



**ACCESS AND CUSTOMER CARE STRATEGY  
2009-2010**

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## 1 **Introduction**

The Access and Customer Care Strategy supports the Association's Business Plan objective to "achieve continuous improvement in resident satisfaction"

CHA's strategy for delivering high quality services is to:

- empower tenants to exercise influence over the services they receive
- obtain regular feedback on the standards of service provided which will be used to identify opportunities for improvement
- retain existing customer base (and be recognised as a landlord of choice)

The objective "to achieve continuous improvement in resident satisfaction" incorporates the following areas taken from the Associations Business Plan;

- Corporate Communications
- Customer Satisfaction
- Service Standards
- Asset Management
- Performance and Targets
- Continuous Improvement
- Sustainable Communities
- Resident Involvement
- Regeneration
- Financial Inclusion
- Sustainable Development

The Access and Customer Care Strategy embraces the needs of tenants, leaseholders, applicants and stakeholders. All customers have a common expectation when they contact the Association. They want someone to do something about an issue that concerns them and to be able to contact the organisation in a way, which suits them.

The Association provides a number of services but customers are not interested in 'who does what', they just want to be able to access services in a straightforward and direct way. Customers expect the range and quality of services to be the same irrespective of their particular circumstances or location. Whoever deals with customers, be it an Association employee or contractor, such as KHT Services providing service on our behalf, the same level and quality of customer service should be provided.

The Access and Customer Care Strategy is about;

- serving customers better, reaching more people by ever increasing methods and at more convenient times
- understanding the customer experience and making them feel important and valued when they contact us

The Association wants customers to recognise and value the services the Association provides, to be confident that services are good value for money, and to feel that their voice can be heard.

The Association is committed to working proactively with all our contractors and partners to ensure that customers can access a wide range of services irrespective of their circumstances, in a seamless, customer focused way.

The Association has produced this strategy from the best practice gathered from a variety of sources, but most importantly using feedback from its tenants.

## **2 What does excellence in customer services look like?**

- **Quality** – high quality, reliable, flexible and responsive services which is continuously improved
- **Relevant** – tailored services that meet specific needs
- **Choice** – through a choice of access channels, putting the customer first
- **Accessible** – in locations, at times and in ways which ensure inclusion of all
- **Consistent** – using information effectively to ensure the same level of service and the same information is available to all
- **Joined up** – with partners serving the same customers
- **Value for money** – greater cost effectiveness, reliable and efficient

## **3 Equality and Diversity**

Where an individual or group come from a diverse background the Association aims to ensure that they are able to receive services and be treated equally to the same high standards as others.

Equality of opportunity is something the Association aims to deliver and is driven by a Diversity Strategy, which incorporates both legislative and regulatory requirements together with best practice. Equality impact assessments are undertaken out as part of the review process for strategy and policy.

## **4 Where the Association wants to be**

The Association will achieve excellent customer services through:

- A continuous improvement programme, which ensures that the way the Association delivers improvement, involves its customers to achieve excellent customer services
- Well trained and developed staff, with effective systems that provide comprehensive information to, provide consistently high standards of customer access across a wide range of services, through a variety of channels
- Working with partners to provide a wide range of complementary services across Merseyside, Cheshire and the North West
- Balancing the need to provide face-to-face services to tenants with other methods of contact, such as home visits, telephone and electronic access

- An improved telephone system with options to select repairs or all other enquiries
- Development of a Customer Contact management system supported by an integrated Housing Management system
- Providing services that suit the diverse needs of customers, by using the Tenants' Census profile information
- A website that is informative, interactive and accessible to all customers
- Having comprehensive and measurable service standards developed in conjunction with customers
- A complaints system that is publicised, easy to use, developed with customers and provides regular feedback to staff to assist identify ways to improve services

## **5 What outcomes the Association expects**

### **For customers**

- Greater involvement in the design, review, monitoring and evaluation of services
- Greater choice and convenience
- Better customer service and provision of information
- Resolution to queries at the first point of contact
- Joined up services
- No unnecessary red tape
- Accessible services, irrespective of location
- Understanding and dealing with individuals and their needs

### **For staff**

- A customer focused approach
- Led by confident and supportive people
- Part of an organisation which is up to date and progressive
- Effective frontline services
- Empowerment and involvement in the shaping of improved services
- Better management of information
- Service standards developed with customers so they understand customer expectations
- Continuous improvement and development

### **For the Association**

- A clear focus on the customer
- Improved customer satisfaction
- Improved service delivery
- Improved relationships with key stakeholders and other providers

## **6 Where the Association is now**

### **Customer access**

- The Association provides direct access to services at three locations, Marybone in Liverpool City Centre, Halton Lodge in Runcorn, and at Evolve, Bedford Road Bootle
- Reception areas are friendly and welcoming, with private interview rooms and with full access to customer records
- At Halton Lodge the Association also provides a direct repairs phone line
- The Association's website provides information and access for customers to be able to report repairs, make complaints, compliments and comments via e-mail
- The Association provides an out of hours call service to allow tenants to report emergency repairs and anti social behaviour
- The data files of vulnerable people are flagged on the computer system in order that the Association and its agents can respond to the specific needs of customers
- Customers requiring floating support have access to support workers through specialist agencies
- For customers who are hearing impaired the Association provides a hearing loop for meetings and at reception
- The Association has provides face to face contact with customers, including home visits and area inspections

### **Customer Involvement**

The Association places the involvement of its customers at the centre of the way it operates.

The Association has;

- a wide range of methods available to customers so that they can be involved at a level of commitment that is suitable to them, whether it is reviewing documents in their own homes, attending meetings or being involved in one of the various focus groups
- produced with customers, an annual Involvement Statement, setting out how customers can be involved and the priorities for the year ahead together with a complete Annual Impact Assessment in order that residents can understand how helping the organisation to improve services has had a positive impact
- a track record of delivering improvements with customer involvement, views and feedback

### **Customer Feedback**

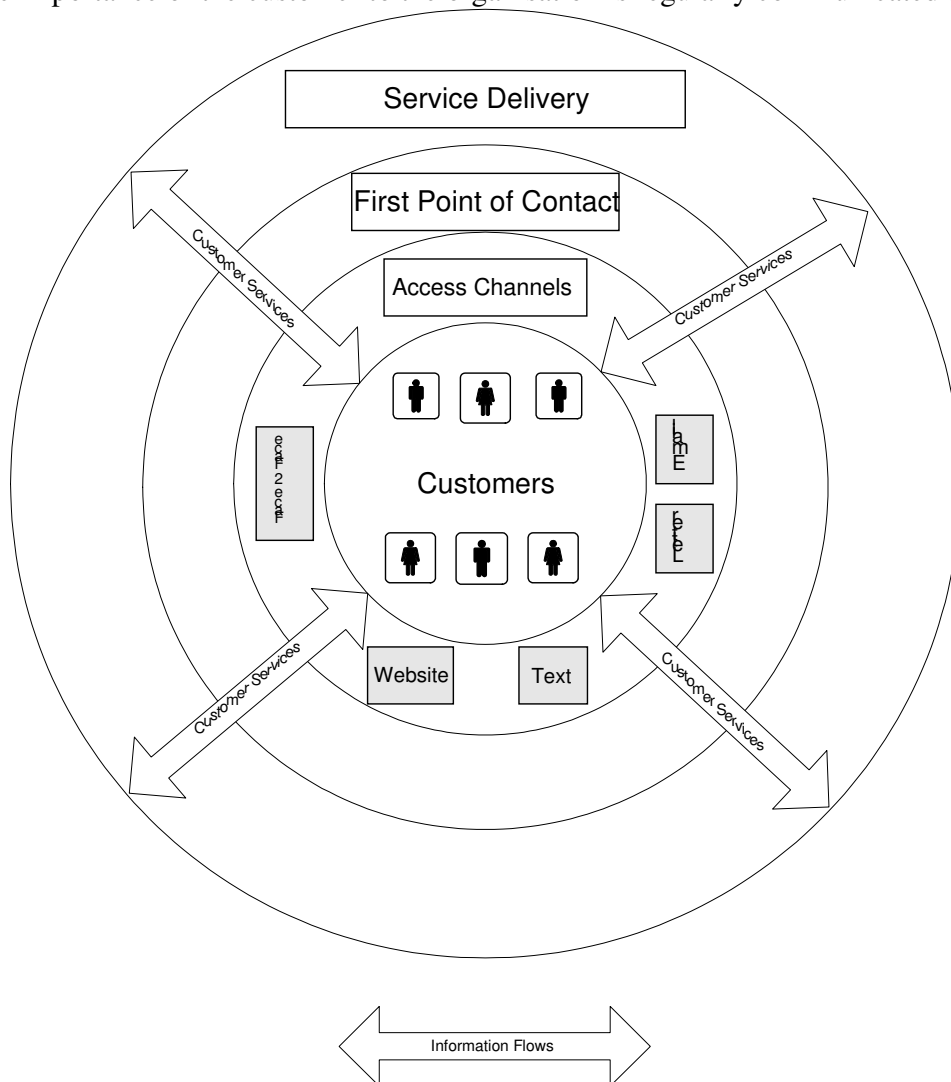
The Association listens to its customers through a range of satisfaction surveys that are analysed and influence the way future services are provided.

When things go wrong, the Association encourages customers to tell us about it through the complaints procedure. This allows the Association to respond to the issues raised and put right mistakes that have been made.

The Association would like to develop this further, using information more effectively to learn about weaknesses in our service and to highlight opportunities to improve. Methods have been put in place for learning lessons from complaints, analysing trends and ensuring that mistakes are not repeated. The Association would like customers to take a central role in that process.

### Customer Care

All of the Associations functionalist teams have been trained in excellent customer service, including external qualifications. The Association plans to extend this to all staff to ensure that customer focus is fully embedded across the Association. Customer care is the principal role for staff in customer-facing teams which include; Tenancy Management, Resident Involvement, Asset Management and Repairs, Rent Income and Allocations and Support. The importance of the customer to the organisation is regularly communicated to staff.



## 7 What have customers told us

The Association knows from the 2006 STATUS survey completed by our residents that 92% preferred to contact us by phone. The percentage of residents visiting our offices was 3%.

| <b>Method last used to contact<br/>Cosmopolitan Housing<br/>Association</b> | <b>Survey<br/>2006</b> |
|---|------------------------|
| By telephone  | 93%                    |
| Visited office  | 3%                     |
| In writing  | 0%                     |
| By e-mail   | 0%                     |
| In other ways   | 3%                     |

The Association carried out a review of access to services using a number of different methods to gather customer and staff opinion, which included the following;

- Issuing a questionnaire to all tenants, this was made available at reception areas and staff actively encouraged customers to complete the information when undertaking home visits
- Existing tenants groups and other involved customers were asked their views
- A specific customer focus group was set up to drive the process
- A specific staff focus group was set up to input their views

### **What customers told the Association;**

- They would not like the phone hours extended
- They would like surgeries in some locations
- Written information such as newsletters should be less frequent and easier to understand
- They would like an appointment system for repairs
- Staff should be available to take telephone calls
- They would like to see more of our staff face to face on site

## 8 What the Association needs to improve

The Association needs to understand the access needs of our customers better and ensure that our plans are consistent with these needs

The majority of tenants accessing services provided by the Association live more than 3 miles from our offices. More information is required to understand the access needs of communities in more remote areas as part of our growing understanding of the specific access needs of different groups and communities and how the Association ensures full access for all.

Expectations of customers are increasing. Customers want to access services at times that are most convenient to them, as well as in places and ways that suit their needs. The Association already offers an out of hours service for services. The Association needs to build on this

good practice and if required extend the times customers can contact us during the day. The Association also needs to develop a consistent approach when customers contact us. This will provide an opportunity to explore additional flexible patterns of working for staff.

The Association needs to promote cost effective ways of accessing services and to ensure that a connection is made between value for money and providing various access channels.

Customers place importance on using a mix of channels depending on time of day, location and the services they are accessing. The average cost per transaction differs considerably according to the access channel used

| <b>Channel</b>                | <b>Level of cost per transaction</b> |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Personal contact to an office | High cost                            |
| Letter                        | High cost                            |
| Telephone                     | Medium cost                          |
| e-mail                        | Medium cost                          |
| Internet                      | Low                                  |
| Self service on-line          | Low                                  |
| Text message                  | Low                                  |

To ensure customers have equal access to services whatever their location the Association needs to;

- Offer a mix of conventional and electronic channels for effective and efficient service delivery. Customers using self-service channels will still want to be able to access help from staff when they need it.
- Deliver integrated face-to-face services in a building fit for purpose, offering a modern environment and facilities that meet the needs of customers.
- Ensure reception areas must be friendly, informative and accessible. If a customer needs information in another format, the Association must be able to provide it to them in a reasonable timescale. The Association also offers private interview facilities with full access to all customer records. Toys will be provided for children so their parents are not distracted when they are discussing business with staff.
- Work closely with a wide range of partners (for example Local Authorities, other community groups and commercial businesses) to explore opportunities for delivering services in partnership, as well as alongside other community facilities.
- Minimise travel to outlying homes to make the most effective use of staff time and resources, without compromising the level of service received by these customers.
- Explore opportunities taking the service to the customer as well as developing electronic means of accessing services.
- Achieve an ingrained culture of excellent customer service/access and customer care across the organisation.

- Raise the expectations on managers to drive this forward in a way in which delegates decision making to the lowest possible level and empower staff to pursue excellence. Association employees need to have access to high quality training, systems, data and information if they are consistently to be able to deliver the excellent standard of customer service/access and customer care to which the Association aspires.
- Ensure resources and capacity to deliver the strategy are aligned.
- Consider the various customer access methods at our disposal and make informed decisions on what should be developed and what it may choose to discontinue to achieve excellence and provide value for money. The Association needs to make sure that new and emerging access methods continue to be embraced in order to meet the needs of customers.

### **Customer profiles**

The Association has made considerable effort in the last six months in profiling our residents. Our goal is to reach 100% of residents by March 2009. The Association will keep this information up to date as new customers take up tenancies and through tenancy audits.

### **Age profiles**

The Association profiles residents by age bands:

|              | 2006 STATUS Survey |
|--------------|--------------------|
| Age band     | Percentage         |
| Under 25     | 2%                 |
| 25 – 34      | 16%                |
| 35 – 44      | 24%                |
| 45 – 54      | 16%                |
| 55 – 64      | 20%                |
| 65 and older | 21%                |

### **Disability profile**

The Association profiled residents for disability in various categories. Out of the total who responded to this question, the Association found:

43% of tenants stated that they suffered from a long-term illness or disability. Of these 87% confirmed, the disability limited their daily activity in some way.

## Ethnicity profile

The Association asked residents to confirm their ethnic background, the Association found:

|                      | 2006 STATUS Survey |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| Ethnic origin        | Percentage         |
| Asian                | 0%                 |
| Black                | 3%                 |
| Chinese/other        | 1%                 |
| Mixed                | 3%                 |
| Not declared/refused | 0.2%               |
| White                | 91%                |

## Internet and e-mail usage

The Association asked customers in its 2006 STATUS survey 'Do you have access to the internet'? The Association found that 29% of tenants had access to the internet. This represents an increase from 23% in 2004.

## Customer Satisfaction

The results of our 2006 STATUS survey show that the percentage of customers satisfied overall with the service provided by the Association is 81%. Below is a summary of the positive findings and areas where tenants were less satisfied than in the previous survey in 2004.

### *Positive Findings:*

- Overall satisfaction levels have continued to remain high (81%). The key influencers in this included:
- How CHA deals with repairs and maintenance
  - Overall condition of CHA properties
  - Satisfaction with the outcome of queries
  - Clear explanations about the way CHA deals with anti-social behaviour
- Satisfaction levels are consistently high across BME and disabled groups, suggesting CHA deals well with such minority groups.
- Tenants feel CHA rents represent good value for money (88%).
- There are high satisfaction levels with the quality of major repairs and improvements.
- There are high satisfaction levels with CHA accommodation (90%) and the general condition of their property (89%), particularly the quality of their heating and windows.
- Generally, there remain high satisfaction levels amongst tenants with their neighbourhoods (81%), although fewer were 'very satisfied' compared to previous surveys.

- There have been significant improvements in the level of incidences of Anti-Social Behaviour (down to 15% from 27%).
- There have been improvements in the way in which victims of anti-social behaviour are kept informed but there remains room for improvement.
- Customers find it easy to access the right member of CHA staff when contacting the organisation.
- Customers are generally happy with the complaints procedure (73%).
- A major improvement by CHA is the standard of information supplied to tenants and the way that they are consulted. A high proportion felt that they were kept well informed (89%). This reflects the increased level of communications and newsletters that have been produced since the 2004 survey.

*Negative Findings:*

- There appeared to be lower satisfaction levels in Sefton across a range of indicators. This was particularly the case in relation to features of the home (windows, bathrooms, kitchens, and external appearance of properties), the area, and the repairs service.
- Tenants' experiences of the Repairs Help Desk were less positive, and have decreased since the last survey (77% compared to 87%). This was compounded by a reduction in satisfaction of the repairs appointment system (73% down from 86%). This was felt to relate to staffing issues during the last year and the need to use temporary staff, combined with an increase in "defect" based repairs from new developments, e.g. Olive Mount. However, further research is required in this area.
- There was a downward trend in satisfaction levels with CHA kitchens since 2001 (from 83% to 73%).
- There were lower satisfaction levels in Halton with heating, windows, kitchens and bathrooms.
- There were lower satisfaction levels in Knowsley with bathrooms.
- There were lower satisfaction levels in Halton as well as Sefton with their neighbourhood. This appears to be particularly linked to issues of anti-social behaviour.
- Only 45% felt that they were kept informed about how CHA were dealing with their report of anti-social behaviour. Tenants in Halton were particularly dissatisfied with how well informed and the advice they received relating to anti-social behaviour.
- 12% of BME tenants considered racial harassment to be a problem.
- The overall CHA's approach to customer service had deteriorated, particularly in how helpful CHA staff were perceived to be (down from 90% to 80%).
- Customer experience of using the CHA complaints procedure was low (31%), although this should be considered cautiously given the nature of the issue.
- A greater proportion of tenants living on the Wirral felt that CHA took no account of their views.

As 70% of contact by tenants relates to repairs and maintenance, the Association has taken steps to improve this service by entering in a 10 year partnering agreement with KHT Services which includes the provision of call handling via their call centre. This approach was decided following extensive consultation with residents. Residents were also part of the selection panel responsible for choosing KHT Services to deliver its repairs and maintenance service.

The table below compares key areas of service delivery:

| <b>Key aspect of Service</b>                           | <b>2004</b> | <b>2006</b> |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| Overall Satisfaction with landlord services            | 86%         | 81%         |
| Overall satisfaction with home                         | N/A         | 89%         |
| Overall satisfaction with neighbourhood                | 82%         | 81%         |
| Overall satisfaction with repairs service              | 80%         | 73%         |
| Overall satisfaction with how you are kept informed    | 80%         | 89%         |
| Overall satisfaction with opportunities to participate | 59%         | 59%         |

However, when benchmarking this performance nationally, the Association compares favourably with other providers. The Association intends to analyse the data and agree actions to improve. In addition, the survey showed there were areas in customer service where the Association needs to focus on improving, for example; getting hold of the right person and being satisfied with the outcome of enquiries.

The Association also measures satisfaction in relation to key profile information such as age, disability, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, gender and location (local authority). The Association is committed to ensuring that satisfaction is equally high regardless of these differences and intends to examine performance in these areas to ensure all customers receive a fair and equitable service.

## **9 Making it happen**

The strategy for Customer Service is ambitious and stretching and will take many years before it is delivered fully across the Association's stock. There is work, consultation and planning required to deliver this strategy. Engagement with customers, partners, colleagues and communities is essential in order to move forward.

This strategy has been developed to provide a route map for implementing the customer service Cosmopolitan Housing Association wants to provide in to the future. It is built around strategic priorities contained in the Business Plan.

### **Resident Involvement**

#### **The Association believes services should**

- be customer focussed, proactive and easy to access
- be designed and delivered in such a way to allow service users to live as independently as possible and not to disadvantage those living in rural areas, isolated customers or those with diverse needs
- face to face services should be delivered in a variety of ways and meet the needs of all customers
- be supported by technology and information that are appropriate to meet customer needs

### **What the Association will do;**

- Consult further with customers about when and where to hold surgeries, and ask whether they should they be specialist or generic. This will provide a proactive rather than reactive service.
- Work with local councils and other partners on a plan to co-locate services where the need is greatest.
- Extend the call centre opening hours to 8.00am to 6.00pm Monday to Thursday and 8.00am to 5.00pm Friday, and 9.00am to 12.00 pm on Saturday morning for repairs.
- Contact residents who live more than 3 miles from the office to evaluate any differences in the way they access and receive services.
- Commence an annual “tenancy check” to establish who is living in the property and seek their views on service delivery.
- Develop web-based and other electronic services to complement face-to-face and telephone channels, as well as providing increased access for customers to self serve and receive personalised services.
- Upgrade the Associations telephone system.
- Align the access and customer care strategy with the IT strategy to deliver a joined up approach.
- Roll out the use of hand held technology to all staff that work closely with customers.
- Promote and market new ways of accessing services. The Association will help customers to become confident in accessing services in new ways. The Association will identify and work to remove barriers that prevent them from doing so.

### **Customer Satisfaction**

#### **The Association believes;**

- Customers are at the heart of the Associations ethos.
- Customer should be treated with respect, dignity and understanding whoever they are and whatever their background.
- Quality of the customers experience of accessing the service is as important as the quality of the service itself.
- If the Association design or review services with our customers, it is most likely to get it right.

#### **What the Association will do;**

- Monitor the service standards with residents to identify gaps in service delivery
- Monitor service take up and satisfaction levels across the Associations services by ethnicity, disability or long-term limiting illness, age and gender
- Develop a mechanism to use customer feedback from satisfaction, service standards, consultation, complaints and comments to improve services
- Make better use of research, information and consultation outcomes by co-ordinating, disseminating and taking consistent action on the information gathered
- Continue to engage customers in the design and review of services and the development of access methods

- Have a robust consultation programme that ensures effective use of feedback and evaluation as part of service design, development and delivery
- Have a simple and accessible complaints system which enables a speedy response and helps staff to learn from complaints to improve services
- Informed by consultation, develop a plan for delivering the mix of access channels needed over the next three years
- Develop an annual resident involvement statement setting out how the Association will involve customers and identifying key priorities
- Publish an annual resident involvement impact statement showing the Association did what it set out to do and how this had a positive impact on services for customers
- Develop a “customer charter” setting out what customers can expect when they contact the Association and the expectations placed on them
- Develop a panel of tenants auditors to monitor and test service standards

## **Continuous Improvement**

### **The Association believes;**

- Staff are our most valuable resource
- Staff should be treated with respect, dignity and understanding, whoever they are and whatever their background
- The Association should be a great place to work
- In the value of a well trained, motivated, managed and led organisation
- The workforce should reflect the diversity of the local population and provide good role models for all
- If the Association look after staff, they will look after customers

### **What the Association will do**

- Review our HR strategy so that it sets out how the Association can improve its succession planning and staff planning, as required in areas of business growth and contraction. This will be supported by a learning and development programme to build capacity, implement new practices and enable change to be delivered effectively.
- Improve internal communications using new technology such as task flow management
- Increase the capacity for staff to help to shape the improvement of services.
- Continue to provide monthly staff briefings and an annual staff event.
- Review the service standards and performance indicators for customer service to ensure progress in achieving excellence is monitored.
- Deliver a programme of customer service excellence training using the best affordable external training providers.
- Promote staff understanding of excellence in customer care and the customer charter through a programme of interactive awareness-raising activities.
- Develop an award for colleagues who go that bit further for customers and a ‘good ideas’ scheme that contributes to improved services.
- Roll out handheld technology to staff who work closely with the customers, so they can provide good customer service with real time information.

- Continue to promote home working so that staff can spend more time working face to face with customers as unnecessary travel is avoided.

## **Partnership Working**

### **The Association believes;**

- Partnerships are fundamental to delivering excellent services
- Working together will ensure that better use will be made of resources and expertise
- The Association will provide better access to services by working together to join up services at a local level; and to remove service, geographical and professional barriers
- In the value of a strong partnership with business, community and voluntary organisations

### **What the Association will do;**

- Identify best practice and aim to match or better it
- Share the strategy with local authorities and other key partners, identify areas of similarity/dissimilarity and potential barriers to implementation, and begin to plan how the Association might achieve progress in practice
- Continue to work with local authorities on choice based lettings, being part of the initiative for dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour and working with housing benefit for verification.
- Work proactively with a wide range of partners such as the Health Authority, the Police, other RSLs, voluntary and community organisations and those from the caring professions to develop best practice approaches and share information when dealing with the same customers
- Seek to establish joint customer forums and consultation activity and share feedback and research
- Establish protocols with the caring professions and voluntary / community organisations' to help vulnerable people and specific groups overcome barriers to accessing and receiving services

## **Service Standards**

### **The Association believes;**

- In the value of the contribution that diverse groups can bring to a community and the Association aims to treat individuals with dignity and respect.
- That customers have different needs
- That the services the Association provide should meet the needs of customers
- That if the Association understands more about customers the Association will deliver a better service

### **What the Association will do;**

- Work towards achieving a balanced mix of involved residents who are representative of our customer profile information.

- Use the customer profile information to flag needs on our IT systems to ensure that colleagues have useful information about individual customers and how their access needs should be met
- Contact all residents who confirmed that they had a disability or long-term limiting illness in order to get a better understanding of how they access services and work towards understanding their future needs
- Review the information the Association is gathering on customer profiles to include preferred methods of contact, sexuality and faith
- Show care and consideration for cultural and faith beliefs in an effort to ensure the Association does not cause offence or act inappropriately.
- Contact all those customers whose first language is not English to ask how they wish to receive information

## **10 Continuous Improvement**

The Association is committed to a culture of continuous improvement of services. The Association will continue to develop and improve our services by actively working with customers.

Customers are central to all that the Association does and they will drive our approach to continuous improvement. The Association's Business Plan 2009-2014 seeks to improve performance and ensure high quality, efficient and value for money services.

## **11 Statutory and legislative framework**

The Association recognises its duty to comply with current legislation and will continue to review emerging legislation. In addition the Association also recognises its moral obligations to comply with current good practice guidelines and codes of conduct.

## **12 Awareness and accountability**

The Board has corporate responsibility for ensuring that this Strategy reflects the corporate goals of the Association and contributes to the objectives of the Business Plan.

The Chief Executive has overall responsibility for ensuring the Association develops an organisational culture in which this Strategy can operate effectively and for ensuring its implementation.

The Operations Director will report to the Board of Management on the progress against the strategy, relevant action plans and recommending changes where necessary.

Managers and Team Leaders are responsible, for ensuring that staff receive adequate and continuous training to ensure that their knowledge is current.

Managers and Team Leaders will regularly review learning and development programmes, identify key areas where specific training is required and ensure that training is delivered.

Team meetings and themed events will be used to ensure that colleagues can make

managers aware of difficulties in implementing this Strategy.

The Strategy will be made available on our intranet and website.

### **13 Service Standards**

The Association has developed customer service standards with residents.

The Association's commitment to customers is to;

- Regard customer service as a high priority and treats its customers in an open, honest and impartial way, respecting confidentiality.
- Customer facing staff are fully trained to deal with customer enquiries efficiently.
- Ensure that all customers have equal access to services irrespective of race, religion, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, disability or age, including providing disabled and wheelchair access to the public reception areas, hearing loops and language-line and access to interpreters at customer service points.
- Ensure documents are available, on request, in large print, Braille, audio tape and translated into different languages.
- Liaise with tenants and residents to agree a set of standards across the services it offers. The Associations Customer Service Standards include the following:

General:

- Treat you with respect at all times
- Provide you with information that is clear accurate and honest
- Communicate in a way that suits you
- Treat you and your family fairly whatever your age, ethnic origin, disability, gender, sexuality or religion.
- Make our offices accessible
- Display relevant up to date information leaflets
- Display office opening hours and details of how to contact us outside these hours in offices and on the website
- Give you the opportunity to comment, compliment or complain about our services

In person we will:

- Greet you in a friendly polite manner
- Wear a name badge so you know who you are speaking to
- See you within 15 minutes even if you don't have an appointment

In writing we will:

- Respond to any written correspondence within 5 working days

- Acknowledge complaints within 2 working days and respond with findings within 10 working days
- Communicate in plain language and not use jargon
- Produce documents in your preferred language or format on request within 7 days

Via the telephone we will:

- Answer the telephone stating our full name and team
- Respond to voicemail and telephone messages within 2 working days
- Leave voicemail recordings advising you if we are out of the office, when we will return and how you can contact us or another member of staff

Via email we will:

- Respond to your query within 5 working days
- Leave an out of office message advising you how you can contact us or another member of staff when we are not in

We will also:

- Give you the opportunity to test these standards by becoming a mystery shopper
- Display information on our performance every 3 months. If you would like to comment on these standards please contact [getinvolved@cosmopolitanhousingassociation.co.uk](mailto:getinvolved@cosmopolitanhousingassociation.co.uk)

These standards have been produced following consultation with residents.

There are comprehensive standards for all other services provided by CHA including Asset Management and Repairs, Rent Income, Tenancy Management, Resident Involvement and Allocations and Support. These standards will be brought together to form one document our “customer charter” containing all the standards customers expect from the Association.

#### **14 Performance indicators monitoring and feedback**

Performance information will be available on the Associations website and in reception areas. It will be updated quarterly and published in the “What’s New” newsletter twice a year..

#### **15 Action plan**

The Association’s action plan for delivering this strategy attached at appendix B.

#### **16 Resident, staff and stakeholder involvement in policy**

In delivering resident involvement the Association will:

- Actively promote resident involvement and aims to engage all residents in consultation to influence its decision making process.
- Hold regular meetings with tenants and leaseholders and encourage under-represented groups to participate.
- Undertake customer satisfaction surveys and service specific questionnaires.

### **Staff Involvement**

The Association will ensure:

- Staff fully understand the organisation's commitment to customers and their role in helping to achieve this.
- Regular forums such as Service Improvement Group, Continuous Improvement Group, Departmental meetings and periodic groups and events take place where staff have the opportunity to review strategies and policies.
- Membership of benchmarking groups such as Housemark in order to benefit from significant networking, best practice sharing and learning and development opportunities from each organisation and their wide membership.

### **Stakeholder Involvement**

The Association will:

- Work in partnership with Local Authorities, other social housing providers, outside agencies and community groups to ensure that it makes best use of resources and works towards mainstreaming customer services.
- Regularly assess ourselves against the Audit Commissions Access and Customer Care Key Line of Enquiry, and will fully monitor progress in its Service Improvement Plan.
- Carry out a review of customer access with stakeholders, to develop this strategy

## **17 Risk**

The Association recognises the importance of effective management of our strategies, policies and procedures. A risk management approach is undertaken to ensure all projects undergo assessment to identify the level of risk they pose to the business.

## **18 Efficiency and value for money assessment**

The Association aims to deliver high quality cost effective housing services and has developed a value for money strategy to measure progress.

The Association aims to outperform against its budgets to improve efficiency and deliver more efficient services to customers. The Association has made the following specific budgetary commitments to improve services:

- £2,000 for staff training
- £2,000 for customer training
- £10,000 for IT developments
- £50,000 for telephony improvements

The Association will work with other agencies to identify where pooling of resources may offer opportunities for savings from greater economies of scale.

## **19 Continuous improvement assessment**

The Association is committed to continuous improvement. The Association's Service Improvement Plan 2009/10 identifies key targets, timescales, identifies milestones and lead officers with overall responsibility for delivery and anticipated outcomes. Progress against these targets will be monitored and reported to the Board quarterly.

## **20 Associated and linked policies**

Cosmopolitan Housing Association Corporate Strategy & Business Plan  
Service Improvement Plan  
Risk Management Strategy  
Resident Involvement Strategy  
Asset Management Strategy  
Complaints Policy  
Customer Service Standards

## **Appendix 1**

### **Statutory and legislative framework surrounding the policy**

Cosmopolitan Housing Association will operate this strategy and all other policies and practices relating to it in line with statutory requirements. Set out below is the current statutory framework within which the Association will apply this policy as it relates to specific policy areas.

- The Race Relations Act 1976 and associated Codes of Practice issued by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) (in particular Sections 2.1 and 71 and the Codes of Practice for rented housing and the Draft Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Housing)
- The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and associated Codes of Practice issued by the CRE
- The Housing Acts 1985, 1988 (in particular Section 56), 1996 and 2004 (anti-social behaviour powers)
- The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and 1986 (as amended)
- The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 and associated Codes of Practice
- The Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- Civil Partnership Act 2004
- Gender Recognition Act 2004

**Appendix 2**

**EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

| <b>POLICY / SERVICE AREA DETAILS:</b>  |   |
|--|---|
| Name of policy / service area:   | Access and Customer Care Strategy   |
| Details of person carrying out EIA:<br><i>(Name; title; contact details)</i> | Alec Gaston<br>Operations Director<br>0151 224 0314<br><a href="mailto:agaston@cosmopolitanhousing.co.uk">agaston@cosmopolitanhousing.co.uk</a> |
| What does this EIA relate to?  | New Policy  |
| What service areas does this EIA relate to?                                  | Any service where customer may potentially contact the Association or require information   |
| Other persons involved in the EIA:   | Housing Services Team Leaders   |

| <b>POLICY / SERVICE DESCRIPTION</b>  |
|--|
| <p><b>What are the aims of the policy / service review?</b></p> <p>To allow all customer to have fair and equal access to services and information</p> |
| <p><b>How do the proposals link with the corporate objectives?</b></p> <p>The increase customer satisfaction</p>                                       |
| <p><b>Who will the proposals benefit?</b></p> <p>All customers and stakeholder coming into contact with the Association</p>                            |

**What outcomes with the proposals achieve?**

A clear indication of the Association current position, its aspirations for improving how customers can access service and how it intend to reach these targets.

**Are there any aspects of the policy / service that could contribute to inequality?**

YES (*delete as applicable*)

**Details:**

**Unless the Association offers access to service in a variety of formats and languages customer could be discriminated against if the have any communication barriers.**

**Please summarise how the policy / service contributes to the Group’s equality and diversity commitments:**

By allow customer to access service in a format that suits them and is appropriate to the individual needs.

**What interface is there with other organisations for implementing proposals?**

Not applicable

This section allows you to identify whether the policy / service changes will impact positively or negatively on a range of diverse groups.

If negative impacts are identified, it would be useful at this stage to highlight the actions that could be taken to create a more positive effect.

| <b>IMPACT ASSESSMENT</b>    |                                      |   |                |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|----------------|
| Equality and diversity area | <b>Benefit<br/>(positive impact)</b> | <b>Disadvantage<br/>(negative impact)</b> | <b>REASON*</b> |

|   |                 |  |   |
|---|-----------------|--|---|
| <p><b>1.1.1.1 Gender</b><br/>women, men,<br/>Transgender</p>  | <p>Positive</p> |  | <p>The Access and Customer care Strategy will ensure all customer have fair and equal access to services. Regular satisfaction monitoring and continuous updating of the Association's tenant profile will allow us to make adjustment to service where required.</p> |
| <p><b>1.1.1.2 Race</b><br/>Black and other minority ethnic people (for specific groups, see note 1)</p>                           | <p>Positive</p> |  | <p>As above</p>   |
| <p><b>1.1.1.3 Disability</b><br/>Disabled people in general, physical access, sight/hearing needs, other groups of disability</p> | <p>Positive</p> |  | <p>As above</p>   |
| <p><b>1.1.1.4 Sexuality</b><br/>Lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals.</p>   | <p>Positive</p> |  | <p>As above</p>   |
| <p><b>1.1.1.5 Religion</b><br/>Faith group (see note 2)</p>   | <p>Positive</p> |  | <p>As above</p>   |
| <p><b>1.1.1.6 Age</b><br/>Older people, younger people, children (see note 3)</p>   | <p>Positive</p> |  | <p>As above</p>   |
| <p><b>1.1.1.7</b><br/><b>1.1.1.8 Other</b></p>  |                 |  | <p>N/a</p>  |

| <b>FURTHER ASSESSMENT</b>  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| <b>Equality and Diversity area:</b>  |                      |
| <b>Type of impact:</b>   | Positive<br>Negative |
| <b>Is it legal?</b><br><i>(i.e. not discriminatory under equality / discrimination legislation)</i>  | Yes      No          |
| <b>Is it intended?</b>   | Yes      No          |
| <b>What is the level of impact?</b>  | High      Low        |
| <b>Could you minimise / remove any negative impact? How?</b>   |                      |
| <b>Could you improve the positive impact? How?</b>   |                      |
| <b>If there is no evidence that the policy / service promotes equality and diversity, could it be adapted so that it does? How?</b>                                    |                      |
| <b>On the basis of answers to questions for the policy screening stage, do you recommend Phase 2 - a full impact assessment should be carried out?</b>                 | Yes      No          |
| <b>If a full impact assessment is required, what experts / relevant groups need to be contacted to get further views or evidence on the issues and the assessment?</b> |                      |

**ACTION PLANNING**

| <b>Area / Issue</b>               | <b>Action</b>            | <b>Responsible</b>  | <b>Due Date</b> | <b>Resources</b> | <b>Comments</b>                   |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Access and Customer Care Strategy | Review Impact Assessment | Operations Director | 1 April 2009    | N/A              | Review following update of Census |
| Access and Customer Care Strategy | Review Impact Assessment | Operations Director | September 2009  | N/A              | Review following STATUS survey    |

**Signed:** .....

**Date:** .....