



PO20 Customer Care Policy

Approval

Approved by Tenants' Forum	DATE 19 November 2009
Approved by Board	DATE 25 November 2009
Due for Review	DATE 2012

Review undertaken

Resident involvement <i>As agreed with Tenants' Forum</i>	<p>This policy is the result of a major service review from Feb-May 2009; the review group included two Tenants' Forum members. In addition we consulted with the Tenants' Forum Customer Services Sub Group 12 October 2009. We also consulted with the readers group in October 2009.</p> <p>We compared the policy with the results on Customer Care from the Big Door Knock exercise to ensure we are consistent with what our customers say are their main priorities.</p>
Equality Impact Assessment	Maureen Adams February 2010
Other consultation	N/A

1.0 Scope of policy

This policy sets out Soha's approach to having good access to services and high levels of customer care to our existing and prospective tenants as well as our key stakeholders. We aim to recognise and respect people's needs and aspirations, and ensure fair access to the opportunities we create.

We operate the Mary Guber method in relation to communication with customers which seeks to deliver excellence in customer care and all new staff receive specific training on this approach.

Soha operates in a semi-rural environment and has a majority white British population with approximately 58% aged over 60 years old. We have an ageing population in addition to new younger tenants and emerging BME communities. A significant number of our residents have disabilities and may be vulnerable, requiring support from our key agencies.

2.0 Aim

2.1 We aim to achieve consistently high quality customer services across all of the services we provide by:

- Establishing, and reviewing our service standards in key areas of service such as repairs, lettings and how we respond to customers. We monitor and communicate our performance against these standards and set targets.
- Employing highly motivated and well trained staff in our Customer Services team as they are the first point of contact, as well as across the wider organisation who ensure all tenants receive a good quality service, whilst recognising individual needs.
- Addressing the majority of customer queries and concerns at the first point of contact.

2.2 If we are unable to deal with a customer's query we will signpost them to other organisations who may help.

2.3 Anyone working on our behalf, such as contractors, will be offered training and we will monitor their performance to ensure they are operating within the principles of this policy.

3.0 Policy Statement

All Soha staff will conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times and be courteous and respectful to customers. We ensure that our services are accessible to everyone by having or providing:

- full disabled access to our offices.
 - a range of Plain English publications about our services and products.
 - the offer of a range of formats for publications.
 - translation and interpretation services.
 - e-mail and internet services.
 - home visits.
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- out of hours services.
 - published service standards so customers can measure performance.
 - well trained staff.
 - support our more vulnerable customers

3.1 We seek to apply our Customer Care policy consistently and fairly and we do not discriminate against any person on grounds of their race, colour, ethnic or national origins, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender, age or any other matter which may cause a person to be treated with injustice.

3.2 Our approach to delivering excellent customer care is based upon good quality contact and communication and taking any failure in service standards seriously.

3.3 We are open 8.30am – 5.00pm Monday to Friday and provide an out of hours service to our customers so that they can report emergency repairs and we visit and assist customers in their home where these customers find it difficult to visit our offices.

4.0 Implementation

4.1 Having undertaken in 2009, a review of our Access to Services and Customer care, we have a number of priority actions that are being implemented. Our priorities are to:

- Ensure that our premises are fully DDA (Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and 2005) compliant, and accessible to disabled customers.
- Continue to collect information on our customers through a data capture exercise and ensure that our services and products meet the needs of different customer groups whilst tailoring our services to meet their needs. We will continue to offer support to our tenants through a range of services and initiative and offer support to our younger and more vulnerable tenants.
- Introduce Freephone to reduce costs for residents using landline numbers to contact us
- Identify customer aspirations so that future services are effectively planned and delivered via result of systematic surveys with service users on existing services and future aspirations and report the results to staff and tenants
- Extend the office opening hours.

5.0 Communication and Training

5.1 We will consult with customers to publish specific, measurable service and performance standards across all key areas of service provision. Customers are able to compare our performance against these standards which we publish in our regular newsletters.

5.2 Soha has trained existing staff in the Mary Gober 'Delivering Service Excellence' project. Each new staff member has this training as part of their induction. Soha has established customer service coaching champions from staff in

every service area. This will help ensure that we cascade the 'Delivering Service Excellence' message through to all levels of staff and promote it as a key priority. These coaching champions help staff to think about how they can make changes to improve customer care.

5.3 We produce our information in a range of formats such as podcast, CD, and large print, use hearing loops in meetings for customers with a hearing disability and translate information where English isn't a first language. Typetalk is available to support phone calls & Language Line is also available to support phone calls and face to face discussions.

5.4 All communication is handled within the procedures that accompany our Data Protection policy.

6.0 Complaints and appeals

6.1 We encourage customers who are dissatisfied with the Customer Care service to follow the complaints procedure, so that we can put things right and learn from their complaints.

6.2 Where a customer is not happy with our service we will try to put it right. If we have made a mistake we will apologise and take action to ensure that we do not repeat our mistakes.

6.3 Customers can appeal if they are unhappy with the response to their complaint or request for compensation, via Soha's complaints process. Customers can also complain to the Independent Housing Ombudsman Service.

6.4 Payment of compensation will be considered where we have failed to deliver service, or if legislation requires that compensation should be paid. Compensation payments will not automatically be monetary, but may take the form of other satisfactory alternatives, e.g. vouchers.

7.0 Resident Involvement

7.1 This policy is the result of a major service review; the review group included two Tenants' Forum members. In addition we consulted with the Tenants' Forum Customer Services Sub Group and the readers group. We will continue to consult with tenants on each review of this policy.

Soha's tenants measure our services through mystery shopping and the Tenant Inspectors service inspections.

Mystery Shoppers help measure our performance against our Customer Service Standards that we promise to deliver in our Customer Charter.

Tenant Inspectors monitor services, collect data themselves and actively report on how well our services are doing. The Tenant Inspectors decide which service area they want to inspect, and they receive feedback on their recommendations for improvement.

We survey tenants at least every three years to measure satisfaction with Soha.

8.0 Choice

8.1 The need to offer realistic and meaningful choice is integral to our policy on customer care. We offer choice in many of our services and continuously seek to

improve choice, using feedback from complaints, focus groups and satisfaction surveys. We recognise that choice needs to be offered fairly and transparently and may have resource implications, but should be at the forefront of our customer services.

9.00 Responsibility

9.1 The Director of Customer Services and Operations is responsible for the effective implementation of this policy. However all staff are responsible for their own personal customer care approach to our customers.

10.0 Monitoring and review

10.1 Soha will produce regular reports to the Tenants' Forum sub groups and Board to monitor performance against set service standards.

Soha will review this policy every 6 months, subject to any legislation or sector developments requiring earlier review, to ensure that it continues to meet its objectives and reflects good practice as we continue to build on the Audit Commission inspection results.

Context

Disability Discrimination Act 2005

Data Protection Act 1998

Soha Equality & Diversity Policy PO02

Soha Complaints Policy PO13

Soha Compensation Policy PO18

Soha Data Protection Policy PO10