

Gas Servicing – Equality Impact Assessment Validation Report – June 2010

1. Introduction

This report summarises how the Equality Impact Assessment for Gas Servicing was undertaken, its scope and the key findings.

The officers responsible for the assessment were as follows:

- Ian Barrett – WCC Equality Consultant
- Steven White – Building Services Manager
- Gaynor Bromley – Senior Customer Liaison officer
- Fiona Churcher – Principal Area Housing Manager
- Janette Palmer – Project Co-ordinator, Landlord Services
- David Cruden – TACT
- Paul Bungey – TACT

One scoping and assessment session was held on 15 June 2010.

2. Scoping

Gas servicing was previously impact assessed as part of the comprehensive impact assessment of all elements of property services undertaken in July 2008. Gas servicing does not include gas renewal or upgrade. This is a very specific and important element of the cyclical work of the Property Services team due to the health and safety implications.

The service is being reassessed as the contract was recently retendered and let to Kinetic and the policy and procedure is in the process of being formalised.

3. Activity being assessed

The procedure exists to:

- To comply with gas safety regulations and legal obligation to carry out an annual gas safety check in all properties with Council owned gas and solid fuel appliances (4, 313 gas units, 100+ solid fuel).
- To meet our performance target and ensure 100% of properties receive an annual gas service and hold a current gas certificate (CP12).
- Effective and consistent approach to gain access to all properties before current certificates expire.
- Effective and consistent approach to dealing with tenancies where access has not been possible.

The procedure requires that the contractor sends out a letters which provide the customer with an appointment when the contractor will call to carry out servicing of the gas appliance and issue of the CP12 gas certificate. The customers can contact the Gas Service Provider at any time to arrange alternative appointment time. Approximately 100 customers are contacted each week.

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If these first and second letters sent by the contractor are unsuccessful in facilitating access, Property Services send out a reminder letter which gives the customer 10 days to reply. If this letter is unsuccessful the case is passed to the Area Housing Manager to consider legal action. It is rare for all attempts to contact the customer to be unsuccessful and legal action become necessary.

The main elements of the service being impact assessed are:-

- Initial Communications
- Service Home visits
- Gas Certificates
- Satisfaction Survey

4. Impact Assessment

This is an appointment lead service where the customer is provided with a set appointment date and time at the beginning of the process, which they are able to rearrange at any time by telephoning the contractor directly.

For this reason many of the access restrictions imposed on customers through their commitments, beliefs and support needs can be overcome simply by rearranging the appointment. Such as conflicting commitments around; religious festivals, care responsibilities, medical appointments, home visits considerations around; gender, faith requirements, support for those with mental health conditions and learning disability and other disabilities.

The main issues were around:-

- **Form of communication**
All initial forms of **communication** are written and in standard font size, currently it is not until the fourth stage, when the case is passed to the Area Housing Manager, that the customers' communication needs as recorded on Orchard are checked. However, a standard Orchard report presents all customers that have different communication needs and the Building Services Manager will be discussing with the Contractor how to use this report to contact customers in ways appropriate to their needs at the first stage of the process.

Officers felt that they would benefit from training in plain English and requested that the Project Coordinator investigate the possibility of an event being organised for housing officers. In the meantime the letters used will be checked for plain English through the reading panel. Additional training needs around dementia awareness was also discussed to assist Area Housing Managers recognise access issues linked to this condition and to ensure appropriate support is arranged to facilitate appliance servicing.

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Gas certificates are provided in standard written format and are currently printed off at the office and posted out to the customer within 28 days of the service taking place. However, a process is being developed whereby the certificate will be printed on completion of the service at the property and handed to the tenant by the engineer who is then able to explain its content. This provides an opportunity to explain anything which is unclear.

The **satisfaction survey** is conducted both by post and telephone. The postal survey involves the sending of a customer care card which checks various aspects of service delivery including showing ID. The telephone survey is random and 1/3 of all customers are contacted, those customers contacted by telephone do not receive an customer care card. The telephone survey is generally conducted outside of normal office hours to provide an opportunity to comment to most groups. Both surveys are carried out within 24 hours of the service being completed.

- **Contractor Monitoring**

Contractor procedures and processes should ensure that when **Service Home visits** are carried out respect is given to all customers and service delivery should be monitored to ensure these measures are successful.

The contract documentation required that the gas service providers submit Equality and Diversity policies and these were checked at tender stage. The contractor has an Equality and Diversity policy which was checked at the time the contract was let. The contractor also carries out equality training.

Inappropriate behaviour would be picked up through WCC satisfaction survey, corporate complaints process and word of mouth to TACT representatives who would raise concerns at Property and Contract Group. However, (other than corporate complaints) it is not possible to analyse these measures by customer group due to the limitations of the Orchard system. Customer satisfaction with Repairs and maintenance service is analysed by customer group through the bi-annual Status Tenant Satisfaction Survey required to report to national indicator 160.

The corporate process for monitoring contractors against their Equality and diversity obligations is currently under review as part of wider corporate equality and diversity work on monitoring and procurement. When this review is complete Property Services will apply the changes required.

The Group also discussed the measures in place around safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. The Building Services Manager agreed

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to investigate with the Gas Service Provider contractual arrangements around these issues.

5. Key Recommendations

- A standard Orchard report presents all customers that have different communication needs. The Building Services Manager will discuss with the Contractor how this report can be used to contact customers appropriate to their needs at the first stage of the process.
- The written format of the initial appointment and reminder letters to be checked for plain English by the Reading Panel.

6. Conclusions

No detailed assessment is required.