

No. 30: Access and customer care Key Lines of Enquiry Housing Inspectorate

This Key Line of Enquiry (KLOE) on access and customer care is part of a set of KLOEs produced by the Housing Inspectorate. To find out more about how KLOEs are used please read the KLOE guidance notes available from the Housing Inspectorate.

KLOEs represent sets of questions and statements around either service or judgement specific issues which provide consistent criteria for assessing and measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of housing services. These KLOEs are designed to provide inspectors, inspected bodies and others with a framework through which to view and assess services. In inspections, service specific KLOEs are used as a basis for assessing Judgement One on ‘How good is the service?’

There is a separate KLOE for Judgement Two of inspections on ‘What are the prospects for improvement?’ This KLOE covers the assessments made on visions and ambitions, track record, ability to learn, quality and effectiveness of plans, prioritisation, capacity to deliver improvements and performance management.

As well as those service-specific KLOES, we have written three cross-cutting KLOEs which give more detail on our expectations of organisations in terms of value for money, diversity and, in this case, access and customer care.

The Access and Customer Care KLOE is intended to cover the following areas;

- ◆ Corporate Culture and Governance**
- ◆ Access to the service**
- ◆ Information**
- ◆ Complaints**
- ◆ Consultation and feedback mechanisms**

KEY LINE OF ENQUIRY (KLOE)	AN ORGANISATION DELIVERING AN EXCELLENT SERVICE	AN ORGANISATION DELIVERING A FAIR SERVICE
<p>30.1 Corporate Culture and Governance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there clear and consistent leadership ensuring that the whole organisation has a clear customer focus? • Have service users and relevant stakeholders been involved in evaluating the service and determining standards and priorities for improvement? How have these priorities been disseminated? • Are external requirements – legislative or good practice being addressed? • Do the governance structures receive the reports necessary to judge whether the organisation is delivering on customer focus? • How does the organisation respond to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has an impressive and appropriate corporate approach to customer care that is very well understood throughout the organisation. There is a regular, consistent message and ethos that focuses on the customer. Has staff that all demonstrate user focus in their work, and who treat people with respect at all times. • Sets clear standards in consultation with customers for all aspects of customer service. Customer services and standards are regularly tested and monitored including by customers themselves in all sections of the organisation. • Regularly updates and reviews the approach in light of external and internal requirements. Training programmes on customer care are regularly updated and delivered to relevant staff. Experience and good practice is shared in an effective and structured way. • Knows what its strengths and weaknesses are in delivering a customer focussed service. It is taking appropriate actions to improve the areas where customer service standards are not high. Customers' views are taken into account when prioritising actions for improvement. • Has comprehensive reports supplying information and statistics on the quality of customer care in all parts of the organisation. Measures have targets or benchmarks. • Tells service users what will happen as a result of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has staff who generally have a reasonable approach to customer care, but examples of some staff providing an inconsistent approach to customer care. Individuals may have high standards, but it is not strongly enough part of the organisation's culture and customer care is therefore sometimes inconsistent. • Has some customer standards, some of these and some customer services are tested or monitored, but significant aspects of the service lack standards and monitoring. • Does not regularly update its approach and there is a lack of knowledge on external and internal requirements. While there is some good practice in the organisation this is not shared adequately. • Has only a partial knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses and few actions are taken in response to weaknesses. Customers' views do not have significant input into prioritising actions for improvement • Has few measures in reports. In some relevant areas, there are no targets or benchmarks. Explanations for different measures and outcomes are not always adequate. Many senior officers and board members or councillors are not aware of the relevant key issues. • Does not systematically tell service users how and when their enquiry/request will be dealt with, at the first point of contact. There may be an appointment

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service users?	their enquiry/request at the first point of contact, including outside normal office hours. Arranges the appropriate response, at a time to suit the service user, mainly by appointment.	system, but it is not service user-focussed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does advise some service users whether they are responsible for paying the cost of a service at the first point of contact, but not systematically.
<p>30.2 Access to the service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are customers easily able to contact the organisation by telephone, in person or via the internet? Have appropriate decisions been made on where to locate offices, at what times services are available and how to structure the service. Are customers aware of the services available and how and when to access them? Are services standards comprehensive and are customers aware of them? Can the organisation identify customers who are not accessing the service and is appropriate action being taken to remove barriers to access? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has services that are easily accessed through conveniently located offices, by telephone and internet and by visits to residents where appropriate. Makes it easy for residents to access the service by telephone, in person or electronically, including outside normal office hours – all of which are dealt with efficiently and effectively Has carried out a full analysis of the costs and benefits of the different means of accessing services and residents have been consulted. Has signs leading to offices and receptions that are clear and effective. Successfully publicises all methods of access along with opening times and arrangements for out-of-hours contact which are clear, and have been agreed following consultation with users. Has service standards that are realistic and challenging. Customers are aware of the standards, understand them and are informed on how well the organisation is meeting those standards. Can provide significant evidence that customer service is delivered to a high standard including a high level of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers a reasonable range of ways for service users to contact the service, but some are not as efficient and effective as others, therefore providing inconsistent service provision. Has many customers who do not find getting to the office convenient. The website is of limited use to access services and service users cannot easily contact staff by e-mail or telephone. May have carried out some cost benefit analysis and consultation on the means of accessing services, but has not used that information effectively. Has some offices that are not easy to locate. Has opening times and arrangements for out-of-hours contact that are either not clear and well publicised or have not been agreed following consultation with users. Has many customers who are not aware of the standards. Information on whether standards are being met is limited if it exists at all. Carries out little testing of customer services or the evidence that exists suggests that the service is below average quality. Has a small but significant proportion of staff or

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	<p>customer satisfaction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has staff and contractors that deal with customers who are professional, informative and polite. They are well trained and well supported by information technology to deliver an effective service. They are able to tell customers about relevant services in other organisations. • Offers a range of services and information via the internet and forms can either be downloaded or submitted on-line • Has information from surveys and databases that inform it of groups of customers who are not accessing the service as frequently as others. Action is taken to remove any barriers to accessing the service. 	<p>contractors who are not professional, informative and polite. Training while delivered is either very brief or inconsistent. Staff are not well supported by information technology.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has very little information available on customers who are not accessing the service and very little action is being taken to remove barriers to accessing the service
<p>30.3 Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the information provided to customers easy to read? Was it developed in consultation with customers and does it meet their needs and expectations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has front-line staff that demonstrate a wide range of knowledge about the full range of enquiries they receive or know who or how to access the necessary information to help service users. • Provides a variety of leaflets, posters, handbooks and other relevant information covering, all that customers reasonably need to know including for example, customer services, complaints, contact information, opening hours, approach to rent arrears and dealing with anti-social behaviour. • Provides all information in plain English and other formats required by customers (see diversity KLOE). These are easily available on paper and electronically on the website. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has front-line staff who demonstrate reasonable knowledge about many services, but have some gaps in the range of knowledge about the enquiries they are likely to receive and are unclear where or who to access the information from, to be able to help service users. • Provides a variety of information to customers but it is not comprehensive and is not consistently written in plain English. • Does not supply information in alternative formats to suit the needs of groups with special needs. • Provides newsletters that are not regular, not interesting or not informative.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produces regular newsletters about policies, procedures and performance that are interesting and informative and residents are involved in production and decisions on content • Routinely consults residents about the nature and content of leaflets and handbooks. Residents are satisfied with the quality and timing of information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has limited resident involvement in the production of leaflets, handbooks, newsletters etc. • Has below average resident satisfaction with the quality and range of information they receive.
<p>30.4 Complaints</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the complaints service well publicised and easy to access? • Are standards for complaint handling high? • Are results from the complaints process publicised to customers and do they result in improvements to the service? • Are customers reasonably satisfied with the responses to their complaints? • Has the organisation implemented determinations by the Housing Ombudsman? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has customers that know about the complaints system and find it easy to use. The complaints process runs as it is says it will run. • Deals with complaints in a professional manner. • Has clear standards for handling complaints and performance is reported to customers. Staff and customers are clear about procedures and standards • Analyses complaints and learns from them, using them to to drive improvements to services. • Involves customers in monitoring performance on complaints and identifying service improvements • Monitors customer satisfaction with complaints and has customers who are satisfied with the way complaints are handled. • Implements promptly, and in full, determinations made by the Housing Ombudsman. • Has guidelines on compensation made in response to complaints and service failure that ensures that compensation is fair and relatively consistent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is not open to complaints and is reactive in its approach. • Has a complaints procedure but it is not readily accessible or well publicised and complaints must always be made in writing. • Has standards for complaints but performance against these is not routinely measured and monitored. • Does not publicise complaints information and performance on complaints well. • Makes some use of information from complaints to drive improvements in services, but it is not systematic. • Does not manage complaints well and many customers are unhappy with the responses to complaints. • Does not implement promptly, determinations made by the Housing Ombudsman.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has which guidelines meet statutory requirements, for example, LAs on the Right To Repair in Sections 121 and 122 of the Leasehold, Housing and Urban Development Act 1993 and regulatory requirements for HAs in HC circular 33/94 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has minimal guidance on compensation in response to complaints, there is a significant lack of consistency in compensation given out. Has guidelines which do not take account of statutory and regulatory requirements on compensation for repairs.
<p>30.5 Consultation and feedback mechanisms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there a variety of methods of consulting and obtaining feedback from customers and are they effective? Does the approach take account of local context and ensure that a wide range of user views are obtained? Is good use made of this information? Are customers informed about what happens as a result of providing their views? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively canvasses the views of service users and uses them to review or improve services. Service users are consulted and involved in major decisions that affect the service. Provides customers with a range of opportunities to put forward their views. The approach was developed in consultation with users. Seeks views from a broad cross section of users using methods that encourage good response rates. Use HC recommended (if HAs) survey methodology on satisfaction and uses comparison with other similar organisations in order to set targets for improvement. Uses consultation and feedback from users to drive changes and improvements to the way services are delivered. Has high levels of satisfaction with opportunities to inform management and affect decision making and service delivery Has customers who understand the purpose and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seeks users' opinions, but does not always act on them and places a greater emphasis on seeking the views of stakeholders. Has limited opportunities for service user involvement and feedback. What exists has been developed with little reference to the views of service users. Does not ensure that consultation methods routinely reach a wide cross section of residents. Does not use recommended survey methodology on satisfaction or use comparison with other organisations to set targets for improvement. Has customers who are not clear whether the organisation responds to, and takes account of, feedback and this is reflected in satisfaction levels.

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	value of participating and replying to surveys and questionnaires. Customers are confident that their input will be valued and acted upon.	