

Liverpool Housing Trust

Charitable housing association Liverpool Housing Trust wanted confirmation that it delivered excellent customer care, look for ways to improve its services, and promote its reputation. The Customer Service Excellence standard was just what they needed.

Liverpool Housing Trust (LHT) is a charitable housing association, a social landlord and a member of the Industrial and Provident Society. It manages, maintains and improves around 9,000 properties for rent in Liverpool, Runcorn, Wirral and other parts of Merseyside.

The challenge facing LHT was to be able to demonstrate that we offered excellent standards of customer service compared to other organisations, “applying for the Customer Service Excellence Standard was an exciting challenge for us” commented Dave Lambert, Managing Director of LHT.

As a Trust we have made full use of the structured and systematic assessment process that is part of the Customer Service Excellence and found that the format worked well. “Our view was that we were already compliant with many of the criteria as they are similar to what is expected from a good housing association by the Tenant Services Authority (regulator for affordable housing) and the Audit Commission as well as being recognised as good practice in the social housing sector”, said Sue Westwater, Divisional Director Planning and Strategy.

The team felt that the Customer Service Excellence standard offered a way of highlighting our ongoing commitment to providing excellent service for all and supporting continuous improvement. It also provided significant external recognition for staff to demonstrate that we are providing an excellent customer focussed service.

The assessment process was comprehensive with the documentation being straightforward to follow. All staff was involved in the self assessment and this provided an opportunity for employees working on front line service delivery to contribute and see at first hand the positive impact that their work makes.

Following submission of the documentation the inspection was arranged. The actual inspection was very constructive with the assessor well prepared and clear about what constituted evidence in support of our application. Feedback was provided from customers, stakeholders, and staff. Staff who were interviewed found the discussions interesting and thought provoking in addition to being an opportunity to share examples of service delivery that they were very proud of.

What the customer thinks!

Despite always having achieved high levels of customer satisfaction, adopting the principles of Customer Service Excellence has ensured we maintain this high level with annual surveillance inspections. "It was good to have had our services assessed by an external organisation that has knowledge of good practice nationally and in a variety of different sectors. Having external recognition supports the views of our tenants from our last tenant survey, where 86% of tenants said they were happy with the standard of customer care they receive from us", Commented Sue Westwater.

What we learnt...

Sue went on to say, "Applying for the standard was a real opportunity for LHT to build on the services provided to tenants, identify gaps and further improve our approach. The assessors used a range of experience and examples to judge LHTs services. During the process we learnt how to strengthen our approach to evidencing how we were improving services both during the inspection and to customers. We have in place a suggest a way scheme to enable customers to provide feedback on our services and this enhances our formal complaints process that was already in place. We have also run a series of "You said..... We did" articles in our tenants' newsletters to let customers know what they have been saying to us and how we have responded.

We now advise other organisations considering accreditation not to assume what they consider to be acceptable customer services is the norm throughout the sector but to be open to learning and sharing good practice as this was a very positive experience. Also we would encourage other organisations to make full use of the resources and guidance offered by the accrediting organisation and assessor as this will be open and constructive".

What next...

For Sue the most important lesson has been never losing sight of the customer whatever service you are providing. External scrutiny provides the opportunity to test whether you are continually operating and offering your services to the highest standard.

"This accreditation has given the staff a real sense of pride, achievement and expresses our commitment to Continuous Improvement" Sue Westwater Divisional Director Planning and Strategy.

Dave Lambert, Managing Director of LHT said, "Having a customer focus and a continuous improvement policy is central to our business philosophy and crucial to our future. It is a credit to the team here at LHT that we have been officially recognised for

the work we do. This award will ensure we continue improving our approach towards customer service.”

Seeing the Improvements...

Applying for the Customer Service Excellence standard has been very positive for LHT as it has helped us better understand our services and consider how to use evidence to really demonstrate the improvements we are making. In addition we have been able to measure our services against a standard that is used across a wide range of businesses and sectors. The outcome for LHT is that we were able to demonstrate that we deliver an excellent customer focused service and identify areas for further improvement to support our approach to continuous improvement, specifically around feedback to tenants and informal complaints.

Syd Mills one of LHT tenants said “I am so pleased that LHT has achieved the Customer Service Excellence standard in recognition for all its work in improving services to Customers. This standard is well deserved and recognition of all LHT does”.

LHT is very proud of successfully achieving the Customer Service Excellence standard as it is a reflection of our values and vision being focused on customer service and the hard work and commitment shown by staff.