

**HABINTEG HOUSING
ASSOCIATION (ULSTER) LTD**

HOUSING

MYSTERY SHOPPING

REPORT

JUNE 2015



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1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Mystery Shopping is a tool traditionally used by companies to measure the quality of their service from a customer perspective and to progress service improvements.
- 1.2 Supporting Communities NI has been facilitating an annual programme of Mystery Shopping for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Housing Association for the past number of years. SCNI have carried out a number of Mystery Shopping exercises on behalf Habinteg Housing Association (Ulster) Ltd since 2010, with the most recent exercise completed in April 2013.
- 1.3 The purpose of Mystery Shopping is to examine how organisational policies and procedures are translated into actual customer service provision. In other words it focuses on the customer's experience of Housing Management. Mystery Shopping is not used to 'catch people out'; queries are not obscure or complicated. The scenarios used relate to everyday issues and Mystery Shoppers are objective in their approach.
- 1.4 The results provide an opportunity for Habinteg Housing Association (Ulster) Ltd to view themselves as their customers do. The analysis provides the Association with an opportunity to consider any requirements for overall organisational improvements.

Mystery Shopping is a powerful way to assess service standards and complements other research methods utilised by the Association.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

Supporting Communities NI undertook management of the project.

2.1 AREAS OF SERVICE

A number of key service areas were examined by Mystery Shopping, these were:

- Finance
- House Sales
- Development
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Complaints
- Human Resources
- Maintenance
- Rent

In addition, Mystery Shoppers made observations on:

- Response to Letters
- Website
- Visits to Habinteg Schemes
- Visits to Habinteg Offices (Holywood and North West)
- Telephone Service

The project also included a survey of:

- Maintenance – actual repairs
- Commencement of Tenancy visits

2.2 SCENARIOS

In order to gain the maximum effect of the exercise, possible scenarios were drawn from everyday issues and set the scene for the Mystery Shopper to enact. The scenarios were proofed to test they were practical, straightforward, relevant, credible and objective.

Habinteg Housing Association (Ulster) Ltd highlighted the most appropriate desired outcome for each scenario. Scoring and reporting templates used ensured that a consistent approach was taken and that the process was as user friendly as possible.

2.3 FRAMEWORK FOR MYSTERY SHOPPING

The framework used for the Mystery Shopping exercise took account of SCNI experience in managing similar projects.

- 8 Areas of Service were subject to a number of telephone calls.
- 2 Letters were sent to Habinteg Offices regarding Housing.
- Habinteg's Website was subject to 4 observations.
- 24 survey calls were made regarding the commencement of tenancy service.
- 10 survey calls were made regarding the repair service.
- A total of 21 observations were made of the Telephone Service.
- 9 visits were made to Community Assistant Schemes.
- Mystery Shopping was conducted between May-June 2015.
- Habinteg Housing Association (Ulster) Ltd staff team was informed of the intent to conduct Mystery Shopping but not of the actual timeframe for the exercise.
- Reporting templates used by the Mystery Shoppers included a checklist of potential outcomes.
- The service experience was scored using a range of Poor, Fair, Good or Excellent.
- Mystery Shoppers were advised to make reference to the names of individual members of staff on the reporting forms.
- Participants were asked to only make comments when they supported the score awarded.

2.4 SELECTION OF MYSTERY SHOPPERS

Habinteg Housing Association (Ulster) Ltd agreed to have the exercise carried out by SCNI staff and tenant representatives from their Tenant Board. The Tenant representatives received training through joint workshops facilitated by SCNI and Habinteg staff. As parts of the process Mystery Shoppers were required to adhere to confidentiality at all times and take a balanced and objective view of service provision.

2.5 MYSTERY SHOPPING WORKSHOPS

In preparation for the commencement of the exercise, Mystery Shoppers attended individual one to one workshops where their roles and responsibilities were explained.

During the workshop, each Mystery Shopper was provided with an information pack including a tailored work programme, tips on carrying out the exercise and information surrounding confidentiality.

Mystery Shoppers were encouraged to contact SCNI during the exercise with any queries or concerns they may have experienced.

3.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

3.1 This report provides an overview of the findings from the Mystery Shopping exercise.

3.1.1 In relation to **Finance**, 100% of the service was considered to be Good.

This is indicative of the score recorded during the 2013 exercise.

3.1.2 In relation to **House Sales (North West Office)**, 50% of the service was judged to be Excellent and 50% Fair.

Where the service was Fair, the Mystery Shopper noted that the staff member was very helpful and gave good advice, but they did not ask for their name and number to call them back.

3.1.3 In relation to **House Sales (Holywood Office)**, 50% of the service scored Excellent and 50% Fair.

Where the service was scored as Fair, the Mystery Shopper noted that the staff member advised them to check the website.

3.1.4 In terms of **Development**, 100% of the service was judged to be Poor.

This shows a significant decrease from the previous exercise, when the service scored 100% Excellent. The Mystery Shopper did note that the person who answered the phone wasn't aware of anyone they could speak to and advised them to send an email.

3.1.5 In terms of **Complaints (North West Office)**, 33% of the service was deemed Excellent and 67% Poor.

It should be noted that where the service was Poor, the Mystery Shopper highlighted that they were unable to speak to a member of staff.

3.1.6 In relation to **Complaints (Holywood Office)**, 67% of the service was Good and 33% Poor.

Where the service was Poor, Mystery Shoppers noted that the staff member advised that they couldn't give them information as they needed further details (scheme/name) and advised them to put their complaint in writing.

3.1.7 In relation to **Human Resources**, 100% of the service was judged as Poor.

This represents a significant decrease in service from 2013, when the service was judged as 100% Excellent.

It should be noted that the person who answered the call was very reluctant to let the Mystery Shopper speak to Human Resources and advised that all positions would be advertised.

- 3.1.8 In relation to **Planned Maintenance**, 50% of the service was judged as Excellent and 50% Poor.

Where the service was Poor, the Mystery Shopper was advised that the maintenance department was busy.

- 3.1.9 In relation to **Rent (North West Office)**, 100% of the service was deemed as Excellent.

Mystery Shoppers recorded that the staff members were very sympathetic and helpful.

- 3.1.10 In terms of **Rent (Holywood)**, 50% of the service was Excellent and 50% Fair.

Where the service was Fair, the staff member did not cover all the required information within the scenario.

- 3.1.11 In relation to **ASB calls to the North West Office**, the service scored 100% excellent.

- 3.1.12 In terms of **ASB calls to the Holywood Office**, 50% of the service was excellent and 50% good.

- 3.1.13 In relation to the response from **letters** by Habinteg Staff, 50% of the service was judged as Fair and 50% Poor.

It was noted that in one instance the Mystery Shopper did not receive a reply from the organisation.

- 3.1.14 In terms of **Website Observations**, 67% of this service was deemed as Excellent and 33% Good.

Mystery Shoppers commented on how attractive the colours were and how easy it was to use the search tool.

- 3.1.15 In relation to **Visits to Schemes**, 44% was scored as excellent, 44% Good and 12% Poor.

This shows an increase in service from 2013, when the service was recorded as 34% Excellent, 22% Fair and 44% Poor.

Where the service was Excellent or Good, Mystery Shoppers noted that staff were very helpful and professional.

3.1.16 In relation to visits to **Habinteg Offices (Holywood and North West)**, 100% of the service scored an Excellent rating.

3.1.17 In relation to the survey of **Repairs**, 13% of the service was judged as Excellent, 37% as Good , 25% as Fair and 25% Poor.

It should be noted that not all contact numbers were accurate so the calls could not be made.

3.1.18 In terms of the survey of **Commencement of Tenancies**, 72% of the service was scored as Excellent, 6% as Good, 11% as Fair and 11% Poor.

Mystery Shoppers commented that in some instances, they found it difficult to complete the survey due to language barriers.

3.1.19 Across **All Service Areas**, 50% of the service was judged as Excellent, 20% as Good, 8% as Fair and 12% as Poor.

3.1.20 In relation to observations made to the **Telephone Service**, 100% of calls were answered promptly and the person answering the calls identified the Association in 94% of the cases.

4.0 FINDINGS

4.1 SUMMARY FINDINGS

4.1.1 From the exercises completed the summary results in terms of Poor, Fair, Good or Excellent were as follows:

**Red represents the highest scores*

	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCELLENT
FINANCE	-	-	100%	-
HOUSE SALES (North West)	-	50%	-	50%
HOUSE SALES (Holywood)		50%		50%
DEVELOPMENT	100%	-	-	-
ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR (North West)	-	-	-	100%
ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR (Holywood)	-	-	50%	50%
COMPLAINTS (North West)	67%	-	-	33%
COMPLAINTS (Holywood)	33%		67%	-
HUMAN RESOURCES	100%	-	-	-
PLANNED MAINTENANCE	50%	-	-	50%
RENT (North West)	-	-	-	100%
RENT (Holywood)	-	50%		50%
LETTERS	50%	50%	-	-
WEBSITE	-		33%	67%
VISITS TO SCHEMES	12%	-	44%	44%
VISITS TO HABINTEG OFFICES	-	-	-	100%
REPAIR SURVEY	25%	25%	37%	13%
COT SURVEY	11%	11%	6%	72%
ALL SERVICE AREAS	18%	12%	20%	50%

4.1.2 For comparative purposes, the table below displays results from the 2013 Mystery Shopping Exercise

2013 Results	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCELLENT
FINANCE	-	-	100%	-
DEVELOPMENT	-	-	-	100%
HUMAN RESOURCES	-	-	-	100%
COMPLAINTS	-	16%	67%	17%
ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR	-	-	50%	50%
HOUSE SALES	-	-	50%	50%
RENT	-	-	50%	50%
LETTERS	-	-	100%	-
WEBSITE	-	-	100%	-
VISIT TO SCHEMES	12%	22%	-	34%
REPAIRS SURVEY	-	25%	50%	25%
COT SURVEY	-	12%	50%	38%
ALL SERVICE AREAS	9%	11%	53%	27%

4.1.3 In relation to the telephony service the following summarises the findings:

	Yes	No
Calls answered promptly	100%	-
Person answering phone identified the Association	94%	6%
Where the call was transferred, it was transferred to the correct person	93%	7%
Where the call was transferred it was answered promptly	86%	14%
Where the call was transferred the person answering gave their name and department	86%	14%

4.2 OVERALL RESULTS

4.2.1 From the exercises completed the following highlights the results per telephone call or visit:

	Call 1	Call 2	Call 3	Call 4	Call 5	Call 6	Call 7	Call 8	
FINANCE	Good	-	-	-	-	-	-		
HOUSE SALES (North West)	Excellent	Fair	-	-	-	-	-		
HOUSE SALES (Holywood)	Excellent	Fair	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DEVELOPMENT	Poor	-	-	-	-	-	-		
ASB (North West)	Excellent	Excellent	-	-	-	-	-		
ASB (Holywood)	Good	Excellent							
COMPLAINTS (North West)	Excellent	Poor	Poor	-	-	-	-	-	
COMPLAINTS (Holywood)	Good	Poor	Good						
HUMAN RESOURCES	Poor	-	-	-	-	-	-		
PLANNED MAINTENANCE	Poor	Excellent	-	-	-	-	-		
RENT (North West)	Excellent	Excellent	-	-	-	-	-	-	
RENT (Holywood)	Excellent	Fair							
	Letter 1	Letter 2							
LETTERS	Fair	Poor	-	-	-	-	-	-	
	Observ 1	Observ 2	Observ 3	Observ 4			-	-	
WEBSITE	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Excellent					
	Visit 1	Visit 2	Visit 3	Visit 4	Visit 5	Visit 6	Visit 7	Visit 8	Visit 9
SCHEME VISITS	Good	Poor	Good	Good	Excellent	Good	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent
OFFICE VISITS	Excellent	Excellent							

Repair Survey

Call 1	Good
Call 2	Good
Call 3	Poor
Call 4	Fair
Call 5	Excellent
Call 6	Fair
Call 7	Excellent
Call 8	Poor

COT Survey

Call 1	Excellent
Call 2	Excellent
Call 3	Excellent
Call 4	Excellent
Call 5	Excellent
Call 6	Fair
Call 7	Excellent
Call 8	Excellent
Call 9	Excellent
Call 10	Fair
Call 11	Excellent
Call 12	Excellent
Call 13	Excellent
Call 14	Excellent
Call 15	Excellent
Call 16	Poor
Call 17	Poor
Call 18	Good

4.3 ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

4.3.1 Following analysis, the following services yielded the highest satisfaction, scoring 100%;

- Visits to Habinteg Offices (North West and Holywood)
- Anti Social Behaviour Calls to North West Office
- Rent Calls to North West Office
-

This was followed by;

- Website Observations (67% Excellent and 33% Good)
- Anti-Social Behaviour Calls to Holywood Office (50% Excellent and 50% Good)

4.3.2 The service areas that yielded the least satisfaction were **Development and Human Resource Calls**, with 100% of the service judged as Poor.

4.3.3 Across all service areas, 50% of the scores were identified as Excellent, 20% as Good, 8% as Fair and 12% as Poor.

4.3.4 There was found to be a high standard of service provided in relation to the telephony system.

5.0 PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

The Mystery Shoppers were invited to reflect on the process and experience of Mystery Shopping:

5.1 TAKING PART IN MYSTERY SHOPPING

The Mystery Shoppers were asked to highlight:

- Their Observations
- What they most liked about the exercise
- What they least liked about the exercise
- Any lessons learnt
- Any other comments

5.1.1 Observations made by Mystery Shoppers

- Very Professional Staff
- COT Surveys- quite difficult when tenants were unhappy with the service
- Language Barriers with some tenants
- Good knowledgeable staff members

5.1.2 What the Mystery Shoppers Most liked

- The overall exercise
- The professionalism and warmth of staff

5.1.3 What the Mystery Shoppers Least Liked

- COT survey- found difficulties when making the calls to tenants and they felt that they were 'suspicious' of them
- COT and repairs survey- Language Barriers

5.1.4 What the Mystery Shoppers Learnt

- Putting themselves in other peoples/tenants shoes
- Mystery Shopping
- To prepare in advance

5.1.5 Any other comments

- Thoroughly enjoyed it
- Looking forward to participating again
- Staff were overall very nice and sympathetic

6.0 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 Mystery Shoppers have examined how organisational policies are translated into customer service. Mystery Shopping has proven to be a cost effective method of gauging satisfaction with service provision.
- 6.2 In general terms the findings have been positive and in some areas, improvements have been very notable, particularly in relation to scheme visits.

It should be noted that in a number of instances, the North West Office scored slightly higher than the Holywood Office, this was particularly prevalent in the Rent and Anti-Social Behaviour scenarios.

There were service areas where poor was scored (Development and Human Resources) that this was not reflective of that particular service, but was due to the staff members answering the call either being unable to offer assistance, suggesting that the Mystery Shopper emailed their query or in some instances, sign posting the Mystery Shopper to the organisations website.

Additionally, Mystery Shoppers once again commented on the professionalism and friendliness of staff when dealing with their requests.

- 6.3 It is imperative that the exercise is not considered complete when the results are published rather the exercise should be considered to be part of an ongoing cycle of service improvements. An improvement plan should be developed to ensure that areas of concern are addressed.
- 6.4 In terms of future possibilities there is significant scope to extend and enhance Mystery Shopping in Habinteg Housing Association (Ulster) Ltd.

The value of the exercise could be enhanced by conducting Mystery Shopping on a rolling programme. Rather than focussing on a particular time of the year the service areas could be examined across the year. This would enable an increased sample size to be examined.

There is also an opportunity to further extend the scope of the exercise to consider other areas of service delivery such as:

- Transfer/Exchange
- Tenant Participation

Additionally, the use of tenants in the exercise has proved an invaluable resource and should be utilised as fully as possible in future Mystery Shopping exercises. In doing so, Habinteg Housing Association (Ulster) Ltd. should continue to promote this opportunity to their tenants.

APPENDIX 1

INDIVIDUAL CALL REPORTS

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