATED POLICIES

Equality and Diversity Policy
 Customer Feedback Policy
 Compensation Policy

OTHER SOURCE DOCUMENTS

Corporate Plans (parent and partner associations)
 Annual Training Plan
 Continuous Improvement reviews
 One-to-one guidelines
 Appraisal scheme
 Housing leaflets
 Performance Criteria
 Customer Feedback procedures
 Customer Services Standards
 Putting the Customer First leaflet

PROCEDURES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Group Board

The Group Board will be responsible for approving the Customer Care Policy and ensuring that it is carried out through a monitoring process. It will also be responsible for ensuring that the Customer Care principles are reflected in the work and attitude of the Board members. This will be checked annually through Board Appraisal and Committee Effectiveness schemes.

Group Chief Executive

The overall responsibility for the effective implementation of this policy will lie with the Group Chief Executive.

Executive Management Team

The Executive Management Team will be responsible for:

- ensuring that the policy and procedures are implemented effectively throughout the Group
- keeping the identification of customers and priorities under review
- setting standards of performance through the Corporate and Business Planning processes across the Group that are devolved to departments, teams and individuals, monitoring those standards, taking action where necessary and providing feedback on performance to staff
- keeping all policies and procedures under review to ensure that they reflect the Customer Care Policy and that decision making and financial approval can be given at the appropriate level to ensure speed of response
- recommending staffing resources to meet service demands, enabling staff to attend customer care training as required and making customer care a key issue in all staff briefings, appraisals and one-to-one discussions
- recognising the importance of internal customers by putting in place effective communication between the parent and subsidiary associations and their departments, teams and individuals
- leading by example in making sure the principles of customer care are followed, identifying and correcting problem areas across all sectors of the Group

Parent and Subsidiary Association Managers

- leading by example in making sure the principles of customer care are followed, participating in the mystery shopping programme, identifying and correcting problem areas within their teams, making customer care a key issue in all staff briefings, appraisals and one-to-one discussions

- assisting with the review of policies and procedures to ensure that they reflect the customer care policy, identifying any 'hold-ups' and speeding up processes where possible
- assist with the monitoring of performance standards, taking remedial action as necessary
- making communications between departments, teams and individuals work

Human Resources

- identifying and providing effective customer care training
- making customer care a key part of induction training
- including attitude to customer care issues as part of the interviewing process

All Parent and Subsidiary Association Staff

- maintaining a positive attitude towards the principles of effective customer care at all times and aiming to achieve consistent standards of excellent service
- implementing the policy and procedures as an integral part of all work areas and responsibilities
- responding to training and recommending ways of improving standards and procedures

CONSULTATION

Consultation with tenants and customers will take place regularly to ensure that service standards are being met and changes in service requirements are identified promptly. In particular, consultation will take place on new or reviewed policies that impact on customer services.

MONITORING

The policy will be reviewed annually via the policy review programme and monitored in a number of ways. Performance will be reported to different groups or individuals initially, but will be drawn together eventually through the reporting systems to the Group Board. Monitoring will take place as follows:

- i) Customer Care targets in the Corporate Plans will be part of the reporting process to the parent and subsidiary associations' Boards on their Corporate Plan outcomes
- ii) Departmental/team or individual Customer Care targets will be monitored through the appraisal system and through reporting on the relevant corporate plan where appropriate

- iii) Customer satisfaction surveys for housing services will be reported to the relevant Board and then to the Group Board
- iv) Implementation of the policy will be monitored through general management and discussed at staff briefings, appraisals and one-to-one meetings
- v) Overall management and implementation of Customer Care will be monitored and kept under review by the Executive Management Team, and then reported to the Group Board

Equality Impact Assessment carried out: Initial screen

Person responsible for review: Governance and Performance Manager

Date of review: March 2009

Date of next review due: March 2010