

Report from Leeds Tenants Federation's second cross-tenure Mystery Shopping Project

Front and Back Office Communication on Resident Involvement

1.0 Background

Leeds Tenants Federation has developed and trained a team of residents from across tenures and social landlords to carry out Mystery Shopping inspections of housing services. This is the second project from this unique cross-tenure Mystery Shopping team.

The innovative aspect of this Mystery Shopping team is that it gives residents from different landlords the opportunity to inspect each other's service. It aims to challenge the expectations and perceptions of tenants, to raise the horizon on service standards and to disseminate good practice among housing providers by providing an independent and customer-led quality check.

2.0 Mystery Shopping Programme November to January 2006/07

The aim of the second cross-tenure mystery shopping project was to test communications between front and back office staff and the ability of front-line reception staff to provide information on a specialist areas of customer interest, in this case, resident involvement opportunities.

Leeds South Homes, Belle Isle Tenant Management Organisation and Connect Housing all agreed to take part in this test of standards. Each housing organisation taking part in the mystery shopping process undertook to consider the results of the process as part of its service improvement strategy. The housing organisations were given advance notice of the approximate time period in which the mystery shopping is to take place but did not have a detailed timetable.

3.0 Methodology

Leeds Tenants Federation's cross-tenure Mystery Shopping team visited the Leeds reception points for each organisation and contacted the main customer telephone number, requesting information on resident involvement. They said they were looking for a property and, having previous experience in residents groups, or focus groups, wanted more information about opportunities for participation with the housing organisation in that area. Specialist resident involvement officers from all

three organisations took part in planning the project. They specified the standard of response that should be received from each organisation and had an input into the questions to be asked. Leeds South Homes was inspected by residents from Connect Housing, Yorkshire Housing and Leeds East Homes. Connect Housing was inspected by residents from Leeds South and Leeds East Homes and Belle Isle TMO was inspected by residents from Connect and Leeds East Homes.

4.0 Executive Summary of Results

General Points

Reception staff at each of the three organisations were familiar with resident involvement, with the exception of one access point, and were able either to provide information on the subject themselves or put the customer through to a specialist officer. The issue of identity cards was raised by the Mystery Shopping team in their feedback, since individual shoppers had complained that ID cards were worn low on the chest, in a print size that made it difficult to see the name. It was the feeling of the Mystery Shoppers as a group that ID cards should feature at least the first name in large print and that the card itself should be worn higher on the chest. The aim of an ID card, they felt, was to show that the staff member was a representative of the organisation, to enable friendly discourse, and to enable the customer to identify a staff member in the case of complaints or compliments. They concluded that if the identity on the card was not clearly visible, the effect was as if no ID card was worn.

Leeds South Homes

Leeds South Homes performed very well in the inspection. Service at the three One Stop Centres was well-regarded and the reception service was praised. In most cases, the Mystery Shopper's enquiry was either referred efficiently to the back-office or their enquiry was dealt with to their satisfaction at the reception point. The specialist resident involvement officer was particularly praised for her enthusiasm. Only the inspection of the Morley Town Hall reported a less than satisfactory response to the enquiry on resident involvement. Suggestions for improvement in signage and identity cards were made and some points were raised on the telephone service at Navigation House.

Connect Housing

The reception service at Connect Housing was praised for its friendly atmosphere and staff were commended for being very polite and helpful. As in the first Mystery Shopping inspection, attention was drawn to the need to ensure all staff were wearing name badges. Reception staff did not refer the enquiry to the specialist officers but did give the customer information they found sufficient.

Belle Isle Tenant Management Organisation

In commissioning this Mystery Shopping, BITMO asked for checks to be made on front and back office communication on a range specialist subjects. We carried out

checks on resident involvement and on capital works. Staff were highly commended for their cheerful and helpful approach. The customers were offered appointments to explore their requirements in greater detail and reception staff were knowledgeable, friendly and efficient.

5.0 Future Mystery Shopping Projects

Leeds Tenants Federation welcomes Headrow Housing and Leeds West Homes as the newest housing organisations to join its Mystery Shopping programmes. After a Spring round of inspections we hope to start developing a range of quality checks with the seven housing organisations in the programme looking at repairs and anti-social behaviour services.

6.0 Details of Mystery Shopping responses

- Leeds South Homes reception and telephone service – page 6
- Connect Housing reception and telephone service – page 12
- BITMO reception and telephone service – page 15

7.0 Responses from participating housing organisations

Connect Housing

I would first like to thank the team of mystery shoppers for their efforts, which are much appreciated. I also would like express my support for the project of mystery shopping in partnership led by a tenant organisation, rather than a consultancy firm, which in my view gives the project added credibility.

The first mystery shopping exercise was fairly straightforward just requiring tenants to observe facilities and behaviours/attitudes of staff. In the second exercise we attempted to become more sophisticated in terms of testing service quality and service standards in a particular service area. The exercise was very useful, but I think a number of further refinement of the methodology should be considered.

I would like to make the following suggestions in view of refining the methodology:

- It would be useful if the mystery shopping form had stated what information the tenants did receive- because they would not have been able to judge if the information they received was misinformation or partial information.- i.e. by ticking items off the list given to mystery shoppers by specialist TP staff indicating what tenants should be able to expect.
- The form stated that staff did or did not pass the enquiry on to the back office- this in itself could have been a good thing, if they front line staff

themselves had been able to deal with the query fully or a bad thing if they did not. It would be helpful if this distinction was made more clearly on the form.

- It also would be useful for the specialist TP staff of the organisation that were mystery shopped to be invited to a debriefing with the mystery shoppers to help assess the quality of the information received further, so they can use the information gained to develop further training for front line staff.
- As a consumer of the report I would find it useful if a number of general recommendations were made for service improvements, not necessarily singling out a particular landlord, for example the general view that having fixed name badge with minimum font size may be one of these would be better. These recommendations could be one of the outcomes of the debriefing meetings and could then be included in the report.
- The stars are a good indication of standards allowing organisations to compare their services, but it would be good to have some sort of moderation between tenants arriving at their grading, for example if tenants were to arrive at the number of stars in discussion with each other, giving reasons for their decision to make results more comparable.

To conclude I think the project is very worth while and am interested in continuing the partnership work on mystery shopping in view of further refining the methodology used, particularly for purposes of service improvement and benchmarking.

Thank you

**Barbara Kempf,
Community Services Manager
Connect Housing**

Leeds South Homes

Overall we are very pleased with the results of our Mystery Shops. Not only has it boosted staff confidence and morale but it has also outlined a couple of areas we need to improve on which is a great help. Training has now been organised for the staff at the One Stop Centre in Morley to provide them with a wider knowledge of our Tenant Participation procedures and, new and clearer name badges have also been ordered for the staff at Rothwell.

I am personally disappointed that the one time I didn't give my name when the call was transferred from reception was the time I was Mystery Shopped! However, I will now never do that again so for me, this has been a very valuable and worth while exercise. I was pleased that the callers felt my enthusiasm for my role and I have to say that I very much enjoyed each conversation we had. They were all clear in their

questions, friendly and each ended the call appropriately and professionally. If only all tenants were like that!

Karen L Fletcher
Tenant Participation Officer
Leeds South Homes

Belle Isle Tenant Management Organisation

Belle Isle Tenant Management Organisation is delighted with the outcome of the survey. We have worked extremely hard to raise the standard of customer service and, given that we are a Tenant Management Organisation we place particular emphasis on resident involvement and are pleased that this is reflected in the survey results. We will however continue to work hard to maintain and improve our standards. As an Organisation we welcome the constructive criticism contained in the report and will take action to rectify areas which need attention. The fact that the survey is conducted by tenants is particularly important to us and we would like to thank LTF for offering Belle Isle Tenant Management Organisation the opportunity to take part.

Cath Gill
Board & Community Co-ordinator
Belle Isle TMO

Leeds South Homes

Leeds South Homes

Reception Service

Dewsbury Road One Stop Centre visited on 27 November 2006 at 9.30am

- The reception was staffed on arrival
- The Mystery Shopper was seen within two minutes
- The member of staff was wearing a name badge
- Staff were polite
- Staff were helpful
- Comment "Brilliant. What more can I say? She dealt with everything I asked for. She also gave me a list of private landlords in the area and the form to apply. Faultless.
- Staff were able to deal with the enquiry
- Staff passed the enquiry on to the back office or gave a direct contact number

Comment Resident Involvement Officer phoned same day

Ratings

Facilities and cleanliness at reception area

☆☆☆☆☆ 5 Stars (out of 5)

Comment "Best as yet. The place was immaculate"

Quality of Service

☆☆☆☆☆ 5 Stars (out of 5)

Comment "[Resident Involvement Officer – name supplied] was brilliant. Wanted to start a new group with me."

Reception Service

Rothwell One Stop Centre visited on 27 November 2006 at 9.30am

- The reception was staffed on arrival
- The Mystery Shopper was seen within two minutes
- Comment "The television was too loud " [A TV was playing in One Stop Centre].
- The member of staff was wearing a name badge
- Comment "Badges hung too low on their clothes – a pin or a clamp would be better."
- Staff were polite
- Staff were helpful
- Comment "Very polite and really, really helpful. Pulled out all the stops"
- Staff were able to deal with the enquiry
- Staff passed the enquiry on to the back office or gave a direct contact number
- Comment "They got books and papers from another room at the back of reception and talked to us for half an hour. We left with a carrier bag full of information."

Ratings

Facilities and cleanliness at reception area

☆☆☆☆☆ 5 Stars (out of 5)

Quality of Service

☆☆☆☆☆ 5 Stars (out of 5)

- Comment "This was the easiest Mystery Shop we had done and we were made to feel very welcome."

Reception Service

Morley Town Hall visited on 19 January 2006 at 11.45 am

- The reception was staffed on arrival
- The Mystery Shopper was seen within two minutes

Comment "There was a sign outside that said 'Leeds South Homes via Contact Leeds'. But inside the reception desk was labelled 'Contact Leeds'. I walked around looking for some indication that it was Leeds South Homes until a member of staff told me she dealt with it. It was not clear it was Leeds South Homes and I felt it confusing not to see a sign inside as well."

- The member of staff was wearing a name badge

Comment "Badges were worn swinging around but could not read them because of the text size"

- Staff were polite
- Staff were helpful

Comment "Very polite and helpful"

- Staff were not able to deal with the enquiry
- Staff did not pass the enquiry on to the back office or give a direct contact number

Comment "She provided me with correct information on applying for a property but was unsure about tenant involvement. I asked about tenants associations and asked to speak to someone about it but she brushed my enquiry aside. She obviously wasn't going to tell me or pass me on to anyone else so in the end I had to end the conversation."

Ratings

Facilities and cleanliness at reception area

☆☆☆☆ 4 Stars (out of 5)

Quality of Service

☆☆☆ 3 Stars (out of 5)

Comment "Very good at providing me with information about houses but didn't give me any information about tenant involvement and didn't pass me onto anyone who could deal with the enquiry."

Telephone Handling

[0113 2141916 The number promoted on LSh website] Phoned on 20 December 2006 at 13.30 pm

- The number was engaged twice
- The phone was answered promptly within about five rings
- The member of staff gave their name and the name of the organisation
- Staff were polite
- Staff were helpful
- Staff were able to deal with the enquiry
- Staff passed the enquiry on to the back office or gave a direct contact number

Comment "I was transferred to [name supplied – Tenant Participation Officer] a Senior Housing Officer. The Housing Officer came over as being very warm, very dynamic and very enthusiastic about her patch."

Rating – Quality of Service

☆☆☆☆☆ 5 Stars (out of 5)

Telephone Handling

[0113 2141916 The number promoted on LSh website] Phoned on 23 November 2006 at 15.20pm

- The Mystery Shopper got through first time
- The phone was answered promptly within 5 rings
- The member of staff gave their name and the name of the organisation
- Staff were polite
- Staff were helpful
- Staff were able to deal with the enquiry
- Staff passed the enquiry on to the back office or gave a direct contact number

Comment "First number not very good. Said I had to visit. Gave me another

number. This lady [name supplied] was very helpful.”

Rating – Quality of Service

☆☆☆☆ 4 Stars (out of 5)

Telephone Handling

[0113 2141916 The number promoted on LSh website] Phoned on 19 January 2007 at 9.45 am.

- The Mystery Shopper got through first time
- The phone was answered promptly within about five rings
- The Mystery Shopper was left on hold for less than two minutes
- Comment “She said ‘just hold on, I’ll put you through’ but didn’t explain why or who she was putting me through to”
- The member of staff gave their name and the name of the organisation
- Staff were polite
- Staff were helpful
- Staff were able to deal with the enquiry
- Staff passed the enquiry on to the back office or gave a direct contact number

Comment “When I was put through to [Name supplied} she had been told my name, but didn’t give me her name until I asked her. She was very enthusiastic and asked me if I wanted to help set up a tenants association and she did tell me about the area I said I wished to live in. When she told me her name, I told her that I was the Mystery Shopper without getting full information.”

Rating – Quality of Service

☆☆☆☆ 4 Stars (out of 5)

Connect Housing

Connect Housing

Reception Service

Connect Housing visited on 29 January 2006 at 11.00 am

- The reception was staffed on arrival
- The Mystery Shopper was seen immediately
- The member of staff was not wearing a name badge

Comment "There was a queue of two or three people before me but two other members of staff came forward and started seeing people. The member of staff behind the counter had a badge slung on a chain. The one who spoke to me did not have a badge"

- Staff were polite
- Staff were helpful

Comment "She was very nice and helpful. Really polite"

- Staff were able to deal with the enquiry
- Staff did not pass the enquiry on to the back office or give a direct contact number

Comment "I asked about tenant involvement but she didn't understand my enquiry at first. But then when I explained further she offered to get me contact details and offered to arrange for me to speak to someone to find out more information. I was satisfied with this response"

Ratings

Facilities and cleanliness at reception area

☆☆☆☆☆ 5 Stars (out of 5)

Comment "The reception area was cosy. It was covered with leaflets, and like a community centre really - there was a nice friendly atmosphere"

Quality of Service

☆☆☆☆ 4 Stars (out of 5)

Comment "Very polite, helpful and nice."

Telephone Handling

Phoned on 8 December 2006 at 1.00 pm

- The Mystery Shopper did not get through first time
- The Mystery Shopper was kept on hold for less than 1 minute
- The phone was answered promptly within 5 rings
- The member of staff gave their name and the name of the organisation
- Staff were polite
- Staff were helpful
- "He was very polite and helpful"
- Staff were able to deal with the enquiry
- Staff did not pass the enquiry on to the back office or give a direct contact number

Comment "But did explain that if I got a tenancy I could join a focus group that was held at Connect and get to meet people and learn more about the area. If this had been a genuine call I would have been satisfied with that information"

Rating – Quality of Service

☆☆☆☆ 4 Stars (out of 5)

Comment "I'd never put 5 stars because no one is ever perfect are they?"

Belle Isle Tenant Management Organisation

Belle Isle Tenant Management Organisation

Reception Service

BITMO Office visited on 5 December 2006 at 9.00 am

- The reception was staffed on arrival
- The Mystery Shopper was seen within two minutes
- The member of staff was wearing a name badge

Comment "Badges on but not visible – i.e. wrong way round"

- Staff were polite
- Staff were helpful
- Staff were able to deal with the enquiry
- Staff passed the enquiry on to the back office or gave a direct contact number

Comment "Made an appointment for 13 December and gave me a card with a number on" [Appointment cancelled by Mystery Shopper]

Ratings

Facilities and cleanliness of reception area

☆☆☆ 3 Stars (out of 5)

Quality of service

☆☆☆☆ 4 Stars (out of 5)

Reception Service

BITMO Office visited on 5 December 2006 at 9.10 am

- The reception was staffed on arrival
- The Mystery Shopper was seen immediately

Comment "Very polite, happy and nice to talk to. Very helpful"

- The member of staff was wearing a name badge

Comment "Unable to see name"

- Staff were polite
- Staff were helpful
- Staff were able to deal with the enquiry
- Staff passed the enquiry on to the back office or gave a direct contact number

Comment "After being informed that Belle Isle is run by tenants, the lady gave me a BITMO Welcome Pack that is very informative and complete with telephone and email contact information. The lady offered to make me an appointment to see someone if I wished. There was no need. The lady dealt with my enquiry."

Ratings

Facilities and cleanliness of reception area

☆☆☆☆ 4 Stars (out of 5)

Quality of service

☆☆☆☆☆ 5 Stars (out of 5)

Comment "They were nice people – they were 'people' people – not just sat behind a counter pushing paper about"

Reception Service

BITMO Office visited on 26 January 2006 at 1.30pm

- The reception was staffed on arrival
- The Mystery Shopper was seen immediately
- Comment "Friendly and cheery staff"
- The member of staff was wearing a name badge
- Staff were polite
- Staff were helpful
- Staff were not able to deal with the enquiry
- Staff passed the enquiry on to the back office or gave a direct contact number

Comment "She gave us the name and contact number of the appropriate person to contact. He had a cheery voice, a pleasant manner and a good attitude"

Ratings

Facilities and cleanliness of reception area

☆☆☆☆ 4 Stars (out of 5)

Comment “A gloomy functional building. Plenty of leaflets available. Floral arrangement. Didn’t appear to be anything for children to read or play with but school pictures on the wall”

Quality of service

☆☆☆☆☆ 5 Stars (out of 5)

For more information on this report contact:

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