



Background Information – Customer Service Manager

We are improving customer contact

These days Southside Housing Association (SHA) is a complex business. We are more than just a housing provider, and our customers rely on us for a variety of services, some that you wouldn't automatically associate with a social housing provider.

Some of the key landlord services we offer our 2,200+ tenants include:

- Letting houses
- Carrying out repairs
- Collecting rent
- Managing estates and neighbourhoods
- Dealing with anti-social behaviour and complaints

We also:

- Invest millions of pounds every year in modernising and upgrading homes and
- Build, on average, 50-100 new homes each year

We provide specialist advice to hundreds of residents each month on welfare rights, benefits, debt and financial management. We also have a commercial subsidiary company, Southside Factoring and Related Services (SFARS) that trades under two brands ('Letting' and 'Residential'). SFARS provides factoring and property management services to home owners and manage 200+ Mid Market Rent (MMR) and privately rented homes.

In addition we have a busy community development team who deliver community activities ranging from small events to large infrastructure projects, and we manage Care and Repair Handyperson and Advice services for the whole city. On top of that we have a variety of contractors and suppliers, insurers and bankers, funders and regulators all regularly in communication with us – therefore managing our customer contacts is a complicated business.

At the moment customers contact us through a traditional reception service and have to navigate our different administrative boundaries to identify the most appropriate part of the SHA service to connect with. Telephone is the most commonly used contact method, but we expect digital contact to increase significantly in the coming year as we upgrade our systems capabilities and provide customers with digital self-service.

We want to better manage customer contact and improve the customer experience, and we are investing substantially in new technology to help us do this. We are recruiting a specialist manager to build a bespoke Customer Service Department (CSD) and increase the importance and profile of the customer services role and remit within the business.

We have a number of specialist functions in the organisation reflecting the complexity of the business, but we want to make sure we give just as much importance to our customer contact as we do to our other key process areas.

Southside's Customers

Our customer base is incredibly varied.

A typical working day can involve dealing with retired QCs worried about a factoring repair or complaining about anti-social behaviour, or a tenant anxious about rent payments because their hours of work have been reduced, or vulnerable older resident who wants a key safe installed to improve access for a carer.

Our customers cut across many demographics and our customers have a broad variety of support needs and engage with our services on very different terms and in different circumstances. They may need help with everything from an insurance claim or a repair, or they might rely on us for signposting to jobs or training, or benefits.

Despite this, we don't differentiate in how we deal with customers. We have recently established a set of common values and standards within our **Customer Standards** that aim to support our new approach to managing customer service.

What will the Customer Service Department (CSD) look like?

The Customer Service Department will be the initial contact to all service requests from customers and will oversee the customer journey from initial enquiry to follow-up and completion. One of our key aims is to have far more of our customer contact dealt with first time and less emphasis on "passing customers on" to other parts of the organisation. Some contacts will require referral to specialist colleagues or teams, but our new systems will allow us to keep better track of the customer journey and allow us to follow up with

customers and colleagues to make sure service delivery has been excellent. When things don't go 100% as planned, the CSD will make sure we put things right.

The CSD won't just be waiting for customers to contact us, we will also be proactive in reaching out to our customers, making sure they are happy with our services, adding value and making better linkages across all the services that we provide. Our new system, which provides a 360-degree view of the customer will allow us to better link each customer contact, e.g. a simple rent enquiry might result in the opportunity to conduct an advantageous benefits check or book in a timely gas safety appointment. An application for housing might result in a referral to Care and Repair.

The staff in the CSD won't just be experts in handling enquiries from social housing tenants, they will also be able to expertly field contact from factoring customers, MMR tenants, insurance claims etc. We won't have customers defined and routed by tenure, they will simply be customers seeking a service.

This new approach has profound implications for the type of staff we need for the CSD. We need to recruit staff who take delight in dealing with customers and who are motivated to build their knowledge on a wide range of services.

We want staff to be as comfortable dealing with a factoring enquiry, an insurance claim, processing a repair or helping with a rent problem. We also want staff who are keen to own the customer experience and advocate on behalf of the customer both internally and externally.

The staff in the CSD will be tenure neutral and seek to address the needs of all customers. The aim of the Department will be to resolve customer requests for service, to properly record service requests, ensure individual customer journeys are managed successfully, that the customer is satisfied, and that outcomes are reported on.



Business Support Unit

The Customer Service Manager will also carry overall responsibility for delivery of Business Support activities within SHA. The team will look after the services relating to the office accommodation, vehicles and provide administrative support across the organisation including all key communications with customers, e.g. newsletters, social media, mail shots etc.