

Customers First Strategy

Homes in Sedgemoor

Reviewed April 2021

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Customers First Strategy - 2021 – 2023

Introduction

Homes in Sedgemoor (HiS) is an Arms' Length Management Organisation (ALMO), responsible for managing and maintaining 4,100 properties on behalf of Sedgemoor District Council (SDC).

In return for managing their housing stock, HiS receive an annual management fee. HiS is a not for profit organisation, and exists solely to manage SDC's housing stock in a proficient manner.

Our Customers First strategy will be applicable to:

- Current, potential and future tenants & residents of all properties and garages managed by HiS
- Shared ownership and leasehold properties within our estates
- Our colleagues within HiS and SDC
- Board members
- All external contractors
- Our local Councillors and MP's

Purpose of this Strategy

This strategy aims to set out our commitment to providing an excellent service, and to ensure this approach is applicable and relevant to all of our customers, residents, colleagues and external partners.

It has been built upon the Corporate Strategy over-arching framework, to be the best managing agent in England by 2023.

To achieve this objective, there are three **Core Pillars**:

A green oval containing the text "GREAT SERVICES FOR OUR CUSTOMERS" in a bold, sans-serif font.A green oval containing the text "BUILD A STRONGER BUSINESS" in a bold, sans-serif font.A green oval containing the text "GOOD QUALITY, SAFE HOMES" in a bold, sans-serif font.

1. • Great Services to our Customers
2. • Good Quality, Safe Homes
3. • Build a Stronger Business

Our Customers First Strategy has been designed to link to all core pillars and enable us to achieve a completely customer focused approach across all our service areas.

When shaping and delivering our strategies and policies, customers will be foremost in our minds to enable excellent service and overall customer experience, and our Customers First strategy will provide a common link for all.

Where are we now?

The basis of our over-riding corporate strategy is a “back to basics” approach, in that we want to be the best landlord, providing services that are valued by our customers.

Following the recent publication of the Housing Ombudsman Code of Practice and the Social Housing White Paper, we have undertaken a complete review of our Customer Services and Complaints Handling and updated our policy, to ensure it is accessible and fair to all, and our involved tenants now participate in the final stage of the process.

Our Service Standards have been set as per the Government Regulator of Social Housing criteria and provide clear expectations across our key service delivery areas.

We are committed to carrying out regular customer satisfaction surveys and will ensure all feedback and key performance indicators are readily available on our website and by request.

The last 12 months have been challenging for all, but we have continued to support all of our residents, and embraced new and flexible ways of working, and will continue to do so.

**GREAT
SERVICES
FOR OUR
CUSTOMERS**

**BUILD A
STRONGER
BUSINESS**

**GOOD
QUALITY,
SAFE HOMES**

Where do we want to be?

To achieve our overall corporate objective, to be the best managing agent in England, we have to ensure that we are providing great services to our customers.

Linked with our other key strategy documents, we want to ensure that we provide our customers with a choice of communication channel, and enable all to have the opportunity to access our services and have their voice heard.

We want to adopt a solution focused approach, ensuring we are realistic and honest with customer expectations, to enable collaboration and compromise when necessary.

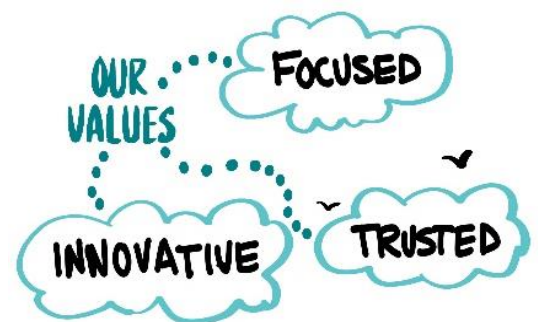
Every customer and situation is different, so we will ensure that we listen and engage, and then approach in a focused and flexible way.

To demonstrate our organisational commitment to ensuring all staff adopt this approach, we will be working towards achieving a Customer Service accreditation.

What does Customers First mean for HiS?

Customers First links directly with our organisational values:

1. To ensure a customer focused approach
2. To be innovative and open to new ways of delivering our services
3. To enable our customers and partners to trust that we will always be reliable and fair



Customers First is relevant to all of our colleagues and external partners, and we will demonstrate this when we achieve accreditation.

Our ethos of Customers First means that we will always treat everyone with respect, listen and empathise with different situations and viewpoints, and strive to reach a mutually amicable outcome.

HiS will ensure services are accessible to all and make reasonable adjustments where necessary.

Through our tenancy audit and data profiling work, our aim is to have a clear understanding of our customers and their needs and preferences.

We are committed to understanding and respecting the needs of our more vulnerable customers and recognise and respect differences amongst our customers.

With this in mind, we will ensure we engage our customers in shaping our services, to ensure we design and implement from the customer viewpoint and will make use of customer feedback to drive service improvements.

We will adopt a "Right first time" approach and will always aim to deal with queries at first point of contact and reduce failure demand, as per our service standard of resolving 80% of all customer queries at the first point of contact.

What are our customers priorities?

From the work we have already completed, and customer feedback gained we know some of the key priorities are:

- To have an effective repairs and maintenance service
- To feel safe within their home and surrounding neighbourhood
- To be treated with fairness and respect
- To be able to ask HiS for support and help when needed
- To be listened to and be able to put their viewpoints forward

We will use all customer engagement and feedback to adapt and react as these priority areas may change.

How will we get there?

a) Culture of organisation

- Putting our Customers First is everybody's job within the organisation and is relevant for our external and internal customers.
- Our expectation is that all customer enquiries are dealt with promptly, effectively, and with respect.



- Colleagues will take ownership, and if they are unable to answer a customer query directly, they will seek the help of another colleague or partner, and ensure it is followed up and resolved.
- HiS will empower all colleagues to challenge if they feel the Customers First approach is not being followed by peers or external partners, in a constructive and positive way.
- Colleagues will be recognised for outstanding customer service, via our Rewards and Recognition process, and within our internal communications.

b) Recruitment and training

- Our recruitment process ensures we are employing the right calibre of candidate, who share our ethos of Customers First.
- Customers First training will be mandatory and regular for all colleagues and will form a vital part of all new starters induction programme.
- All colleagues will undertake regular refresher training and alongside this, we will also ensure all external contractors undertake induction training and then annual refresher courses.
- As part of the tender process for new contractors, there will be a requirement to embrace the Customers First ethos and ensure all operatives and sub-contractors undertake the HiS training.

c) Actively engage and seek views of customers

- We will ensure all customers have access to our complaints process and know that they can have their voice heard.
- We will listen and learn from our customer experiences and adopt a true lessons learned approach from any complaints or customer feedback.
- Our customer satisfaction scores will be available within our quarterly newsletters and on our website so that all residents know how we are performing.
- In conjunction with our Customer Involvement & Consultation strategy, we will hold regular scrutiny and focus groups, which will run in conjunction with our core customer service improvement groups.

d) Understand who our customers are

- It is the responsibility of all HiS colleagues to make every contact count, and to check and update customer details held within our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system.



- We will carry out periodic and regular data profiling reviews to ensure that we hold accurate information and produce an annual “Who lives in our home” report so that we can ensure our services are relevant and appropriate.
- Our colleagues will not make assumptions and will treat everyone as an individual and respect and embrace differences.
- All colleagues will continue to complete mandatory Equality &
- Diversity training to ensure all customers have an equal opportunity to access our services, and reasonable adjustments are made as required.

e) Make it easy for customers to access our services and with a choice of preferred contact

- Our customers will have a choice in how they contact us and access our services, and we will incorporate new channels such as webchat, in line with our Digital strategy.
- If contacting via telephone, customers can expect their call to be answered by polite and empathetic staff, and as quickly as possible, with at least 80% of calls answered within 2 minutes.
- We will ensure our services are readily accessible to all, and will communicate this through our quarterly newsletters, website, social media and other relevant means.
- Our website will be updated on a regular basis, as per our Communications strategy, to ensure key information is valid and current.

f) Review of services

- Key service areas including our telephone opening hours, reception, out of hours emergency service, repairs – will be scrutinised via customer groups on a regular basis, to ensure we are providing services that are valued and meet our customer needs.
- We will utilise all complaints and customer feedback to adopt a continuous improvement approach, and ensure processes and policies are updated as necessary.

g) Involve customers

- We will offer customer engagement mechanisms that give all customers the opportunity to have their say and influence decisions that affect their homes, the services they receive and the area in which they live.

- Through our customer engagement channels, we will ensure that our customers and residents are at the heart of our decision-making process, to improve service delivery.
- We will actively seek customers involvement via our service improvement groups, and ad-hoc consultations for policy review, and will provide training as needed to enable customers and residents to participate.
- All of HiS staff and partners are responsible and accountable and will provide opportunities to challenge performance in a constructive way.

h) Service standards

- Our Service Standards will always be clear and relevant, and available to our customers via our website or on request.
- We will regularly review to ensure fit for purpose and meet customer requirements and will involve customers in this process.
- Our Service Standards will be monitored and managed, so that any failures can be identified, and improvements made.

i) Social Value

- Social value is a measure of how people value any experiences or changes within their lives.
- We will measure the social value of our activities and services, to ensure that we are delivering on what matters to our customers and residents.
- We will ensure our business decisions are taken to deliver a positive outcome for our customers and make a difference within their neighbourhoods.

j) Continuous Improvement

- We will continue to bench-mark and review our services, to ensure we are reacting in a timely way to new developments and innovations.

Measures

In order to monitor and gauge how we are meeting our customer expectations we will use the following -

- Service standards – Leadership team (LT) will continually monitor and review how staff are performing against our agreed standards



- STAR (Survey of Tenants and Residents) survey – we will carry out a quarterly survey of a cross-section of all customers to measure overall perception of HiS as a landlord
- Satisfaction surveys – we will ask for customer feedback across all key service areas on a regular basis
- Key performance indicators (KPI's) – we will monitor our performance against agreed targets that have been set by our Board and involved customer groups. These will be presented to our Strategic Management team and Board on a regular basis and will also be available for customers to review via our newsletters and website.

Review

Our Operations Committee will be responsible for overseeing all aspects of this strategy and ensuring it is being adhered to across all service areas.

This strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis and in-line with the latest Housing Ombudsman and Government guidelines for housing management.

Related documents

All Homes in Sedgemoor Strategy and Policy documents have been developed in line with our Customers First Strategy and are available via our website or on request.

