



Lewisham Homes

# Customer Care Strategy



Lewisham  
Homes

[www.lewishamhomes.org.uk](http://www.lewishamhomes.org.uk)

## Lewisham Homes

### Customer Care Strategy 2009 – 2011

#### 1.0 Introduction

We are an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) created in January 2007. This was one of a number of investment vehicles set up by Lewisham Council to improve housing services and deliver the Decent Homes Standard (DHS).

We manage 13,000 social housing tenancies and more than 5000 leasehold properties within the borough, as well as 5000 additional properties which we are managing on an interim basis. This interim arrangement is in place while other proposed investment options are being decided by residents; for example, ballots for stock transfer.

We are a non-profit making company limited by guarantee and the Council is the sole shareholder. The Board of Management consists of 15 members including Councillors, Tenants, Leaseholders and Independents.

#### 1.1 *Who are our customers?*

This strategy is intended to apply our values and vision for customer care across all of our services and wherever we are in contact with customers. Our main customers are the tenants and leaseholders who live in the properties we manage. This strategy also covers customer care for internal services. It applies to temporary staff and to our contractors and consultants.

We collect information about the profile of our customers, which we are using to ensure the delivery of a targeted service that meets residents' needs.

The tenant base broadly reflects Lewisham's community:

- Women hold 58% of our tenancies;
- 21% of our tenants are over 65;
- 29% of our tenants are classed as long-term ill or with a disability;
- 47% of tenants are white, 36% black, 3% Asian and 6% mixed race;
- 19% of our tenants don't have English as their first language. There are no other dominant languages spoken in Lewisham, although there is a French population (2.5%) Chinese population (2%) and a Vietnamese population (2%), predominately in the north of the borough.

Our last leaseholder survey showed this profile:

- 30% are single-person households with the leaseholder aged under 60 years old;
- 18% are two-person households where both residents are aged under 60;

- 49% indicated they are White British; 14% African; 10% Caribbean; 7% are Asian or Asian British and 2% are Chinese;
- 2% are permanently sick or disabled.

## **1.2 The next 3 years for customer care**

This strategy has been developed following a review of customer care which consulted residents and staff about the current customer experience and how it can be improved.

By delivering this strategy we will:

- Provide good quality services delivered in the way our customers want them to be
- Improve customer experience at the point of contact
- Make use of new technology in providing our services
- Deliver increasing customer choice
- Improve customer satisfaction
- Ensure the service delivered is accessible and appropriate for the needs of all groups of customers
- Ensure Value for Money

We have already made some progress in improving our approach to customer care, for example –

- Repairs programme – improvements to the repairs service have focused on improving the number of repairs carried out in one visit; and making sure that operatives tell customers what will happen next if they are unable to complete the repair on the first visit;
- Reorganisation of the responsive repairs, contact centre and housing customer service functions;
- Commissioned and rolled out training programmes on customer care and complaints handling;
- Increased the scope and quality of customer feedback through surveys for specific services, like estate services and for new tenants;
- Mystery shopping and quality audit programmes;
- Improved accessibility of customer profile data;
- Protocol between Property and Housing Services to provide a more 'seamless' service.

The strategy is centred on four key themes, which are developed further in section 5:

- **A customer focused workforce**
- **Accessible services**
- **Understanding our customers**
- **Efficient and effective processes and technology**

### 1.3 Impact

We anticipate that this strategy will impact our customers, staff and the organisation in the following ways:

For our customers:

- Easier access to services at a time and place that suits them
- Resolution to queries at the first point of contact
- Joined up services
- A more consistent service
- Every customer will feel valued
- We will keep our commitments set out in our service standards

For our staff:

- Be part of a customer focused organisation
- Have a clear direction
- Greater knowledge to resolve enquiries
- Greater investment in technology to enable them to provide excellent customer services
- Greater empowerment and involvement in the shaping of improved services.
- Better management of information
- New and more efficient ways of working

For the organisation:

- Clear focus on the customer
- Improved customer satisfaction
- Improved working relationships with key stakeholders and other providers.
- Efficiency savings resulting from more effective ways of working

## 2.0 Our Commitment

The aim of this strategy is to ensure we keep our commitments to our customers, as set out in our service standards, in line with our overall mission of

**‘Delivering great services for thriving neighbourhoods’**

Our vision is underpinned by four strategic objectives set out in our Business Plan, two of which relate directly to our approach to customer service and customer care:

- Deliver excellent services;
- Instil a value for money (VFM) culture throughout the organisation and demonstrate business efficiency;
- Improve customer satisfaction to top quartile performance in London;
- Improve our homes to the Decent Homes Standard (DHS).

In our Business Plan we state that the delivery of excellent services we will focus on improving:

- Repairs service
- Tackling anti-social behaviour
- Customer service

We employ nearly 450<sup>1</sup> people. We are committed to leading and developing our workforce to deliver our main priorities and objectives. We recognise that well informed, trained staff are fundamental to the delivery of excellent customer service. To that end, another short term goal is for Lewisham Homes to achieve Investors in People status (IIP) by September 2009. Ultimately, we would like to be recognised as one of the best local employers.

We are committed to making our customers feel valued, and ensuring they receive a fair and effective service that meets their needs. This is reflected in our seven core values.

- Challenge
- Excellence
- Passion
- Openness
- Reliability
- Respect
- Sustainability

We expect that over the course of the next three years our customers will see a marked difference in the level of service that they receive in the following ways:

- It will be even easier to contact us at times and in ways that suit the customer's individual needs and preferences;
- When customers contact us they will experience a consistently excellent service delivered by a customer focused organisation;
- A greater percentage of our customers will have their enquiry resolved at the first point of contact;

And as a result we expect customer satisfaction to increase and for the number of complaints to decrease.

We will review our strategy annually to ensure that it is meeting its aims and objectives.

### **3.0 Our current points of delivery**

We reviewed our main points of public contact, in consultation with residents during our first year. We now offer:

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<sup>1</sup> 431 staff at August 2009

- Access in person from
  - four public points of access (Holbeach, Pepys, Honor Oak, Home Park offices)
  - three estate surgeries (Heathside, Lee Green, Kingswear House)
  - home visits by staff
- Access over the telephone
  - a freephone number for repairs via a contact centre
  - an emergency repairs service out of hours
  - general contact numbers for front line teams
  - direct dial to individuals
  - via text for our involvement opportunities, (rent balances and satisfaction surveys to follow autumn 2009)
- Access over the internet
  - via email contact - addresses advertised on the website, in leaflets and magazines
  - via the web site with on-line reporting forms for a range of services such as Anti Social Behaviour, rent payments, non urgent repairs and for consultation purposes
- Access in writing
  - via a freepost address
- Provision of information through a range of printed copy and on-line leaflets, and a quarterly residents magazine
- Provision of a complaints service
- Provision of consultation, events and feedback mechanisms

## 4.0 Developing the strategy

A recent review of customer care has consolidated previous feedback and analysis that had been gathered about our customers' experience. The review of customer care was carried out by independent consultants to offer external challenge. The review also engaged with customers and staff to capture views and key issues to be addressed by this strategy. This strategy has been influenced by:

- the most recent STATUS survey results (2008)
- Research into drivers of satisfaction for Lewisham Homes residents and follow up focus groups;
- findings from mystery shopping exercises carried out by our own customers, independent professionals and a peer organisation

- focus groups consulting on services with vulnerable tenants, support agencies and partners
- staff focus groups
- resident focus groups (involved and non involved)
- resident challenge sessions for the Business Plan
- staff workshops and away days
- research into the needs of vulnerable tenants.

Customers were involved in the development of our customer care standards as part of the review. They were also consulted at the Area Panel meetings in August, and feedback used to finalise the strategy.

#### **4.1 What our customers told us**

Our learning points from all of the influences outlined above can be summarised as:

- Customers are clear that they want Lewisham Homes staff to be responsive, attentive, knowledgeable and helpful;
- The STATUS results showed that Lewisham Homes is currently in the lower quartile for overall satisfaction;
- Over 75% of those dissatisfied with the outcome of the contact are also dissatisfied with the overall service. Outcome is clearly linked to overall satisfaction;
- Just over half, 51%, of the survey find it easy to get hold of the right person;
- Too few, 64%, of those surveyed find the staff helpful;
- Only 59% of those surveyed say the staff were able to deal with the problem;
- Customer care standards need to be embedded to offer consistent levels of care across all points of contact;
- Staff ownership of policies, processes and standards of care is key to; delivering consistent and excellent customer care, more work needs to be done on this;
- A lack of knowledge of the 0800 number and what services it covers;
- Customers would like one number for all enquiries;
- Many vulnerable tenants are unaware of additional support available and Lewisham Homes are unaware of the vulnerabilities of many tenants;
- The telephony system for our main offices does not currently offer tenants what they expect of an excellent landlord;
- The complaints process is not delivering outcomes and resolution to the satisfaction of those making the complaint.

Capturing insight into our customers' satisfaction is a key component of the strategy. As such we will regularly monitor and review the strategy and improvement plan to ensure that it keeps pace and keeps delivering effectively.

We also consulted staff as part of our review of customer care. Good communication with our internal customers will improve efficiency, staff morale, and ultimately translate to the delivery of better external customer service. The specific objectives for internal communications at Lewisham Homes are outlined in the 2009/10 Communications Strategy.

#### **4.2 The Principles of Excellence**

The focus groups for the review of customer care asked people to offer what they considered to be their own principles of excellence, and what they considered to be great service and great customer care. In our own customers' words, we need to aim to:

- Respond, act and follow up – with knowledgeable and empowered staff;
- Be professional, discreet and respectful
- Help customers feel valued rather than anonymous
- Be accommodating and proactive and listen properly
- Take everyone seriously and give care and attention
- Go beyond the call of duty
- Be proud to serve
- Understand who our customers are and how to engage them
- Be honest
- Offer a personal touch with a smile
- Provide points of contact and systems which offer prompt, effective assistance

### **5.0 Our Priorities for Action**

In developing this strategy, we have identified five issues which we believe will have the biggest impact upon service improvement. They are:

- Embedding a customer care culture at Lewisham Homes. This includes developing and monitoring customer service standards; setting expectations for managers; and training and supporting our staff to ensure they have the necessary skills and information;
- Providing the service at the first point of contact. This includes adopting a one point of call policy, implementing a single number for telephone contact and a diagnostic system for repairs;
- Improving complaints handling, especially responsiveness, feedback and learning from complaints;
- Capturing insight and satisfaction from our customers and learning from it;
- Promoting this strategy and the action plan, with a nominated champion/driver for the strategy.

Our strategy is built around four themes which are inter-dependent and all equally important. These themes are based primarily around what our own customers have told us they want:

- A customer focused workforce
- Accessible services
- Understanding our customers needs
- Efficient and effective processes and technology

To accompany this strategy, we are developing an improvement action plan following each of these four themed priorities. The plan will set out what we want to achieve, by when, and the impact for the customer. Some of the targets will be revised, with our customers, during the life of this strategy as current targets are met and new ones are set.

### ***5.1 A customer focused and knowledgeable workforce, empowered to consistently provide excellent services***

We want every single member of staff, from all levels of our organisation, to be committed to delivering excellent services to every customer they serve, every single time.

Our priority actions are to:

- Ensure our staff are customer focused  
We will achieve this by:
  - Instilling a culture of customer care throughout the organisation which will be led from the top with formalised feedback mechanisms - including regular staff briefings;
  - Integrating our commitment to customer care into our procedures for the recruitment and induction of new staff and into our training programme;
  - Adopting 'Customer Care' as one of our key internal messages, and making sure all staff are aware of this;
  - Surveying our staff about the quality of in-house support services;
  - Integrating customer care into our performance management scheme and framework;
  - Taking action where staff do not comply with customer care procedures and standards.
- Ensure our staff are well motivated.  
We will achieve this by:
  - Setting out clear expectations for managers to support and lead their teams. Our management charter will include a focus on customer care;
  - Recognising and valuing achievements. For example, we have 'Gold Members' publicised in the staff newsletter;
  - Responding to suggestions from staff - for example, developing

- o a social calendar and improving team meetings, as suggested by the Staff Forum;
  - o Surveying staff annually to help identify any issues;
  - o Reviewing the rewards for our staff;
  - o Other cultural changes, for example encouraging work-life balance.
- Ensure our staff are supported and equipped with the right skills and knowledge.  
We will achieve this by:
  - o Completing the customer care training programme and providing this to new staff;
  - o Including customer care in the management training programme;
  - o Delivering complaints handling and letter writing courses;
  - o Regularly reviewing and evaluating our training programme, and ensuring customer care is integrated into all relevant training courses;
  - o Providing staff with accessible information about internal and external services so they can effectively advise customers, for example -
    - Providing a bank of Frequently Asked Questions
    - Providing a directory of both internal and external support services for signposting to customers
    - Continuing to update the policy and procedure manual
  - o Capturing and sharing good practice, customer feedback and useful information throughout the organisation;
  - o Promoting and reinforcing the message that abuse of our staff will not be tolerated
- Achieve the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) award. This standard replaces the Government's Chartermark standard. We are applying for this accreditation and aim to have achieved the award during 2009/2010.
- Ensure good internal communications  
It has been identified that poor communications between teams and individuals has sometimes led to an unco-ordinated approach, duplication of effort and poor information for external customers. To address this we will deliver our Communications Strategy, and in particular:
  - o Ensure that customer facing staff are well supported by other departments, by setting standards and protocols for internal customer care;
  - o Hold a quarterly Managers' Forum to share information and good practice;

- Provide regular information through the staff bulletin and the 'e-flyer';
- Use the intranet to access up to date information about the work of teams and current projects;
- Hold regular 'meet the Chief Executive and Directors' sessions
- Hold an annual staff conference
- Target staff campaigns - for instance working '10% smarter'

## **5.2 We will provide accessible services that our customers can utilise at a time and in a way that suits them**

We know that our customers want services which are easy to access and available in a variety of ways at a time that best suits their needs. They have also told us that they want services that are timely and consistent, and that they do not appreciate making several calls to access services or information. they have raised concerns about being 'passed around' and staff not getting back to them.

Our priority actions are to:

- Get things done at first point of contact  
Regardless of the way they choose to contact us, our customers have told us they want a larger proportion of enquiries dealt with at the first point of contact. Where we are unable to fully resolve the query at the first point of contact we will explain why and discuss with the customers what the next steps will be and give a time in which these steps will be completed. We will do this by:
  - Training customer services staff in our Housing Management Service to take repairs requests, so that a full range of services can be provided at our two main offices;
  - Ensuring repairs operatives are equipped to carry out the repair ordered on the first visit, and arrange any follow-up work before they leave.
  - Evaluating whether additional services could be covered by the contact centre;
- Improve telephone access  
Increasing numbers of customers prefer to contact us by telephone and this figure is rising on a yearly basis. To meet this growing demand we will:
  - Invest resources to enable us to improve the quality and extent of our telephone provision.
  - Provide customers with one single number to call whatever the query.
- Review our opening hours  
We will achieve this by:
  - Looking at ways of extending the provision of our services to enable customers to contact us at a time that suits them including evenings and weekends. This will include a review of

- the opening hours of our offices and contact telephone points, and consulting with customers on alternative contact options;
  - Developing our electronic services through our website at [www.lewishamhomes.org.uk](http://www.lewishamhomes.org.uk).
  - Reviewing the out of hours service for reporting emergency repairs and incidents of anti-social behaviour, to ensure these give a good service but are also cost effective.
- Set out clear expectations for our staff about the quality of service expected and regularly check this is happening. We will achieve this by:
  - Developing and launching service standards;
  - Revising and publicising customer service procedures;
  - Customer care publicity campaign for staff;
  - Regular mystery shopping and quality audits of service delivery.
- Provide access for all customers  
We will achieve this by:
  - Continuing to provide a walk-in face to face service at our offices, for our customers who prefer to use more traditional methods of contact;
  - Ensuring that our offices are accessible and meet legal requirements, by regular audits and completing actions recommended by the DDA audit
  - Providing printed easy to read information in a range of formats to suit customers' needs;
  - Providing alternative formats on our website;
  - Use the staff we have trained in sign language to help customers with a hearing impairment;
  - Make full use of the translation and interpretation service for customers who do not understand English well;
  - Improving services to vulnerable customers, based on the findings of research commissioned to engage with vulnerable people, and improved information about residents' vulnerability.
- Improve the complaints service  
We will achieve this by:
  - Completing the review of complaints policy and procedures;
  - Training staff in complaints handling and writing responses;
  - Measuring satisfaction with the complaints service and responding to results;
  - Establishing a process to ensure learning from complaints takes place
- Provide a consistent service and good customer care, regardless of who is delivering the service  
We will achieve this by:
  - Using this strategy and our customer care standards in the selection of contractors, within contract terms and in contract monitoring;

- Requiring contractors, where relevant, to provide training for their staff in customer care and our standards;
- Integrating our approach to customer care in Service Level Agreements with Lewisham Council;

### **5.3 We will aim to understand our customers better to continuously improve and develop our services.**

We want to know who our customers are, to understand their behaviours, needs and preferences, and then use this information effectively to enable us to deliver excellent customer services.

Our priority actions are to:

- Develop a culture which encourages feedback  
We already survey our residents, provide a range of opportunities for feedback (as set out in our Residents' Compact), and involve them in mystery shopping. However, to further improve this we will:
  - Increase opportunities for customers to shape services - particularly for groups who are not currently engaging with us;
  - Continue to expand the range of services that are tested for customer satisfaction;
  - Use learning from complaints and compliments to improve services;
  - Feedback to our customers what action we have taken in response to their views, for example in the 'You Said, We Did' page in our resident magazine and on our website;
  - Involve residents in staff development initiatives.
- Make better use of profile information to deliver the service  
To achieve this we will:
  - Use the demographic information that we collect effectively, to plan service delivery;
  - Use information to meet diverse needs. For example, using information recorded to provide information in a particular language, Braille, large print or an easy to read format;
  - Feed information we capture into our business and financial planning process to make sure our resources are prioritised;
  - Use customer profile data to monitor customer satisfaction and access to services so we can plan to address any differences, to help us meet the aims of our Equality and Diversity Strategy
- Use Information about customers to eradicate exclusion  
We recognise that some of our customers are at risk of, or experience, exclusion either as a result of individual circumstances (including deprivation, discrimination; for instance disability, age or nationality); or they because they do not know how or where to access them. We are committed to recognising these people and removing any barriers that might be preventing them from accessing our services. This includes:

- Continuing to use equality impact assessments to identify barriers as set out in our Equality and Diversity Strategy;
- Improving information recorded about vulnerability, ensuring this is accessible to staff and periodically reviewed - but also meets data protection and confidentiality requirements.

#### **5.4 We will invest in efficient and effective processes and technology that will enable us to provide excellent customer services.**

Like any modern organisation we make extensive use of ICT to support our staff in delivering services. Increasingly, we are also using ICT to allow our customers to get the information they want electronically, and to communicate with us directly – especially over the internet. We need to continue to identify the potential to make use of technology to improve the services we offer, enabling greater and easier access and more joined up consistent services.

Our priority actions are to:

- Increase accessibility  
Improved technology and access to data will improve the service to customers and provide staff with easier access to information about services other than their own. We will achieve this by:
  - Evaluating the introduction of a corporate contact centre allowing customers to dial one number to access our services
  - Providing a 0800 number for free phone access to all services;
  - Implementing new telephony to enable the introduction of integrated directories, real time call monitoring and call routing;
  - Improving the Lewisham Homes website, for example, providing online access to rent and service charge information, and making sure it is easy for all customers to access;
  - Reviewing and improving the intranet to make information more accessible;
  - Introducing electronic document management system;
  - Implementing a customer relationship management system;
  - Improving customer profile information on the Academy system, including advice/warning flags to indicate a specific need or issue.
  
- Increase efficiency and value for money  
We will achieve this by:
  - Using mobile technology (for example, hand-held computers) to help staff deal better with enquiries when they are away from the office. This applies particularly to our caretaking, repairs and income staff
  - Extend our text message service so that, for example, residents will receive a message to let them know when our repairs staff are on their way;
  - Make sure our contractors deliver good customer care and work to the same standards as us;

- Work effectively with other organisations and partners to deliver a joined up service;
  - Ensure that customer contact is recorded consistently.
- Improve performance reporting
    - To achieve this we will:
      - Improve our systems to ensure we can measure, monitor and report on customer care standards and performance indicators;
      - Analyse learning from a continuous programme of mystery shopping, quality audits and surveys.

## 6.0 Linking up

Our combined **Business and Delivery Plan** for 2009/10 was agreed between Lewisham Homes and Lewisham Council, and sets out how we plan to deliver excellent housing services and provide decent homes for all. The plan has been developed with input from our residents, the Board, staff and other stakeholders.

It reflects the important partnership Lewisham Homes has with the Council and stakeholders and is in line with the overall vision of the Council in the Local Strategic Partnership. The priorities in our Business Plan are reflected in this strategy. Our approach to customer care is integral to delivering our Business Plan. We will review and develop our customer care strategy in line with future Business Plans to ensure this continues.

Most of our customers are also customers of **Lewisham Council**. We will continue to strengthen links, review protocols and information sharing arrangements with council departments to achieve a more seamless service to the customer. To ensure a consistent approach, we have also reviewed this strategy to align with Lewisham Council's Customer Service Strategy, which shares similar objectives including:

- "We put service to the public first":
  - We respect all people and all communities
  - We invest in employees
  - We are open, honest and fair in all we do
- Customer focus which ensures:
  - Easier access to services (Better Access)
  - Improved services (Better Services)
  - Services are providing Value for Money.

General aims:

- Make it quick, simple and straight forward to access services
- Focus on customer and user needs

- Take responsibility for resolving enquiries and problems quickly and efficiently.

Our **Residents' Compact** is an agreement between our residents, Lewisham Council and Lewisham Homes. It sets out how we will work together to ensure residents are involved in shaping services delivered by Lewisham Homes. It includes an annual review, a yearly action plan and targets by which the success of the Compact can be measured.

Our **Communications Strategy** 2009/2011 plays a vital role in the delivery of Lewisham Homes' strategic objectives, of which customer care is a core element. The strategy contains an Action Plan for the next year. Each section has a selection of key tasks for the future. The plan is fed into the organisation's Business Plan and is reviewed annually.

Lewisham Homes launched its four year **Equality and Diversity Strategy** in May 2008 and this is due to be reviewed by March 2010. We are committed to ensuring that the services we provide are relevant to the needs of all sections of the community, and that our workforce is representative of the people we serve (see Section 7).

We have also carried out a major consultation exercise with **vulnerable residents** and stakeholders who support them, in order to identify key issues for these groups in accessing services. We will ensure that in implementing this strategy we address key issues arising out of that consultation, in order to meet our commitment of equality of access for all.

A key priority for Lewisham Homes is **Value for Money**, as we aim to move resources away from management costs and invest more in improving our properties and the service we provide. Our Value for Money strategy was approved by our Board in November 2008. Service reviews will be used to ensure that services are providing a balance of quality and cost. We are planning to do a number of things to make sure our services are value for money:

- Checking how much our service costs compared to others, by benchmarking with other ALMOs.
- Asking our customers about their priorities to make sure we spend money on the services that matter most to them.
- Looking at our approach to contracted services so that we ensure they are good value and closely monitored
- Maximising the income we collect – from both rent and leaseholder charges.
- Improving ICT systems to improve our efficiency and provide improved online services to customers

This Customer Care strategy works alongside our **ICT strategy**, which was approved by Board in May 2009.

### The national picture

In recent years there have been a number of national drivers that have raised the profile of customer services in the public sector. These include:

<b>National Strategy/Agenda Link with Customer Service Strategy</b> <b>'Accessible Services'- 2006</b>	Takes a wide view of access to services including an analysis of what customers are looking for from a service and considers the need to be able to respond to differences between consumers in relation to their needs, characteristics, expectations and relationship with the services.
<b>Gershon (Efficiency) Agenda</b>	Aimed at improving efficiency in the public sector
<b>Service Transformation'- (Varney Report)</b>	Sets out the opportunities for transforming the delivery of public services in the UK by looking at how the channels through which services are delivered can be made more responsive to the needs of citizens and businesses.
<b>Strong and Prosperous Communities - The Local Government White Paper</b>	The aim of this White Paper is to give local people and local communities more influence and power to improve their lives. It is about creating strong, prosperous communities and delivering better public services through a rebalancing of the relationship between central government, local government and local people.
<b>Reducing avoidable contact</b>	Reducing avoidable contact (NI 14) is one of the 198 indicators against which local government is being assessed within the new performance management framework agreed between Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Association.

## 7.0 Equality and Diversity

Our Equality and Diversity Strategy sets out our approach and this is integral to providing good customer care. We aim to treat all customers fairly and with respect, so that this becomes a natural part of the way we do things at Lewisham Homes. This involves staff at all levels considering whether we are

being fair and respectful to different types of people during normal work activities. This includes when we are:

- Delivering existing services
- Developing new services
- Reviewing existing policies and procedures
- Arranging consultation events and questionnaires
- Procuring goods and services
- Undertaking service reviews
- Dealing with comments and complaints

To emphasise the importance of equality and diversity within Lewisham Homes, we have set up an Equality and Diversity Challenge group, which includes representation from staff throughout the organisation.

We will meet all legislative requirements and work to current good practice relating to diversity issues. We will do this by:

- Ensuring that everyone has equal access to our services
- Carrying out Equality Impact Assessments for all aspects of our services and reviews
- Delivering services that are relevant, responsive and sensitive.
- Ensuring that our contractors and others who provide our services also share our vision and values and deliver to this strategy.
- Recruiting, developing and retaining the most talented people as well as valuing their varied skills and experiences.
- Encouraging an honest and open culture which values differences between us
- Promoting and encouraging tolerance, fairness and equality.
- Incorporating our commitments to promote equality in all supplier contracts – these range from major building works to auditing our financial records
- Aligning the way we approach equality and diversity with the Equality Framework for Local Government

We carry out Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) wherever a policy or service is amended or a new one is introduced. We use them to identify any issues with our services for specific groups, and include solutions to adverse impacts in our Business Plan. When conducting EIAs we look at all the information we have on individual services to see if:

- We need to make any special arrangements for different groups of people, such as disabled people, or older people
- Anything we do disadvantages some groups of people
- We can identify any unmet needs or positive impacts, for example providing hearing loops and signers for people with sensory disability at consultation events

## 8.0 Driving it through

We have established governance arrangements to provide leadership and clear direction to all of our customer care activities and to oversee implementation of this strategy.

### 8.1 Responsibility for the strategy

We recognise that we need to designate someone to be responsible for leading on and unifying customer services and customer care across our organisation, to raise the profile of customer services and to co-ordinate the many tasks that we will need to complete over the coming years.

Our Service Development Manager will have overall ownership of the strategy and will be responsible for overseeing progress against the strategy. However the responsibility for making it happen is that of every member of staff within our organisation. We will not succeed in our aims unless every one clearly understands what we are striving to achieve and gives their full support.

The key groups and individuals that will be involved in the implementation of this strategy are outlined below:

Title	Role
Housing Services Director	Customer care champion
Service Development Manager	Responsible for the delivery of the Customer Service Strategy and improvement plan
Project Board	Oversee the implementation of the strategy and action plan, acting as a critical friend
Project Team	Deliver elements of the improvement plan and input into review of the strategy.
Senior Management Team and Lewisham Homes' Board	Review progress against the strategy and ensure links between this strategy and others are consistent

## 9.0 Monitoring

The overall purpose of the Lewisham Homes performance management framework is to ensure that our strategic objectives are threaded through all

levels of the organisation to the frontline service delivery. We will monitor progress against our customer care strategy within this framework.

In addition, a Customer Care Project Board has been set up to drive and monitor the implementation of this strategy. This will monitor specific actions through the Customer Care Implementation action plan.

### **9.1 Customer Service Standards**

Alongside this strategy we have produced a set of Customer Service standards, in conjunction with our customers. The standards clearly set out what our customers can expect from us. We will be measuring our performance against them. The standards can be found in full in the appendix to this strategy.

The standards relate to customer care across the organisation and are applicable whichever service is being used. They are supplemented by service specific standards which detail the additional standards customers can expect from that particular service. These have also been produced through consultation with customers, and are clear, measurable and relevant to the customer.

We will monitor to check how we are doing against these service standards in a number of ways including:

- Collection of performance indicators;
- Mystery Shopping by our syndicate and resident mystery shoppers;
- Customer satisfaction surveys;
- Focus groups;
- Quality audits.
- Lessons learned from our complaints monitoring.

We will report results of this:

- Every three months to the Senior Management Team;
- Annually to the Lewisham Homes Board
- And publish key themes and indicators quarterly on our website and in the Home newsletter and in more detail annually in the report to residents.

We will review our service standards every two years and involving our customers in the process.

### **9.2 'Delivering great housing services....'**

#### **In the eyes of residents.....**

The measure of our success in delivering our mission and core values is judged primarily and most importantly by our own customers. Customer satisfaction surveys and community engagement activities are among the ways we will continue to capture customer experience, of all the services we provide. A key element of this will be effective learning from complaints.

In continuing to develop our own residents as mystery shoppers, resident inspectors and auditors we will gain valuable insight into the experience of being one of our customers.

#### **In the eyes of Lewisham Council.....**

The Council as sole shareholder, property owner and as the strategic authority has a responsibility to ensure our service meets residents' expectations. Our performance is regularly monitored by Lewisham Council and we work closely with our shareholder to ensure that we maintain and develop the standards of customer care they require.

#### **In the eyes of the Tenant Services Authority....**

The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) is now in place as the regulatory authority for housing associations. In 2010 this will extend to all ALMOs as well as local authority landlords. In developing our customer care and in delivering great housing services we will look to the new requirements of this regulator. By 2010 new standards developed with tenants across England will become the basis for regulation and Lewisham Homes will need to comply with these. We aim not just to comply, but become a leader in good practice. We will keep a watchful eye on the development of the TSA standards and work with our customers to ensure these are integrated into our own.

## **10.0 Review**

We will formally review this strategy in July 2011. However it will be amended and reviewed in the interim, as necessary, to ensure that we keep abreast of development with new regulatory standards and policies and the CSE criteria.

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### **Appendices**

Customer service standards