

Meeting of:	Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	Wednesday, 03 April 2019
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Homes and Safe Communities
Report Title:	Customer Service Strategy (Housing) - Six Monthly Monitoring Report
Purpose of Report:	To update the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee on progress implementing the Customer Service Strategy (Housing).
Report Owner:	Nick Jones - Housing and Strategic Projects Team Leader
Responsible Officer:	Miles Punter - Director of Environment and Housing Services
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	This report will affect all Council tenants and therefore no individual Ward Member consultation has been undertaken. The report has been reviewed by Officers from the Legal and Finance teams.
Policy Framework:	This report is a matter for information and noting
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Customer Service Strategy (Housing) sets out a framework for driving further improvements to the customer services provided by the Housing team. The Strategy includes five key priority areas, namely: embedding a customer first culture within the housing team; expanding the range of personalised services available to tenants; developing the ways customers can access housing services; improving the quality of customer service provided and lastly, using customer feedback to drive service improvements. • Regular monitoring reports have been reviewed by the Scrutiny Committee and most of the key actions have now been completed. Appendix 1 highlights the progress made for each of the actions in more detail. 	

Recommendation

1. That the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee notes the six monthly monitoring report in relation to the Operational Delivery Plan for the Customer Service Strategy (Housing).

Reason for Recommendation

1. To ensure that the actions in the Customer Service Strategy (Housing) are progressed and they drive improvements in the quality of the housing service.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Customer Service Strategy (Housing) was approved by Cabinet in February 2017 and incorporated feedback from the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee. One of the recommendations was to provide six monthly monitoring reports to the Homes and Safe Communities Committee. This report therefore updates members of progress against the actions identified.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1 The large scale tenant satisfaction survey completed in 2016 gave lots of detailed feedback regarding services provided by the Housing team. With reference to customer service, one of the key issues identified was the need to build closer links with tenants and make it easier for people to contact the right member of staff. As a consequence, a lot of work has been done to raise the awareness about the Neighbourhood team. This has included a series of estate roadshows where staff have gone out into Council estates across the Vale to speak to tenants, run community events, and provide advice surgeries. In addition, a programme of monthly estate inspections has been established when staff are on site and walk around each estate with tenant representatives, checking the condition of communal spaces, grass, parking areas etc. Lastly the tenants' newsletter and the web site runs features about the staff for each patch- making sure that tenants have the up to date contact details and are able to get in touch with Officers quickly and easily.
- 2.2 The Strategy highlighted the need to promote digital services and increase the number of tenants who are able to deal with the Council online. To this end the re housing application form is now online, meaning that applicants can fill in their details and register for the Homes4U scheme via the web site. This has resulted in greater efficiencies and means that application forms are registered quicker. In addition the Customer Portal has been tested and is now 'live' meaning tenants can register and have access to information held about them in the Housing ICT system. This enables people to check rent account balances, look for payments, update contact details, submit housing applications, report concerns etc.

- 2.3 In terms of digitalisation, the next steps will be to migrate the 'bidding' process on line so that applicants can submit bids for properties on line each fortnight instead of ringing into the contact centre or visiting the Civic offices. A number of other services have been identified which could be delivered digitally and discussions have taken place with the corporate project group who are responsible for delivering the Council's overall Digital Services strategy.
- 2.4 The Customer Services Strategy also contained a commitment to develop personalised services for tenants. This work is being taken forward primarily via the Neighbourhood Plans. These Plans recognise the fact that the priorities for tenants living on different estates vary and therefore the way the estates are managed needs to be different. Neighbourhood Plans for eleven estates have been written in conjunction with the local residents and will drive local improvements in each area over the next three years.
- 2.5 Progress has been made embedding a 'customer first' culture within the staffing team. Team members themselves developed a team aim and suite of 'values' they aim to demonstrate when dealing with customers. A significant number of team members have also taken part in the 'aspiring leaders' programme which has equipped them with a range of tools and techniques which help make them more effective and better able to assist customers.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

Long term

- 3.1 The Strategy ensures that a planned approach is taken towards the long term, to ensure that services continue to improve and customers are able to access the services they need when they need them.

Prevention

- 3.2 The approach to customer service makes it easier for tenants to contact the right person and get an early resolution to issues before they turn into problems. The measures to get more people to use on-line services will reduce pressure on the telephone service.

Integration

- 3.3 The Strategy supports a holistic approach to customer service which is focussed on outcomes and problem resolution, ensuring that different Officers and teams work together to bring about solutions to complex problems.

Collaboration

- 3.4 The Strategy recognises that a number of factors contribute towards effective customer service and sets out a framework for several Council teams i.e. Rents, Neighbourhood Management, Assets and Repairs - to work together with residents to deliver effective services.

Involvement

- 3.5** Resident involvement is key to the effective delivery of the objectives in the Customer Service (Housing) Strategy. The Strategy therefore takes account of feedback from tenants in terms of what is most important and how priorities should be decided but also requires this feedback to result in changes to the way services are delivered.

4. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 4.1** The Strategy is being delivered within existing departmental resources. Financial investments are being made from training or ICT budgets.

Employment

- 4.2** There are no direct employment implications arising from this report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 4.3** There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. The Strategy is however designed to ensure that all tenants have access to services. This includes people who may not have access to the internet and also vulnerable people who may require more assistance. The Strategy also takes account of the need to make communications available in English and Welsh.

5. Background Papers

None.

Operational Delivery Plan

Objective 1: Embedding a customer first culture within the housing team

Action	Start date	Finish date	Progress	Status
Review Staff Charter at staff appraisals and team meetings	April 17	Sept 17	The Staff Charter has been reviewed at a monthly team meeting and is discussed with individual team members during the annual #itsaboutme sessions.	
Staff working group to establish team 'values' to include Customer focus	April 17	Sept 17	A set of team values have been developed by group of staff in the Neighbourhood team. These have been reviewed and adopted by colleagues in both the housing management and rents team.	
Highlight good practise case studies as exemplars to team members	April 17	Sept 17	Customer Care Policies of John Lewis and First Direct reviewed by customer services staff working group and informed the content of the Customer Service (Housing) Strategy	
Team members to take part in 'Aspiring Leaders' Staff development programme	Nov 16	June 17	Two cohorts of staff have now participated in the Aspiring Leaders programme which has involved 6 days of classroom based learning covering a range of management competencies. Members of staff who completed the programme have now completed a work based challenge based on the TV Programme 'The Apprentice' - where they worked in teams to produce short films for tenants. The task was judged by members of the Executive team, tenants and was subject to a staff vote. The initiative was very successful and enabled the staff involved to use the skills and techniques they have learnt on the Aspiring Leaders Programme.	
Testing of customer service/ attitude to form part of interview process for future recruitment of Housing staff	April 17	On-going	Customer care questions are included in all interviews for front line staff, specifically; these are competency based questions, designed to ensure successful applicants share the Council's values and are committed to delivering high standards of customer service.	
Undertake service testing to review quality of customer experience	Jan 17	June 19	Tenants have been involved in making checks of the lettings standard of new lettings; this has involved attending properties with repairs staff and checking standards ahead of new lettings. Tenants have also taken part in estate inspections on several estates.	
Undertake staff engagement survey	Sept 17	March 18	The Council staff engagement survey has been completed. There was a very good response rate from the Housing and Building Services team and the results were analysed and fed back via Management Development sessions with Leaders.	
Identify key themes impacting staff morale	April 18	June 18	As per above, staff feedback sessions have taken place in Feb and March 2018. Results and key themes were shared with front line staff via Staff net, team meetings and 1-1s	

Develop a staff working group to address themes/issues	July 18	Dec 18	A group of Managers has been trained in creative thinking techniques and will be facilitating group discussions with staff designed to unpick the results and recommend actions to drive improvements in staff engagement.	
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Objective 2: Expanding the range of personalised services available to tenants

Action	Start date	Finish date	Progress	Status
Develop suite of personalised services/interventions	Jan 18	May 18	Neighbourhood plans have been developed for several housing estates which set out a range of actions to tackle issues which are specific to each individual estate.	
Identify vulnerable tenants from existing management information e.g. difficulty getting access for gas servicing, no repairs reported, single people etc.	April 17	Sept 17	An exercise has been completed to overlay information which contains triggers of vulnerability i.e. very few repairs reported, gas capped off, applicants re housed via homeless. These tenants will be visited to ensure they are managing their tenancy.	
Implement priority tenants scheme to target vulnerable tenants with a range of interventions to sustain tenancies	Sept 17	Dec 17	Vulnerable tenants are being identified and targeted with more intensive management and housing related support. Front line staff have received training in 'restorative approaches' which now helps them work with households to address their vulnerability and the root causes of issues. This represents a new way of working and is consistent with emerging best practise being advocated by Welsh Government.	
Gather socio-economic background data for each estate	April 17	July 17	Socio economic data including census, Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, employment etc. has been gathered for different housing estates and has fed into the Neighbourhood Plans.	
Consult with local residents to identify key issues and future estate priorities	April 17	July 17	Consultation exercises were carried out with residents to inform the Neighbourhood Plans. This included door knocking, surgeries, meetings with residents and also feedback via social media i.e. Twitter and Facebook.	
Develop template for estate action plan	April 17	July 17	A template for the Neighbourhood Plans was developed based on data available and good practise from elsewhere.	
Complete action plans for larger estates	July 17	Dec 18	Neighbourhood Plans have been drafted with tenants for eleven housing estates in the Vale. These plans take into account local concerns and set out a range of priority actions which will drive improvements to the area over the next three years.	

Objective 3: Developing the ways customers can access housing services

Action	Start date	Finish date	Progress	Status
Publish article in tenants newsletter including photograph, name and contact details of Neighbourhood Officers and Assistants	July 16	On-going	Complete. The details of Neighbourhood team, including direct telephone numbers and email addresses have been included in the last two tenants newsletters.	
Undertake programme of estate road shows/ community events to raise profile of landlord and build relationships with tenants	Feb 17	Sept 17	A series of estate roadshows/ community events have taken place at Penarth, Llantwit Major, Buttrills, Gibbonsdown and Central Estates. These have been popular events and have helped raised the profile of the Neighbourhood Manager and enabled them to get to know more residents.	
Pilot mobile working IT solution to free up staff to spend more time on site	Feb 17	June 17	A mobile working solution has been purchased (Photobook) which enables staff to complete forms and gather information when on site. This improves record keeping and reduces administration, allowing staff to spend more time on site. Photobook continues to be used for inspections of communal areas in blocks of flats and to undertake estate grading's but it also being rolled out to other service areas including the voids maintenance and temporary accommodation teams.	
Publish dates and times for estate walkabouts in advance and encourage tenants to join in	June 17	On-going	Estate walkabouts have taken place at a number of sites. The programme has been promoted locally to tenants and residents groups via word of mouth and Social Media.	
Front line staff attend residents meetings and local surgeries	Feb 17	On-going	Neighbourhood staff attend all Residents Boards as well any community group meetings they are invited to.	
Promote ways of getting in touch via tenants newsletter	July 17	June 17	This is a standard item in the tenants' newsletter.	
Publish article in tenants newsletter including photograph, name and contact details of Neighbourhood Officers and Assistants	July 16	On-going	Complete. This will remain a standard item in future tenants' newsletters. The details will be updated to reflect any staffing changes.	
Develop Customer Portal, enabling tenants to access information and services on line	Jan 17	Jan 18	Customer portal is now 'live' and it provides customer access to rents and tenancy modules allowing tenants to review rent balances, view rent statements, update personal circumstances and make service requests. This enables customers to manage their own information and should also reduce the number of telephone enquiries and personal visits to Council offices.	

			Staff training has been provided and the Portal went live on the 26 th September 2018.	
Ensure access to Customer Portal is available in Welsh and English	March 17	Jan 18	The requirement to provide the information bilingually previously proved an issue and translation software (Linguaskin) was purchased to address all of the Council's requirements. All of the information used in the Portal has been translated and tested and is working effectively which enabled the portal to 'go live'.	
Improve quality of information held on the Housing pages of the external web site	July 17	March 18	Some cosmetic changes made to web site content, mainly revised contact details, staff names. More fundamental review of the web site content is underway in order to improve the amount and quality of information available.	
Use social media to share news, information and updates	Feb 17	On-going	Updates and information is being shared via Twitter and Facebook. The new apprentice in Community Investment team has been tasked with increasing the volume of news shared via social media and to increase the number of followers.	
Promote use of Customer Portal via tenants newsletter	Jan 18	April 18	A 'soft launch' took place to ensure everything was working correctly and staff were able to manage requests from new users. Following a review period, a more active promotion campaign has taken place with details included on the rent increase letter which went to all tenants as well as the rent arrears correspondence. An email will shortly be sent to all tenants who have provided their email addresses- giving details how to register for the Portal and access information.	

Objective 4: Improving the quality of customer services provided to tenants

Action	Start date	Finish date	Progress	Status
Establish knowledge base for Contact 1Vale staff to set out key information to help answer housing queries	Nov 16	July 17	Knowledge base has been completed and training provided to staff in C1V. Analysis has indicated that fewer calls have been transferred and fewer service requests raised as a result of agents being able to provide more detailed information to callers.	
Provide C1V staff with read only access to rent screens	March 17	On-going	Complete. C1V staff have access to rent screens in OHMS	
Train staff to interpret rent accounts and provide basic information such as current balances	March 17	Sept 17	C1V have received training in interpreting accounts and providing rent balances to customers and this has resulted in a reduction in calls transferred to the rents team.	
Review repeat callers and identify barriers to first point resolution	July 17	Feb 18	A number of frequent callers have been identified. Analysis identified there can be vulnerability factors which affect the repeat calls (rather than service failures). Staff work with the individuals to ensure appropriate support and assistance is being provided in order for them to live independently. In other cases, repeat calls are due to ongoing issues	

			in an area. This has included on going lifestyle clashes between neighbours. When the dispute has been resolved, there is a noticeable reduction in calls.	
Review call volumes and types to identify main reasons for calls	July 17	Feb 18	Configuration of telephony system means it is not possible to breakdown different call types received via the Housing queue. Analysis of service requests raised via Oracle however has been useful in identifying key call reasons and enables staff to align the knowledge base so that staff are able to provide high quality response to main call types.	
Improve knowledge base and training for front line staff to resolve high call volumes	July 17	March 18	'Knowledge base' is reviewed and updated periodically in order to drive further improvements in first call resolution in contact centre.	
Review current processes to prevent some types of call e.g. more specific appointment slots, follow on for repairs etc.	July 17	March 18	Complete. High volume calls are regarding repairs and Homes4U. Repairs team are improving processes to reduce waste and increase first time fix, also looking at repair appointment system to be able to offer more flexibility in appointment slots. Housing application form available on line and use of paper forms has been discontinued (except for vulnerable people). The next stage will be to introduce ability to bid for properties on line. Call volumes and service requests from C1V have reduced.	
Establish duty facility to provide immediate response to urgent queries raised by customers	April 17	On-going	'On call' system established to ensure that a member of the Housing team is on office cover and available to deal with calls escalated via the contact centre or the reception counter at the Civic.	
Establish knowledge base for Contact 1Vale staff to set out key information to help answer housing queries	Nov 16	July 17	Knowledge base has been completed and training provided to staff in C1V. Analysis has indicated that fewer calls have been transferred and fewer service requests raised as a result of agents being able to provide more detailed information to callers.	
Rent First pilot to include all teams discussing rents during every tenant contact	April 17	March 18	Pilot undertaken with Housing reception staff and agents in C1V.	
Weekly 'void property' meeting to improve new tenant experience	March 17	On-going	Weekly void meetings take place to speed up the letting process and 'move in' dates are conveyed to tenants in order to improve the move in experience. Post letting surveys are also carried out by telephone to identify any issues. Positive feedback has been received about the new lettings process and the condition of properties, with 74% of tenants advising they were satisfied with the condition of their property when they moved in.	
Establish monthly meeting between Housing and repairs staff to resolve repairs issues	April 17	On-going	Regular communication between repairs team and neighbourhood staff have helped address issues and improve customer service.	

Objective 5: Increasing the range of customer feedback and using this to drive service improvements

Identify missing tenant profile data	Nov 16	Dec 17	New 'tenant profile' module has been implemented which gives scope to collect more detailed information regarding each tenant e.g. income, benefits claimed etc. The Money Advice team continue to collect this information and input it onto the OHMS system.	
Send out profile questionnaire to tenants	Nov 16	Dec 17	A tenant profile questionnaire was sent out to all tenants.	
Bulk update of tenant profile data into OHMS system	Dec 17	May 17	Tenant profile data has been updated in the housing management system (OHMS).	
Key driver analysis will be undertaken of the customer satisfaction results to identify the most important improvements and the factors which have the biggest impact on overall satisfaction.	Sept 16	Feb 17	Key driver analysis completed as well as detailed analysis of results at estate level and by various demographic groups. Emerging themes and issues informed a customer satisfaction action plan which was developed by staff from various front line teams.	
Undertake tenant satisfaction survey of all Council tenants in the Vale of Glamorgan (STAR)	Sept 16	Feb 17	Complete. Results reported to Housing and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee and fed back to tenants in the Summer Newsletter 2017.	
Completion of Housemark Core Benchmarking exercise	April 17	Nov 17	Core benchmarking was completed for 2016/17. A fresh submission was made in October 2018 which enabled comparisons to be drawn with a wide range of housing providers.	