



## REVIEW OF CUSTOMER SERVICE AND CONTACT

<b>Objective:</b>	To explore ways of improving customer service and contact and increase satisfaction levels.
<b>Indicators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) To increase customer satisfaction and decrease complaints.</li> <li>(ii) Identify local needs and wishes</li> <li>(iii) Make recommendations to the Board on service improvements</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendations To Rosebery Executive team.</b>	See attached appendix for snapshot of recommendations and recommended timescales. More detailed analysis contained within the report
<b>Context</b>	<p>Within this changing environment for resident involvement and resident led scrutiny, the Opportunity Store has had to adapt and change during 2011/12 to meet the needs of customers and be at the forefront of good practice across the sector. The Residents Panel was formed in June 2011. Nine residents were selected to scrutinise Rosebery's service and offer recommendations for change.</p> <p><u>Choosing a topic</u></p> <p>When deciding upon the review topic the Panel looked at the Key Performance Information (KPI), satisfaction results and benchmarking data. It was decided that topics that would have an impact on resident satisfaction and the organisation will be prioritised</p> <p>From reviewing the satisfaction survey, the 3 key service areas (repairs, quality of home and value for money) have improved but only marginally however there has been a decline in communication.</p> <p>The statistics for listening and responding is below 80%. Communication is down 8% and views taken into account is down by 3% (in a space of 3 years). Customers have indicated they are not getting the feedback they require. Low level of satisfaction is also evident in the key driver information. Customers indicated that they felt they had already told Rosebery what they wanted, and they haven't listened 'so what is the point'.</p> <p>It is clear customers now feel being kept informed is more of a priority than value for money</p> <p><u>Benchmarking</u></p> <p>Within the benchmarking table (in the BMG Survey) Rosebery is well</p>

below average *for satisfaction/views taken into account* at 51.3% compared to Richmond at 83.9% and Merlin Housing who is 85.8%.

Both Richmond and Merlin Housing do have a higher number of stock so it questionable why Rosebery is not performing when they have fewer properties to manage. It should be noted however that Richmond & Merlin Housing surveys were done back in 2006/07 whereas Rosebery was done in 2010.

#### The review

The Panel considered all the information and felt that a review of **Customer Communication** would have the biggest impact on resident satisfaction and how the association is viewed.

The review would work alongside the organisation's own work to make improvements to how Rosebery currently deals with customer communication.

The Panel felt that the joint approach of the review would strengthen the review. Their investigating and reality checking would make a strong and positive contribution by focusing on key areas of interest for customers and making recommendations accordingly.

## Methods & Documents

In this review we used a variety of methods (triangulation) to test the objective. The following methods were used to ensure all areas were covered.

- Desk top review to familiarise with Rosebery's policies, procedures and standards.
  - Key Performance Indicators/Reports
  - Reception log
  - Complaints Log
  - Compliments Log
  - Telephone statistics
  - National Standards
  - Local Offers
  - Published Customer Service Standards
  - Service Improvements Plan
  - Key Lines of Enquiry(KLOE) Access & customer care in Housing July 2007
  - Customer Satisfaction Results – BMG survey 2010.
  - Benchmarking information

A desk-top review of all Rosebery's current information has been carried out to familiarise the panel with policies, procedures and standards. The desk top review highlighted key areas for further exploration and questioning.

- Reception inspection
- Observations of staff
- Interviews with staff
- Talking to residents
- Telephone surveys
- Case study tracking (real life mystery shopping)

## Findings

This section includes the findings of what the panel found whilst carrying out their investigations.

The recommendations from the findings can be found in the next section with suggested actions. (See appendix 1 for table of findings, recommendations and timescales.)

### **WRITTEN COMMUNICATION**

#### **Publications, Forms & Website**

##### Customer Service Standards Leaflet

- On examination of the Customer Service Standards via the desk top review, it was noted that this was out of date. For example, there was still mention of Homecall Property Services.
- Communication methods did not include all that are currently available, for example no mention has been made for texting.
- E-mail communications is classed as written and therefore have a 10 day response standard – As people are using technology more and more, this needs to be reflected in response times. The website gives conflicting information. It says that all e-mails will be acknowledged within 2 days and responded in full within 10 working days.

##### Forms and Website

- The new style website was launched in Summer 2010 and is much brighter and clearer than the old website.
- It has been noted when accessing the website that this is not always up to date.
- There is a lack of information about issues which is of interest to customers such as anti social behaviour.
- Forms were not available on the website to download or complete.
- There were no publications/forms available in different languages.
- It was also noted that there was not much information available with regard to Leaseholders and Shared Owners.

##### Handbooks

- The leaseholder handbook was published in 2007. Reference was made to the Leaseholders Forum which no longer exists and Homecall was also mentioned. Leaseholders feel the only information they receive are 'statements and bills'.
- The Tenancy handbook was published in 2004. The Panel tested some areas of service and not everything in the handbook is still implemented or things had change and staff will provide a different answer.

For example in "Living in your Home" under the section garden, it states that if you do not keep your garden clean and tidy and rubbish free, and it becomes a nuisance to your neighbours or looks unsightly,

Rosebery would take steps to clear the garden and charge the customer for this.” The Neighbourhood Officer asked for the address of the neighbour and offered to see them, to help them manage their garden rather than ‘clear up’ as suggested in the handbook. This implies Rosebery do not do as they say and gives an inconsistent message.

- The tenancy handbook also has Rosebery’s old logo on.

## **Letters, E-mails and Text**

### Letters

- A correspondence log is kept for all written communication that comes into Rosebery. Between January 2011 to December 2011 271 letters have been sent to Rosebery which require a response. (173 from residents and 98 from a 3<sup>rd</sup> party. According to the log of the 271 letters sent, 65 have not been responded to or the information had not been recorded in to the log.
- A couple of complaints made have been about Rosebery not responding to their letters. An example of a complaint was that a customer had sent in a written request about having a pet and it was not responded to at all. This is a fairly simple request and should have been responded to quickly.

### Emails to a individual

Emails being used by customers to contact staff are becoming more common as a method of contact especially by leaseholders and shared owners.

The Neighbourhood Officers were asked to monitor how many emails came into their personal email account from residents on a monthly basis.

- On average general needs officers calculated around 60 emails a month to their personal account.
- Leaseholders and Shared owners amounted to 100 a month to one officers personal email account.

### E-mails to Customer Service

Emails to [customerservices@rosebery.org.uk](mailto:customerservices@rosebery.org.uk) go to a central place and then sent to the officer responsible. However as customers know staff members’ personal e-mail address, staff are being sent e-mails directly which someone from Customer Services could deal with. For example a Neighbourhood Officer could be sent an e-mail about a reporting a repair.

### Text messages

- No reference has been made to text messaging as a way of communicating with Rosebery in the Customer Service Standards (CSS) which is provided to customers.
- Text messages sent to the Rosebery number are viewed as an email in the customer services inbox. During 2011, 41 text messages have been sent to Rosebery. The nature of the texts are asking for the Neighbourhood Officer to call as they have no credit, or to respond to a arrears letter advising they will pay in a few days. The message is

forwarded on to the relevant officer, who will respond by way of a phone call or a text message.

## **IN PERSON COMMUNICATION**

### Reception

An analysis of reception was carried out to see if any trends could be seen.

- Monday was the busiest day with almost double the number of visitors compared with the rest of the week.
- It was recorded that over 15 days, 74 visits were made by customers to Rosebery.
- 94.5% of visits were for housing with over 90% of these visits being dealt with by the Neighbourhood or Customer Services Teams.
- Over half of the visits were with regard to rent arrears or making payments for rent.
- Garages, transfers, mutual exchanges and tenancy management were other popular reasons for visiting.
- Most visitors were from the Epsom area or the large estates of Longmead and Watersedge.

The Panel also looked at various areas of reception. The following points were noted:-

### Reception Appearance

- The example kitchen is out of date
- Toy box (there are not many toys and some need replacing)
- No clock or calendar
- Toilet needs attention
- Posters are out of date
- Walls in need of a lick of paint

### Information and leaflets

- Leaflets are out of date
- Staff structure chart is out of date
- No information to advise customers that a telephone is available for use

### The Computer

- All of the customers surveyed did not know that the computer was for their use.
- The computer for customers to use is positioned wrong. It does not allow the customer privacy when using the computer – does it even work?

### Reception Desk

- The top of reception looks cluttered with leaflets, some are out of date

### Access

- Residents with a disability can access reception however have

difficulty accessing a private interview room if in a wheelchair or scooter as interview room tables are too big.

- This is also the case with buggies- parents have to leave buggies outside the room.

#### Interview Rooms

- Language line information is not clearly advertised.
- Screws protruding
- Walls in both rooms need a clean/lick of paint
- Panic alarms – on the outside of room

### **TELEPHONE COMMUNICATION**

#### **Telephone calls**

- Of customers who have contacted Rosebery 82% is by telephone. With such a high percentage it highlights the fact that Rosebery needs to get the basics right with regards to telephone communication.

#### Call statistics

- It was found that just in November 2011, 3648 calls were made to Rosebery.
- 76% came through on the mainline and Customer Services answered the calls.
- 24% of the calls were made to direct dials.
- 26% of the calls were for repairs.
- Across the organisation 54% of the calls answered were transferred to another member of staff. And in Customer services 20% of calls were transferred.

This does show that Customer Services are dealing with or taking messages for callbacks on 80% of calls if they can not answer the query.

#### Logging Calls

A new system was introduced in October regarding logging telephone calls, which require call backs. A task log has been used for calls requiring a call backs, which is crossed once completed. Any calls not returned are shown red in the staff members' task area.

570 tasks have been set. 16 are currently waiting for completion

97% are completed on target.

From the staff interviews, it was mentioned that there appears to be a lack of information taken on first contact of a customer by some members of staff. This can make it difficult for Officers when calling back a resident without the correct response to hand.

#### Returning calls

- A mystery shop was conducted and it transpired that telephone calls were not always being returned. This is one of biggest negative factors Rosebery has with its customers and it is also reflected in the survey that was conducted in 2010.

#### Out of Hours Service

- It was noted that the out of hour's emergency service for Morrison

was not very clear and gave some conflicting information. The call centre indicated that it was Rosebery, which could cause confusion especially when a poor service is provided.

- For the Rosebery out of hours number – The Environmental Health number is only for Epsom and Ewell, which does not include the 10% of stock which is outside of the Epsom area.

#### Holding Message

- There is no holding message any more. Customers often feel that Rosebery have hung up on them as it goes quiet.

#### Phones on divert

- When the Panel observed Customer Services it was also noted that some phones were on divert and not accepting calls even though staff members were at their desk. This can be frustrating for other members of staff and residents.

#### Customer views - Telephone Surveys

- Voluntas are now undertaking telephone surveys to hear the views of customers.
- In 2010, 51.3% of customers felt that their views were taken into account, where as at November 2011 78.6% of customers felt that their views were taken into account an increase of 27.3%.
- It should be noted that the percentage in 2010 was via a postal survey.
- Satisfaction levels in 2010 was 75% where as at November 2011 it increased to 92.9% an increase of 17.9%.

#### **Internal Communication**

- Teams do seem to work together especially customer service and housing. There does appear to be more of a breakdown in communication with Asset Management as they are on another floor.
- In the observations of staff members, the panel found frustrations with the Customer Services Team trying to contact the Asset Management Team. However from observing the Asset Management team it was noted that are out of the office for large portions of the day and therefore are not available.
- In the past year an additional management layer has been introduced. This means each team has a manager so if customers felt dissatisfied with a service, they now have the choice to speak to a manager.

#### **Staff -Positives and challenges**

- The Panel witness staff 'going the extra mile' on a number of occasions and there are compliments of staff doing excellent work.
- Both Asset Management and Housing praised the work of one individual in Customer Services and it has been commented that staff do seem to go that extra mile to help someone. Particular mention was made to Sam who always goes the extra mile and talking to residents and listening to their issues.
- There have been 21 compliments in a 4 month period about members of staff which included staff from Morrisons and Smith & Byford.
- Customers who come into reception can hear staff talking. It has been noted that customers can hear conversations between staff members about other customers some of it confidential.



- It was also noted that some staff members felt that things were being overlooked due to heavy workload and being bogged down in admin. They have suggested additional admin support could allow them to free up more of their time.
- Staff feel that customers have too much of an expectation from them. For example a callback in 10 minutes.
- The interviews show that members of staff also feel that more information needs to be on the system so that any member of staff can answer questions.
- Looking at the Board KPI staff turnover and sickness has fallen. In an interview with the Director, he felt that the economy was a factor in staff turnover. There has been a recent restructure in staff so that it is more customer focused.
- It was also suggested that the IT software needs up-dating. For example when the quarterly rent statements were being printed off, it clogged the user system and printer. There were other areas of concern with the software used by Rosebery and this needs to be looked into further.

### **External Communication - positives and challenges with staff**

- One member of staff felt that he was frustrated in doing his job to his full potential as the stock condition report was not accurate. He explained that usually when a survey of this nature is done an example property in the street is used to determine the general condition of all the properties in that street. It causes problems when some of the properties are in a significantly worse condition than the one used for the survey.
- An example of poor communication with customers is the schedule of improvement works to stock in the 5 year home improvements schedule. Due to changes in the economic climate the schedule was postponed, which resulted in some customers being overlooked. However Rosebery failed to advise customers of the reasons of the delay, so customers were left sitting waiting for a promised new bathroom/kitchen/door which never materialised. This obviously left customers feeling angry and frustrated; this in turn lowers their opinion of Rosebery. Customers have not forgotten that they were not informed about the postponement. Since conducting this review, mention has now been made of the schedule of improvements on the Rosebery website.

### **Complaints**

- There were approximately over 20 complaints for customer services/service failure in a 4 month period with over £200 compensation being paid out.

One complaint was made about fleas in a carpet – should customers be made to take more responsibility for their properties. If you had brought a property then it would be you as a home owner's responsibility. Is Rosebery being too soft, should they be making customers more responsible for items in their home in accordance with the handbook.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings the Panel have made recommendations to the Executive team at Rosebery to improve Customer Communication and improve customer satisfaction.

Customers should have the opportunity to be able to tell Rosebery if they do/don't like something, a feedback box/e-mail should be set up for customers to give their comments. Someone should have the responsibility as part of the job role to follow through with the suggestions/views and report back to the customer

If customers come up with a good suggestion on how Rosebery can improve and this is implemented by Rosebery, they should be awarded a voucher of some description acknowledging this. It could be featured in Streets Ahead so that a message is spread to its customers that Rosebery is listening to what their customers have to say.

### **WRITTEN COMMUNICATION**

#### **Publications, Forms & Website**

##### Review Customer Service Standards Leaflet

The Customer Service Standards will need to be reviewed and up-dated. To ensure that the standards remain up to date at all times, this should be checked once a year. This could be done by the Communications Officer as part of their job role or the Customer Services Manager.

##### Review forms and the website

Forms should be easily accessible and able to be downloaded from the Rosebery website. Forms should be able to be printed or filled on online and then e-mailed direct to customer services. This would reduce the risk of forms being lost in the post or not reaching the relevant department. This will offer choice to the customers and provide value for money through the use of technology.

English is predominately the first language of customers. However it should be noted that there is for example a large Portuguese & Italian communities living in the area. More promotion needs to be made of Language Line and publications/forms are made available in a different language on request, which would benefit our multi cultural communities.

The website needs to be monitored and up-dated regularly. Links and sign posting needs to be clearer. Good news stories where customers have made a difference/change should be promoted to show Rosebery in a positive light and that they are responding to customer's needs/requests. Since conducting the review, it has been noted that the website has been updated and, for example, the Tenants and Leaseholder handbooks are now available to download.

##### Review Handbook

The tenancy and the leaseholders handbooks should be available on the website so that customers have access to who is responsible for what (which has now been done albeit they are out of date). It needs to be up-dated every five years. Customers should be consulted when reviewing the handbook to get their perspective/ideas on it.

The Leaseholders information and the large legal document that they

receive needs to be simpler and the summery in plain English.

## **Letters, E-mails and Text**

### Letters

All letter/e-mail that requires more investigation, a standard letter/e-mail should be sent advising customers that Rosebery intend to respond to their query within a certain amount of time. If after this time has elapsed and it is evident Rosebery cannot respond in that time frame, then another letter is sent advising that their query is taking longer than expected and you hope to respond within a new time scale. Customers want to be kept advised. They need to be shown they haven't been forgotten.

Letters should be spot checked to ensure that they are being responded to and a proper log system put in place so that no letters are overlooked. It has been suggested that all letters are scanned onto the system and logged into the customer's file. If a letter has been dealt with by a phone call, this should be marked on the letter accordingly with the date and who made the call.

### E-mails

E-mail "out of offices" should be set up to ensure that any e-mails sent the sender is aware if a member of staff is out of the office.

Smart Phones should be made available to all staff members who frequently are out of the office so that they have access to their e-mails and can forward an e-mail to another member of staff to deal with if urgent.

New standards should mean e-mails are responded to quicker than 10 days depending on the nature of the e-mail.

### Text Messages

Text messaging needs to be included in the Customer Service Standards, with a realistic timeframe given as to how long text messages should be responded to. The text number should also be shown in the CSS.

- Rosebery currently exploring 'see my data' – which also offers a texting service details are limited but we do know that this is cheaper than the current service.

## **IN PERSON COMMUNICATION**

### Reception

#### **Appearance**

- Improve the reception area to make it more welcoming to customers and visitors.

#### **Information and leaflets**

- Information should be relevant and current for residents.

#### **The Computer**

- Encourage residents to use the reception computer

### **Reception desk**

- Improve the reception desk area

### **Access**

- Reception should be accessible for all

### **Interview Rooms**

- Improve the appearance of the interview rooms

### **Visits**

- Appointment cards need to be reviewed and made more easy to read.
- A service standard should be created for both staff and customers

## **TELEPHONE COMMUNICATION**

### Telephones calls

- Out of hours needs to be up-dated. This includes ensuring the information given covers all areas of stock owned by Rosebery.
- Customers should be advised that call backs may not be straight away. Expectations of call backs should be managed more effectively.
- More information should be taken from the initial call before being passed to the relevant member of staff so that they have the information to manage the customer.
- Staff should give a timescale on when they can expect to give the customer a call back, they should ask them if there are times to avoid, eg school collect time, ask if they can leave a message etc. This gives the customer more of a choice.
- Staff also needs to take ownership of calls. The person who had the initial contact should ensure that the customer is contacted and if the customer cannot be contacted they should make the call themselves.
- If able, more information needs to be taken from the customer on their initial first call. This would allow the customer to be directed to the relevant staff member and the right information given first time.
- A brief file note of the call should be logged so that a track can be made and another member of staff can log in and make further notes of what they have done so that the customer does not have to keep repeating information already given.
- To prevent phones being on divert, one member of any team should always be on hand to take telephone calls.
- Service standards should be the same across the organisation including contractors.

## **INTERNAL COMMUNICATION**

### Staff

- To ensure that all staff are aware of changes and works in the Housing Sector. A suggestion would be that a seminar is given by the Chief Executive/Director/Managers to all staff members up dating them of these changes. This will allow the staff to talk about

changes and give their ideas on how best to implement these changes.

- Staff meetings should also be held every quarter. This will allow staff to highlight any issues and discussion/ideas to help resolve those issues. The Manager of the individual teams should ensure that if the issue relates to them this is resolved within a specified time period.
- Staff need to be firmer in managing customers' expectations. If they are unable to do something until a certain time the customer should be advised of this immediately.
- Staff should be more empowered to deal with issues and have the information on the questions that customers ask on a regular basis available to them.
- Staff need to be fully aware of the information contained in the Leaseholder and Tenants handbooks.
- Administrative support for Neighbourhood/Asset Management should be given. Staff are spending more time on admin rather than dealing with the main issues affecting customers. It may help to employ a part-time Neighbourhood Officer and Asset Management Officer to assist the current Officers and/or assistant.
- A permanent receptionist could be employed who will be at the front desk at all times. All calls initially go to him/her and he/she fields the call to the relevant member of staff. The receptionist will have access to all members of staff diaries and will be able to advise customers if a certain member of staff is out on site, on holiday, of sick etc and take messages etc. A receptionist could be responsible for the opening and logging of post, dealing with any postal queries that do not need further investigation by a Neighbourhood officer or Asset Management etc. She/he could also be responsible for checking the Customer Services Inbox everyday and respond to simple e-mail requests.
- Managing expectations of customers is key. The idea of under promising and over delivering may be the way forward.
- As the ground floor is open plan, screens could be installed to make areas more private and can muffle telephone calls/conversations.

### **Complaints & compliments**

- If compensation is payable due to an error on the part of Morrisons or Smyth & Byford then they should be responsible for the compensation payable.
- Rosebery should be firmer in their approach when dealing with complaints. If the complaint is as a result of the customer not taking care of their home, or as a result of the customer's actions then Rosebery should not back down.

### **The Future**

There is a Customer Service Excellence award that Rosebery should be aspiring to work towards in the foreseeable future. There is absolutely no reason why Rosebery cannot achieve this as it is evident Rosebery are committed in trying to set a high standard of services.

### **Conclusion**

The mind set of customers needs to be changed to show that Rosebery do promote good work – this would improve customer satisfaction. Many customers feel *"it is a waste of time calling Rosebery as nothing ever happens"*, *"they do not fulfil promises"* or *"they don't feel the love"*

- ❖ The website needs to be continually up-dated and forms made available to download.
- ❖ The Customer Service Standards needs to be up-dated and reference made to modern communication methods.
- ❖ Methods of communicating with customers need to be adapted. A workable logging system of letters needs to be implemented to ensure that no letters are overlooked. Standard letters also need to be set up.
- ❖ The telephone system needs to be used to its full potential for example giving information about Rosebery in the holding message.
- ❖ Staff need to have the resources such as smart phones to be able to keep abreast of all e-mails being sent to them. It may be that e-mails are sent to one central place and then followed to the relevant staff member/team so that personal e-mail addresses are not bogged down with requests that could easily be dealt with quickly by another member of staff/department.
- ❖ Changes to some of the systems in place need to be made to allow staff to work more efficiently and not being bogged down with admin which should be undertaken by support staff who are experienced in this area. The IT software will need to be looked at to allow staff to be able to work more efficiently.

Customer views and satisfaction needs to be continually monitored to prevent a further decline in the future. It allows you to address issues/weakness as and when arise rather than waiting for the three year survey.

Partnerships should be strengthened and followed up for example on the "Walk about Talk Abouts", the Neighbourhood Officer reports the issue to another agency and then follow this up to make sure it is done and report to the customer.

## APPENDIX 1

### Reception

- (i) A fresh coat of paint on the walls.
- (ii) A ding dong mat/bell is installed so that staff is aware when visitors have arrived, unless a receptionist is employed.
- (iii) There is a member of staff sitting at reception at all times
- (iv) A screen be installed on the reception desk so that confidentiality is maintained at all times and also staff/receptionist would feel safer.
- (v) The kitchen is removed and the space be used as a children's area.
- (vi) Posters & leaflets are up-dated and kept up-dated on a regular basis. This could be undertaken by the Comms Officer. Weekly checks by the Customer Services Team to ensure that the leaflets and posters displayed are still relevant and reported to the Comms Officer if not.
- (vii) Stationary is to hand so that members of staff do not have to go back to their desk for envelopes, calculators, pens etc.
- (viii) The computer available for use by customers should be moved and made more private. There is clear signposting to the mutual exchange websites, such as "Homeswapper", Direct Gov, Epsom & Ewell Council website, CAB and also Opportunity Store.
- (ix) A flat panel TV installed on one of the walls, which shows a wide range of information
- (x) Positive images of the estates need to be shown (could be shown on the TV).
- (xi) Phone is clearly labelled and instructions on how to use it.
- (xii) Debt/Benefits advice is prominent
- (xiii) Clearly promote methods of payment (could be shown on the TV)
- (xiv) Promote available garages (could be shown on the TV)
- (xv) Ensure staff availability on Mondays as Mondays is the busiest days.
- (xvi) Signpost to other Epsom based agencies especially for income advise (could be shown on the TV)
- (xvii) Staff structure chart made up to date. This should be checked by the Comms officer/Customer Services Manager every time there is a change in the staff structure.
- (xviii) Toilets are regularly checked to ensure it is clean and tidy.

### Interview rooms

- (i) One of the interview rooms should be made to feel less formal than the other. It needs to be made to feel more comfortable. A smaller table and more comfortable chairs to be placed in the room.
- (ii) Walls in both rooms are cleaned up and given a coat of paint.
- (iii) Posters/pictures are put up.
- (iv) Some leaflets/pamphlets about benefits etc kept in room so that this information is to hand
- (v) Panic alarms installed in both
- (vi) Language line information needs to be clearly advertised.