



# ***Nottingham City Homes***

## **Customer Services Strategy**

**2016-2019**

This is a Nottingham City Homes Group wide strategy and its contents apply to any subsidiary company within the Nottingham City Homes Group, incorporating but not exclusive to Nottingham City Homes Registered Provider Limited (NCH RP), a company limited by guarantee which is Registered Provider and is regulated by the Regulator; and Nottingham City Homes Enterprises Limited (NCH Enterprises), a company limited by shares. References to Nottingham City Homes / NCH in the strategy refer to the group as a whole.

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## Introduction

Nottingham City Homes Group prides itself in putting customers at the heart of everything it does. We want to continue to provide the highest quality service which delights our customers, consistently exceeding their expectations, in the home, on their estates or when using their preferred method of contact. We will seek innovative ways of delivering this in challenging financial and social circumstances.

This strategy will seek to bring about a genuine cultural change around customer service in NCH so that it is evidently second nature to all of our employees - a "this is the NCH way" attitude. We will make sure we have the right people with the right skill set and attitudes, who are empowered to make the right decisions in the best interest of our customers. Managers will be held accountable for the performance of their team in relation to customer service standards. This excellent customer experience will support first rate delivery wherever we provide a service to customers.

We will make use of technological opportunities and advancements wherever they assist us in achieving our customer service goals. We will be realistic and accept that some technological solutions may be cost prohibitive for us, but will aim to be using technology to achieve the same as the best in the sector.

We want our customers to have their needs resolved at first point of contact wherever possible. We will be inventive in helping our customers to use the right method of service for them in order to achieve this. Where necessary we will use initiatives to nudge them in the right direction to fulfil their and our needs. We will make sure the service we provide is quick and efficient but that we have the resource and skills to support our customers empathetically and with time where required.

**We will use our resources to produce efficient and insightful customer service which best serves the needs of the customer and the business.**

## Developing the strategy

The Customer Service strategy builds on our Corporate Plan 2015 – 18 which expresses our ambition to be among the top ten housing organisations nationally. Delivering excellent customer service is fundamental to this and the aims of this strategy fit with our corporate vision, goals and values. We have listened to our customers and their feedback to make sure our strategy delivers the services and standards that they expect. We have consulted with our tenant panels and incorporated their feedback into the strategy. Our tenants and leaseholders will benchmark the service they receive from NCH against other suppliers that they are customers of i.e. their phone provider, utility company or bank and we will look beyond our own sector to make sure we are offering service which measures up to – or exceeds - these in the eyes of our customers.

The Customer Service strategy supports and has interdependencies with other NCH Group strategies in order to deliver against our corporate goals.

## Context

Nottingham City Homes was set up in 2005 as an arm's length management organisation (ALMO) to manage the council's housing stock. We manage over 26,000 social rented homes and more than 1,000 leasehold properties, the largest landlord in the East Midlands.

Since our creation as an ALMO we have transformed in terms of our culture, service and performance. NCH is a key strategic partner of the city council, working to help deliver the city's housing aspirations, positioned to take a much broader role within the city than simply deliver our core business. By April 2015 we had delivered £200m worth of investment in council housing on behalf of the city council – on time, and to budget, through our Secure Warm Modern programme. This is more than just improving the quality of our homes – it's about improving the quality of life for tenants and their families and for the communities we serve.

Since the recent creation of Registered Provider and market rented subsidiary companies, the NCH group is positioned to deliver wider benefits for the people of Nottingham through the homes that can be offered. The services provided by the group will help meet the needs of people living in the increasingly diverse City of Nottingham as we look to the future.

## National context

- **Customer expectations and digital transformation** – the way in which customers interact with companies is changing dramatically. The Customer Contact Association Research Compendium 2014/15 reports that 66% of the UK population own a smart phone, using it for nearly 2 hours a day to browse the internet and access social media. 54% of UK households now have a tablet – up from just 2% in 2011. The scale and pace of this change and the choices businesses have to make regarding which innovation to adopt and where to invest can lead to digital disruption rather than digital transformation. As customers become increasingly familiar with different methods of service delivery in other aspects of their lives, so they will expect services from across our group to match those other experiences.

However, regardless of the channel used, consumers put continuing importance on factors such as the time taken to respond to their contact. In addition, the Institute of Customer Service UK Customer Satisfaction Index 2015, reports that organisations' ability to deal efficiently with problems and complaints is a key differentiator between high and low performance. We need to consider carefully where we focus our resources to meet customers' growing expectations without losing sight of their core requirements. We need to manage our own high expectations of ourselves, accepting that we aren't Amazon or Google and can't deliver digital services to their standards. We should take heed of the fact that only 17% of organisations surveyed by the Customer Contact Association (CCA) reported that their current technology infrastructure was fit to support their digital transformation ambitions.

- **Welfare reform** - the government's welfare reforms are wide ranging, and will inevitably have an impact on many of our current and future customers. The introduction of Universal Credit will result in a significant increase in customer contact as the vast majority of our tenants will now have to liaise with us directly to make their rent payments. We will need to work more closely with our customers to assist them in budgeting but still expect to see the amount of rental income we are able to collect to fall. We will need to promote a "Rent First" culture and make sure that collection of rent and offering tenancy sustainment support is our primary focus, taking opportunities presented by customer service contacts to clarify, check and promote this.

- **Social Housing Changes** - A number of changes have been recently proposed (in the 2015 Budget and the Housing and Planning Bill 2015-16<sup>1</sup>) that will cumulatively have a significant impact on the resources NCH has available, and the service that we offer. The 1% compulsory rent reduction announced in the Budget will of course lower the rents our customers pay, but it will also reduce the income available to provide services to help them with the challenges they face. The Housing and Planning Bill is before Parliament at the time of writing this strategy, but it seeks to introduce some measures that will reduce security of tenure, increase rents for certain households (so called "pay to stay"), and a requirement to sell "high value" council homes when they become empty. Should these proposals become law, we would anticipate an increase in customer contact with queries and concerns. The end of lifetime tenancies is likely to result in a higher turnover of customers than currently experienced, requiring us to regularly establish and re-establish relationships with customers to ensure we are providing tailored services to suit their needs.

- **Public Service Reform** – Central government sees customer service quality as being driven by rising public expectations, but also sees this as a way of finding more efficient ways to deliver services, helping to reduce costs whilst still ensuring service quality. Speaking in 2015 about public service reform, Cabinet Minister Rt Hon Matthew Hancock MP stated:

*“And to those who say that because we’ve made savings, there are no more to find, just look at what’s happening in the world around us. You can now set up a direct debit, book a flight, find a flat, or do your weekly shop at a time and place of your choosing, without being put on hold, without having to queue, without being passed from pillar to post, without having to pay people commission, without having to like it and lump it if the service isn’t up to scratch.*”

*“Technology marches on. The businesses that have thrived in an online age have done so not just by winning on quality and price, but on choice and convenience too.”*

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/lbill/2015-2016/0087/lbill\\_2015-20160087\\_en\\_1.htm](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/lbill/2015-2016/0087/lbill_2015-20160087_en_1.htm)

## Local context

- **Increased efficiency** – the increasing demands on resources means that we have to deliver more with less. All service areas at NCH have seen their budget reduced for 2016/17 and we anticipate annual cuts for the foreseeable future. The brunt of these cuts will be felt in staffing resource and we will need to take a joined up approach to delivering customer service across the business, multi-skilling staff to handle generalist queries across a range of subjects.
- **Internal reorganisation** - At time of writing, the NCH Customer Service team is being reorganised to become Customer Experience. Customer Insight will now sit within this team offering a rounded approach to delivering exceptional tailored services to our customers. The Head of Customer Experience will be the corporate lead in ensuring the business delivers exceptional customer service across all of the services we provide.
- **CRM** – our new CRM system, launched in early 2016, will be the primary tool for customer insight and improving delivery of tailored services to customers. Over the lifetime of this strategy, embedding the system across the entire organisation, so its use becomes a way of life for our staff and delivers efficiencies, will be critical.

### **CRM – Customer Relationship Management**

CRM helps us to establish a 360 degree view of our customers – their preferences and requirements, their interactions with us and important information such as the current balance on their rent account. Staff will be able to take all of this information into account whenever they come into contact with a customer and offer the right service based on this snapshot. It will help us to record interactions with our customers and gather data to achieve efficiencies – for example we'll be able to see how many of the 400,000 calls received by the Customer Service Centre each year are avoidable – so we can take the right action to reduce these unnecessary calls and make sure every contact adds

- **Institute of Customer Services (ICS) Membership and ServiceMark Accreditation** – NCH have become members of ICS, who will support us in delivering our Customer Service objectives, offering training opportunities, events and benchmarking services. We will work to achieve their ServiceMark accreditation, a nationally recognised standard confirming excellent customer service delivery.

- **Demographic Change** – Nottingham has a younger age profile than the regional or English average, it is also an ethnically diverse city<sup>2</sup>. These demographic changes present challenges, since it is known from our customer service quality surveys that customers in younger age groups often score service quality at lower levels<sup>3</sup>. As our customer profile changes in line with these local trends we will wish to retain high levels of satisfaction.
- **Nottingham City Council** - is ambitious for Nottingham and sets high standards for service quality in the Council Plan<sup>4</sup>. The NCH group seeks to play our part in delivering such standards to city residents as part of NCH's contribution to ensuring that residents benefit from high quality services.
- **Meeting the City's Housing Needs** – the creation of subsidiary companies and the formation of the NCH group allows us to respond to wider housing need and demand in the city. NCH will be able to provide a broader housing offer aimed at residents who are not necessarily able to qualify for the allocation of social housing.

## What does customer service mean to NCH?

We want all employees of NCH to see delivering excellent customer service as a fundamental of their role in line with our values:

- Passionate about **D**elivering outstanding services
- **R**espectful towards our colleagues, our customers, and our communities
- Always looking for ways to **I**mprove
- Keen to provide great **V**alue for money
- An **E**ffective team, working with each other, our customers and our partners

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<sup>2</sup> Source: 2011 Census – for more information see [www.nottinghaminsight.org.uk/f/85866/Library/Community-and-Living/2011-Census/](http://www.nottinghaminsight.org.uk/f/85866/Library/Community-and-Living/2011-Census/)

<sup>3</sup> Source: NCH STATUS (customer satisfaction) surveys

<sup>4</sup> Nottingham City Council, The Council Plan 2015-2019  
<http://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=56926&p=0>

Our values define the way we work, set out who we are as an organisation and shape customer expectations. Our values DRIVE our culture.

Our customers can therefore expect to be delighted with the service they receive from us. This applies to any subsidiary company of NCH and will be shared with our contractors and our expectations of them made clear. Customers see NCH as one company, whether they phone our Customer Service Centre, e-mail us, tweet us or have a face to face interaction with us. Anyone who has contact with customers under the NCH brand is accountable for the service they deliver.

We will ensure that our work is of high quality and that we keep our promises, doing what we say we will and when we say we will. The work of every member of staff at NCH ultimately leads to a customer and all colleagues will recognise that they are a core component in delivering exceptional customer service. We will work together – both staff who are customer facing and those who aren't – to deliver a seamless service to our customers.

## **Our customer service ethos and objectives**

Our Customer Service objectives reflect our values and have been refined and updated from those we identified in our 2012 – 15 Strategy.

**Our customer service objectives are:**

- 1. Deliver right first time services supported by an exceptional customer experience**
- 2. Offer tailored contact options based on customer preference and business need**
- 3. Use customer data intelligently to provide personalised services**
- 4. Put customers at the heart of setting and monitoring customer service standards**
- 5. Develop effective working partnerships that add value to our customers**

## **Key actions we will deliver against our objectives**

### **1. Deliver right first time services supported by exceptional customer experience**

- Deliver high standard services across the entire organisation that help us to achieve our aim to be in the top ten housing organisations nationally.
- Invest in 3 year membership of the Institute of Customer Services (ICS) and achieve ServiceMark accreditation.
- Review our out of hours repairs service provision and standards to make sure we are offering excellent service whenever it is required and that our customers have clear guidance with regards to emergencies and what they can expect from NCH.
- Deliver regular training and development courses in customer service, ensuring all staff have training or a refresher session at least every 2 years.
- Include customer service skills as a requirement for every role and assess these through the recruitment process to ensure we have the right people in posts to deliver our objectives.
- Develop customer service as a career path within the business.
- Use the single customer view provided by CRM to create processes that are efficient for the business and offer seamless service for the customer, for example, a customer ringing to report a repair will be given an opportunity to make a rent payment, or asked to speak to their rent account manager if they are in arrears.
- Use the CRM project as a springboard to ensure we are maximising efficiency, particularly in staffing resource, in order to provide solid, generalist support at first point of contact and transferring to specialists only when needed.
- Identify and review inefficient processes in order to remove waste and eliminate duplication on behalf of the customer.
- Invest in Work Force Management software for the CSC, to optimise our staffing resource and respond to peaks and troughs of customer demand.
- Celebrate National Customer Services Week annually with a programme of events that highlight and recognise excellent customer service delivered by NCH employees. Outstanding customer service will be recognised and celebrated throughout the year.

## **2. Offer tailored contact options based on customer preference and business need**

- Develop a range of robust self-service and assisted self-service options, direct customers towards these, and increase confidence in their use.
- Continue to develop our website to incorporate self-serve channels such as reporting repairs online and measure the success of these using the appropriate analytical tools.
- Procure and implement a new telephony system that provides us with data and information to allow us to increase productivity and improve the service we offer to customers. The system will have facilities such as web chat and video calls that we will develop and deliver where appropriate.
- Rationalise the number of published telephone numbers by which customers can contact NCH and ensure all queries can be dealt with or passed seamlessly to the right department for resolution at first contact.
- Further develop mobile working so all staff visiting customers for any reason can make the most of offering services to tenants in their own homes.
- Review our current customer contact targets across all channels and service areas to ensure they are fit for purpose for both the business and customers and stretch us to deliver continuous improvement.
- Develop and publish the agreed standards for customer contact which will be adopted across the business.
- Improve the quality of our written customer communication to make certain this is of high quality, consistent and correct.
- Ensure customers can use their preferred method of social media to contact us and that this is responded to quickly and effectively.
- Utilise our CRM system to reduce avoidable contact through more accurate collection and analysis of data to make sure customers make the right contact first time, every time.
- Build on our Responsible Tenant Reward Scheme, using nudge and incentive techniques to encourage behavioural change with regards to communication channels.
- Ensure we can map our customer journey from any point of contact and review this to make it as efficient and customer friendly as possible.

### **3. Use customer data intelligently to provide personalised services**

- Only collect information that is required to deliver our services efficiently and effectively. We will use CRM as a single business-wide repository to ensure that data is captured only once and re-used as required without duplication.
- Undertake a data cleansing exercise to confirm the data we hold on customers is both needed and correct and put in place a programme for regular review of customer data.
- Embed the use of CRM with all staff across the business using the system by 2018 to access a single customer view which provides key information to allow us to respond effectively to their queries and needs.
- Utilise our CRM system to record a customer's preferred method of contact and use this wherever possible. Where customers do not indicate a preference or ability to use a digital method of contact we will work with them to support them to shift to these channels where appropriate. We will use this data to tailor our services to meet individual customers' needs, both when the customer makes contact with us and when we are contacting them.
- Investigate recognition software so we can immediately personalise our response to incoming phone calls and messages.
- Work closely with the E&D team and use the E&D strategy to ensure we are providing the right service to our customers with protected characteristics and vulnerabilities.
- Review our data retention policy.

### **4. Put customers at the heart of setting and monitoring customer service standards**

- Use our surveying data and customer intelligence to listen to what our customers are telling us about the services they receive from NCH and use this information to improve the services we deliver.
- Explore alternative surveying options available to NCH, particularly those that allow customers to provide immediate feedback.
- Regularly analyse data from complaints and other customer feedback and deliver against learning outcomes. Managers will be held more closely accountable for the performance of their team and service area with regards to complaints received.
- Manage and respond to complaints effectively within our agreed process to reach a resolution with the customer at the first stage wherever possible. Review any

complaints that are escalated to the Tenant Complaint Panel to confirm we have taken all appropriate actions to meet their expectations and minimise the risk of any designated person finding NCH handled the complaint inappropriately.

- Support and develop the Tenant Complaint Panel in their role reviewing escalated complaints and providing feedback to NCH. Ensure that we listen to and learn from these tenant representatives and those of our other Panels, advising us on the expectations of our customers.
- Use our 3Cs process to collect comments and compliments – as well as complaints – from customers, share positive feedback and consider any suggestions received.
- As part of the cyclical review process for standard letters and communications, use feedback from customers and the Tenant Communications Panel to ensure our written communications use plain English and are in the best format for our customers.
- Review our 4\* promises regularly to make sure we are either delivering to a 4\* level, or putting the measures in place to do so, as determined by our Customer Excellence Panel (CEP).
- Ensure customer service is built into the programme of service reviews undertaken by CEP.
- Make it easy for customers to provide feedback, particularly through online forms on our website.

## **5. Develop effective working partnerships that add value to our customers**

- All service areas will work proactively to develop partnerships beyond NCH, attending networking events to ensure we have the right connections and information with which to support our customers. We will create and lead these collaborations where no such partnership currently exists.
- Ensure we have the links and networks in place to signpost or transfer customers who contact NCH for help but another provider would be best placed to assist them.
- Undertake partnership working at a neighbourhood and area level through, for example, multi-agency Neighbourhood Action Teams, to coordinate action which improves services and standards for customers on our estates.
- Benchmark and network with other organisations to make sure we learn from the best, both in our industry and beyond.
- Work closely with our partners in NCC Insurance and Risk to make sure compensation claims are investigated robustly and transparently.

- Work with NCC to support the delivery of their Customer Service Charter.
- Develop a plan to effectively market the services of the CSC so we can confidently promote our services, leading to successful tenders for work that generates sufficient income to be more than cost-neutral.
- Through networking and attendance at events, make sure we are well informed on cutting edge theories and techniques and well placed to develop these for NCH.

### **Nottingham On Call**

Nottingham On Call (NOC) offer a 24 hours per day, 365 days per year monitoring and response service to their customers and offer immediate help and support in the event of an emergency, providing reassurance and the confidence to keep living independently. The objectives and actions in this strategy support them in achieving their TSA performance indicators and service standards.

## **Resources**

The new Customer Experience Team will lead the business and support all areas in delivering excellent customer service. However, this responsibility is a shared one and must run throughout the entire organisation, with each individual and their managers being accountable for delivery. The Head of Customer Experience will work with colleagues to ensure that customer service is included in their Team Plans and resourced and monitored effectively.

We are entering a challenging period in terms of financial resources and it is therefore even more important that “the NCH way” ethos of delivering customer service is ingrained, shared and built into the day to day work of all of our staff. Many of our objectives can be delivered without incurring cost and with minimal impact on staff time if managed efficiently. Those areas that require expenditure such as the purchase and development of technology either have been or will be included in the Team Planning process.

## **Monitoring and reviewing the strategy**

This strategy and the aims and objectives for delivering customer service are overarching across the whole of NCH and as such overall responsibility for delivery of this strategy sits with the Board and Executive Management Team (EMT).

This strategy will be owned and adopted across all service areas of NCH and the Head of Customer Experience will monitor it and report on progress. The strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis and progress reported to EMT at this time as well as at regular intervals throughout the year. We will use internal communication channels to regularly report to staff on Customer Service initiatives and achievements.

We will report progress to our customers through our publications and communications such as NCH News. We will promote news and information with regards to customer service through social media, with a focused campaign during National Customer Services Week. We will consult with and report back to our tenant panels on customer satisfaction.

KPIs related to this strategy will be inputted into our performance management system, Covalent, and reports produced on a monthly basis to demonstrate performance against targets.

We will undertake benchmarking, both through our housing sector networks such as the Housing Quality Network and Housemark, and with other sectors through our membership of the ICS, to ensure we are offering services to our customers that are commensurate with both our resources and their expectations.

### **Key performance indicators**

The objectives and associated actions in this strategy will contribute towards the KPIs linked to our Corporate Plan, for example overall tenant satisfaction. With the fast paced changes in technology, many businesses are reviewing how they define and manage targets in relation to customer contact, particularly with regards to traditional methods of contact, such as telephony. We will take into account the value our customers place on telephone contact, whilst improving the service we offer via other channels to encourage them to utilise these.

Once we have baseline data available from the CRM system we will review our KPIs and implement a new suite of targets by October 2016.

We expect our new suite of customer service and satisfaction KPIs to include:

- Response times for telephone, e-mail, online and social media contacts, for all customer facing contacts which we receive
- Tenant satisfaction with helpfulness of staff
- Tenant satisfaction with ease of getting hold of the right person
- Number of self-service interactions completed via our website or automated systems
- Avoidable contact levels
- % of contacts received in the CSC that are resolved at the first point of contact
- Customer satisfaction with complaint resolution

We also expect to review and set targets for income generation and efficiencies achieved through consolidation of staff able to resolve customer queries at first point of contact.

## Key risks

Key risk	Management action to mitigate risks
<p><b>Failure to procure, implement and develop the required IT and technology to deliver our objectives</b></p>	<p>Regular review of progress against ICT developments detailed in the strategy.</p> <p>Close working with ICT team, through DMT meetings.</p> <p>Monitoring and reviewing of major projects at ICT Programme Board, Corporate Programme Board and CRM Project Board.</p>
<p><b>Failure to achieve channel shift and resulting efficiencies</b></p>	<p>NCH website delivery and development regularly reviewed with involvement of Customer Experience team.</p> <p>CRM development managed through CRM Project Board.</p> <p>Confirm baseline figures and benchmark regularly to review progress, taking action where required.</p>
<p><b>Failure to address and reduce levels of avoidable contact</b></p>	<p>Confirm baseline figures from CRM and monitor progress regularly, taking action on specific areas which are generating avoidable contact.</p>
<p><b>Customer Service culture not embedded across the organisation</b></p>	<p>Ensure customer service training is delivered to all front facing staff at least once every two years.</p> <p>Monitor complaints, record learning outcomes and take action to address these. Hold managers accountable for the performance of their service area and review this through attendance at DMT meetings.</p>
<p><b>Inability to deliver critical areas of this strategy due to budget or financial constraints</b></p>	<p>Regularly review budgets with Director of Housing Services and Assistant Director of Finance to ensure resources are prioritised appropriately through the PBB process.</p>

Document change history

Date	Version No.	Section/Page	Details of Change	Authorised by
04/07/16	1	All	New strategy for Customer services 2016-2018	Board, confirmed by J Storar 2 <sup>nd</sup> June 2016