



mhs
homes group

Customer
Scrutiny Panel

mhs homes and Heart of Medway New Customer Journey Report

October – December 2024

1. Introduction

1.1 The Customer Scrutiny Panel (CSP) was requested as part of developing their annual workplan for 2024 to review and feedback on how new customers from all tenures (general needs, supported living and homeownership) view their personal experience from the time that they are offered a home through the following critical 18 months of their tenancy. For Heart of Medway we have included customers and their homes transferred from L&Q completed in 2024. The review follows on from an internal transformation across the business over the last year completed in September 2024. This means that it is important to recognise that this review has considered the impact of change against performance and customer expectations. The full impact of the changes to service delivery and resources will not be able to be fully evaluated at this stage, and this review has highlighted a number of further changes that may positively support both customers and the business service delivery.

1.2 Despite completing this review during a period of significant positive change brought by increasing in particular frontline resources, all officers in Tenancy Services, Customer Services, voids, responsive repairs, supported living, homeownership, and new development have actively participated sharing their own feedback to help understand the new customer journey. A total of 17 officers joined the CSP online to share confidentially their 'story', which was most appreciated and has contributed significantly to the findings and recommendations of this review. A separate confidential supplement detailing operational feedback has been shared with the Executive Team only.

1.3 Overall the CSP considers that feedback in the main is very positive and reflects the caring and supportive culture of mhs homes and Heart of Medway including the importance of providing homes for those seeking a new stable home and those that transfer through a mutual exchange, stock transfer or become a homeowner through purchasing a home direct from mhs/Heart of Medway or on the open market. Having a home and the impact to change lives for the better has been a strong message received from customers through this review.

1.4 The 'Customer Journey' to becoming an mhs/Heart of Medway tenant or homeowner has clear steps and procedures to follow. There are positive opportunities to get to know the needs and potential support requirements of new tenants and triage and alerts put in place to ensure that early intervention will prevent the tenancy failing. Homeowners that come directly through mhs have an opportunity to understand the benefits and challenges of living in a mixed tenure and the associated personal commitments and responsibilities that come as part of ownership.

1.5 The key recommendations that the CSP would like to propose include:

- Having a comprehensive detailed process mapping exercise of all new customer services looking at work flows, smart working and identifying pinch points where service delivery remains challenging. In some instances, identifying additional service operating changes required using customer feedback and listening to the needs and challenges faced by officers delivering services on the frontline. This should happen in the first quarter of 2025, allowing time for new working practices to be embedded into key services. There

was feedback that not all job descriptions and policies and procedures are current and changes are still under review

- There are a good number of policies and procedures that were shared with the CSP as part of their document review, however, many are now out of date and procedures stated as happening are at times confused and not being followed. With no date and version reference on documents it is difficult to determine what is actually current or needing revision. Managers stated that they need time to be more strategic and get the basics of new policies and procedures written and approved.
- Communicating and sharing of information on work agreed at the time of viewing a home and planned to be completed with customers at the home viewing visits must be put in writing to customers at the time so that both sides are clear on agreed works to prevent incidences of challenge where customer expectations are greater than the agreed letting standard. The move to have all inspections completed by the Voids Team may address the challenges that were identified.
- There needs to be 100% property inspection visits of homes being vacated and introduction of recharging to reduce the poor state of homes being returned to mhs.
- Ensure that home visits happen for new tenants, and look to expand this across tenures.
- The main concerns of new tenants is:
 - Condition of the home
 - Cost of carpets
 - Decorating
 - Finite budget
 - Damp and mould
 - Cost of moving
 - Time to get outstanding repairs completed

1.6 The CSP recognises through their interviews with office and frontline workers that there is a genuine commitment to deliver a good service and there is strong empathy for customers and their wish to live in a home that is well maintained and that they can be proud of. The key recommendations detailed in section 4 will help to address the areas of weakness that will

ensure a quality service is consistently delivered for all new customers. It is worth noting that mhs provides all services for Heart of Medway.

1.7 The CSP would like to thank all the staff that participated with this review, and a special thank you to Anthony Strzalek from Communications for setting up our customer survey and promoting the opportunity directly to customers and on social media. A special thank you also to Louise Humphreys and Zoe Marden from Governance for organising interviews and helping to source information required.

2. Key Recommendations

Our recommendations are based on the evidence collected through this review only. The mhs management response will be able to confirm the new changes that are in place and provide helpful assurance to this review. Please note that additional recommendations have been added to the appendices- please refer.

A – For new tenants

- Clear information about potential moving and settling in costs, and advice where help may be on offer for those in poverty
- Sign up in the new home
- Follow-up verbal conversations with written communication – especially around agreed voids works to be completed
- Provide a target date for moving, keeping the new tenant informed if a delay is expected
- Ensure that all keys and documents provided at the sign up
- Book a first tenant home visit at the time of sign up – general needs
- Provide a named contact and number to ring when first moving in
- Ensure that a gas connection is booked as soon as the date for the new tenant to move is agreed
- Ensure that any outstanding repairs are booked at the time of sign up
- Go through the letting standard - read and explain
- Provide enough time at the viewing for the prospective tenant to be happy that they are not rushed
- If there are planned works scheduled for the near future advise so that they know this will be happening

- Ensure that tenants know what support and advice is available – early intervention service

B) For mhs and Heart Of Medway to provide a consistent service going forward

- Ensure that those doing viewings have all the information needed about the property
- Do the home plan visits as detailed in the Welcome Pack
- Treat each tenant as an individual – put things in writing that are agreed
- Provide an update on the new services open to tenants in the newsletter- you have a great offer so share widely
- Look at the advice and information provided for homeowners
- Use the feedback from customers detailed in this report to ensure the needs and aspirations of new customers are integral to shaping policies and procedures as they are written or updated.
- Review and consider recommendations detailed in Appendix 1, 2, 3,4 and 5

3. Conclusion

It is clear that new customers feel supported with the process of finding and moving into a mhs and Heart of Medway home. There is a need to ensure that home plan visits happen and early intervention and access to support and advice is proactive.

It is clear that Heart of Medway customers that transferred from L&Q were given a warm and supported service, and that the dedicated help has proven valuable and elements could be adopted as part of the overall new customer service.

The CSP are confident that the mhs management response to this review will highlight the positive changes and enhanced focus on new customers as the new working practices are put in place post review.

Thank you to all that have helped with this review, and we look forward to working with you to monitor the service improvement plan.