

whg Customer Scrutiny Panel

Review of Repairs

February 2017

1. Introduction

- a) The Customer Scrutiny Panel chose to carry out a review of the repairs service; this is the Panel's second review. The reasons for the Panel's choice are as follows:
 - Repairs is the most important and most frequently used service for customers
 - Customers' main concerns usually relate to the time taken to complete repairs
 - The Panel were concerned that the rent cut and associated budget reductions may have an adverse impact on the speed and quality of the service
 - During the Panel's first review, they identified concerns regarding the tailoring of services to meet vulnerable customers' needs and wanted to look at this in more detail in relation to the repairs service

- b) The Panel decided to confine their review to the following key lines of enquiry:
 - Does whg take too long to complete repairs?
 - How flexible is whg's repairs service in meeting the diverse needs of customers?

2. Activities completed

- a) The review was carried out between May and December 2016. During that time, the Panel undertook a range of evidence gathering activities, as shown below:
 - The Panel received an initial presentation from senior managers
 - A range of research tasks were completed, including a desk top review of whg's performance and an internet based search for positive practices from other housing associations
 - Panel members spent a significant amount of time shadowing and observing colleagues, including Customer Services Advisors (CSAs), repairs planners, trades and stores colleagues
 - Interviewed relevant colleagues

3. Main findings: strengths

a) Customer experience

- All repairs are now completed by appointment
- Trades colleagues are now responsible for a geographical area, which promotes ownership
- whg is sending confirmation and reminder text messages to customers booking an appointment; although there have been some teething problems
- Information about repairs responsibilities was featured in the 'Round Your Way' customer magazine and is displayed on whg's website ('How to report a repair')
- whg's website contains useful 'Repairs Tips' films
- All whg colleagues that the Panel members met were customer-focused
- All repairs colleagues have undertaken customer service training and recent refresher equality and diversity training called 'Equally Yours'

b) Policy and practice

- Comprehensive repairs scripts are in place through Keyfax; contact centre shadowing and observations revealed that these are used mainly by Customer Service Advisors to book a repair
- Repair scripts are tailored to each type of repair to ensure that jobs are allocated to trades colleagues and prioritised correctly
- The repair scripts are written by Technical scripting colleagues in conjunction with repairs colleagues
- There is increasing use of mobile technology to support trades colleagues and improve efficiency

c) Performance

- On average, whg completes repairs within category target times
- whg has reduced the operational target for a routine appointment from 31 days to 26 days and has a target to reduce to 25 days by 31 March 2017 - the intention is to reduce the target further to 21 days by March 2018
- Response time for urgent repairs (3 days) compares favourably with other similar associations

d) Value for money

- Given that colleagues are allocated a geographical area that they cover, there should be efficiency gains because of travelling less (therefore less down time and lower fuel costs) and better knowledge of the properties (which may lead to improvements in Right First Visit performance)
- 'No access' rates for 2016 decreased by 639 compared to 2015 levels
- Property MOT's are a new service that are being run alongside tenancy services visits - Tenancy Services' colleagues refer properties with 3 or more repairs over to the repairs team to conduct a Property MOT (recorded repairs will then either be scheduled in or completed on the day)

4. Main findings: areas for improvement

a) Customer experience

- There is limited flexibility in repair appointment times offered; the majority are office opening days and times with only some Saturday morning appointments, which are not advertised to customers. There are no plans for whg to offer repair appointments in the evenings and at the weekend.
- The Panel found no evidence that the repairs service is systematically tailored towards the customer's needs. However, it is acknowledged that whg is working towards improvements in customer profiling through project Dovetail.
- There are no arrangements in place for follow-on appointments. For example, one customer was informed by a trades colleague that they required a follow-on appointment and that they would raise it. However, this was not done and the customer called whg to enquire about the follow-on appointment. There was no record of a follow-on appointment, therefore a new appointment had to be raised.
- Customers are not clear whether they are being offered a repairs appointment or inspection appointment, when reporting a programmed repair. This is not always explained clearly at the point of enquiry.
- The current repairs scripts are not totally customer-focused or flexible enough to meet the needs of specific customers e.g. the vulnerable. For example, one frail elderly customer who had reported heating problems received a 3 day urgent appointment.

However, she was so cold that she had to stay with her daughter until the issue had been resolved.

- Repair scripts are only effective if they are used correctly and if the customer's repair issues are fully understood. For example, a downstairs window that would not shut and was a significant security risk was booked under 'would not lock', which resulted in a routine rather than an urgent job being raised.
- The Scrutiny Panel members have experienced the following issues with the repair SMS text messaging: no reminders; multiple text reminders; and after the job has been completed the customer has had 3 texts telling them that the trade is on their way.
- Text messaging service is still not working for some customers. For example, a customer called to say the text they had received stated the gas engineers were outside; they were not and had not been. The Customer Services Advisor phoned through to the Planners who checked and said it was a "glitch with the system" – the gas engineers are 5 minutes away. The customer was unhappy with the text message error.
- Customers that do not have a mobile phone, or that have not informed whg of their mobile number, are not sent a confirmation letter. However, customers reporting a repair at a whg office get an appointment card and customers requesting a repair online get a confirmation email.
- Trades colleagues don't let customers know when they are running late, or early, or if they will not arrive until towards the end of the appointment slot; but they would phone the planner so they can amend the diary and update the customer.
- 3 out of 6 calls observed in the Contact Centre involved a vulnerable customer (evidenced by seeing the on-screen prompt); but the prompt did not result in the Customer Services Advisor asking the customer if their vulnerability was adversely affected by the repair.
- Interviews with senior officers revealed that customers are not aware of the reduction in the routine repairs appointment target.
- Although customers have been involved in repairs improvement projects in the past, there are no current repairs service improvement projects involving customers.

All the customer experiences that were identified during shadowing and observations in the contact centre are set out in **Appendix A**.

b) Policy and practice

- The process for trades' colleagues calling the Planners to arrange a follow-up repairs appointment with the customer before they leave is not consistent. Due to resource constraints, the trades' colleagues can't always get through so end up calling the Planners after they have left the customer, which is not customer-focused and occasionally leads to follow-up repairs appointments not being made

c) Performance

- 304 customers were dissatisfied with responsive repairs (April to October 2016), of which 172 (57%) stated that it took too long to complete repairs. This trend is repeated over the previous two financial years (55% in 2015/16 and 65% in 2014/15)
- The average routine repair timescales for benchmarked HAs are 22.31 days, which is quicker than WHG's target of 1 calendar month

d) Value for money

- There were 13% (2,581) cancelled work orders and 8% (1,777) works orders where there was 'no access' to the property during Quarter 3 of 2016/17, which wastes money, time and resources. whg have not benchmarked this performance or reviewed the reasons for this to inform an approach to reduce these numbers
- Panel members identified examples of service inefficiencies through shadowing in the contact centre. For example, one customer required repairs to their fascia and guttering, for which an inspection was required. However, because two different trades were involved, two appointments were made: one for Tuesday 18 October and the other for Monday 7 November. The customer understood, but did question the logic requiring two separate inspections and two separate repairs, which will result in at least four separate visits.

5. Recommendations

Recommendation	Expected benefit
5.1 Customer experience	
a) Ask customers “How is this affecting you?” when they report a repair (to be included within all repair scripts)	This will help identify any issues, risks or vulnerabilities that need to be taken into consideration when prioritising a repair
b) Ensure all Customer Service Advisors receive training on the level of discretion they can use when booking a repair’s appointment through the scripts	
c) Explore the possibility of extending repair appointments to evenings and weekends – meeting the needs of customers that work or are not available during normal working hours	These will improve the customer experience and reduce dissatisfaction
d) Clearly explain to customers what a pre-inspection is and what will happen	
e) Take steps to remind customers about their repairs responsibilities and to respect their property and neighbours	
f) Ensure school run repair appointments are completed by 2.30pm in time for the customer to pick up their child(ren)	
g) Inform customers when they report a repair that should a cancellation occur their appointment maybe brought forward	
h) Book follow-on appointments there and then with the customer when a repair cannot be completed at the first visit	

i) To take steps to address any problems relating to repair appointment SMS text messages, i.e. no reminders, multiple reminders, reminder when job has been completed	
j) Ensure that all customers receive repairs' confirmations	
k) Ensure that all trades colleagues contact customers if they are running late for an appointment	
5.2 Policy and practice	
a) Replace the current responsive repairs appointment timescales with emergency repairs (same day) and all other repairs are by appointment agreed with the customer, with a greater focus on reducing the average time to complete a repair	This will simplify the approach to repairs for customers
5.3 Performance	
a) Review scripts to ensure repairs are correctly diagnosed	This will increase the number of repairs resolved at the first visit
b) Advertise the reduction in the routine repairs appointment target time to customers and strive to reduce this to 21 days by March 2018	This will show customers that repairs are being completed quicker
5.4 Value for money	
a) Take steps to significantly reduce the number of cancelled repairs and to maximise right first visit performance	This will improve the efficiency of the repairs service
b) Explore the possibility of re-charging customers who continually miss their repair appointments or when whg discover a property has been damaged or neglected by the customer	This will recover costs and discourage customers from missing repair appointments

6. Concluding remarks and learning points

- a) The repairs service is the most important and most frequently used service for customers. The Customer Scrutiny Panel is interested in ensuring that whg takes steps to ensure it delivers a positive customer experience to all customers requesting a repair to their home, especially the vulnerable. As a result, the Panel has set out recommendations in section 5 above, which it believes will help whg to achieve this.
- b) The Customer Scrutiny Panel requests that whg colleagues provide an action plan that addresses its recommendations, to be produced no later than 2 weeks following the Board meeting in March 2017.
- c) The Customer Scrutiny Panel would like to thank all of whg's colleagues who supported their review by attending meetings, providing information and demonstrating how the service works.
- d) The Customer Scrutiny Panel would also like to thank the previous members of the panel who contributed towards this review.
- e) The Panel would like whg to publish their findings, along with an action plan, on the website and in the 'Round Your Way' customer magazine.

Appendix A: Issues identified during contact centre shadowing

1. Contact centre: 6 October 2016

- 3 out of the 6 calls involved a vulnerable customer (evidence from the on-screen prompt) but these were not used to ask the customer if their vulnerability affected their repair
- A customer required repairs to her fascia and guttering; they required an inspection that involves two trades (plumbing and carpentry) so two appointments were required. Two appointments were made, but one for Tuesday 18 Oct and the other for Monday 7 November. The customer understood but questions the logic of this as this might involve four visits to resolve it
- Customer informed by the trades colleague that they required a follow-on appointment and that he'll raise this – this was never done – customer called to chase follow-on appointment – no records of this, so a new appointment had to be raised for 2-3 working days' time because of the failure to make this appointment

2. Contact centre: 25 October 2016

- Took 5 repeated jobs of the same toilet blockages over 8 weeks before whg sent out a contractor to investigate
- Customer required a new radiator. A pre-inspection was carried out, then first radiator was the wrong type; the next visit they didn't bring any radiator. Two wasted visits for the customer. Customer told she needed to get a small heater "to take off the chill".
- Frail elderly woman with heating issues was given an urgent 3 day appointment, but the property was so cold she was having to stay at her daughters home

3. Contact centre: 28 October 2016

- Customer called in to report fly-tipping in the block. Customer was deaf but this vulnerability was not captured on the system, so CSA not aware of this. Very poor service for the customer
- Vulnerabilities on the screen could be better highlighted
- IT issue on customer's profile so repairs jobs cannot be booked. She was not called back and Planners could not raise a job on Opti-Time. Could not be raised manually
- CRM has not been updated properly so this affected the CSA and meant the customer was on hold for a long period

- Follow-on appointment was not raised by the Planner (they forgot to raise it). This was then raised with SOS but this job was delayed for a further 24 hours
- Poor communication between colleagues, which does not support the work of the Customer Services Team, which ultimately affects the service to the customer.
- Again, the Planners hadn't raised a follow-on appointment for the customer – these were written on a pad
- CSAs are so busy they don't always fully capture the enquiry or get it right