



**mhs**  
homes group

Customer  
Scrutiny Panel

# Customer Scrutiny Panel Gas Services Report

**June 2023**

## 1. Executive Summary

1.1. The Customer Scrutiny Panel (CSP) has reviewed the management and delivery of gas services focusing primarily on customer experience. However, to fully understand the complexity of delivering and managing gas services the CSP has focused on the Liberty Gas Contract specification, performance and delivery of services by engineers in our homes including mhs management, support and responsibilities. The new contract with Liberty Gas commenced 1 April 2022 following a successful retender process to continue their partnership with mhs.

1.2. The review scope has provided a range of reality checking opportunities for the CSP to identify what works well, and opportunities to be even better. Overall performance information which has been limited in consistent detail shared demonstrates that gas services overall are in the main meeting the mhs commitment to provide their customers with homes that are warm, compliant with regulatory safety regulations, and that there is a satisfactory service including annual boiler safety checks, repairs and installation of new boilers.

1.3. The Liberty Gas contract is the largest contract held by mhs. It provides services for mhs/Heart of Medway customers and is an integral part of the overall mhs homes maintenance and asset management

services. The gas services contract has undergone positive change over the last 12 months with regards to front line delivery of services in mhs homes by engineers. It needs to now focus on supporting mhs to have effective performance management that covers all the performance indicators detailed in the contract specification.

1.4. This review has positively benefitted from the guidance and support of Gemma Hancock Director of Assets and Development and her teams to look in detail at the delivery of gas services and encourage CSP members to experience and observe both management and delivery of gas services. There has been greater enthusiasm and support towards the role and work of the CSP by mhs officers than by Liberty Gas. This highlights a greater need by the CSP to raise awareness of the role and ambitions of the CSP demonstrating the benefits of 'fresh eyes' reviewing and being part of the journey of continuous improvement.

1.5. Period of data collection and review March - June 2023

1.6. The key recommendations for review by the Executive and the Board to assist improvement include:

- Formalise contract performance and monitoring practices and meetings in line with the contract specification
  - Improving communication with customers so that they are kept informed, can self help and prevent the opportunity for the "loudest and most persistent" customer to achieve the fastest service and compensation
  - Review complaints process, recording and management of complaints
  - Record and monitor compliments to encourage excellence by promoting good behaviours
  - Record and report on compensation paid to customers by Liberty Gas and mhs- recharging where appropriate to the contactor - through invoice deduction
  - There is no 'learning log' from complaints (mhs and Liberty Gas)
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- Ensure that the contract documentation is a living document and those managing the contract understand the detail and requirements
  - Ensuring that those taking responsibility for overseeing gas services are provided with contract management training to address deficiencies identified through document review and interviews - ensuring that there is always perception of professional behaviours

- Liberty Gas call centre is considered by both mhs customers and customer services as being difficult to access and providing a less than customer centric experience, more monitoring, training and performance reporting is key to address service failures
- Ensuring issues around time taken to access essential stock items and lack of consistency of van stocks is addressed urgently, as many customers are left without heating and hot water for extensive periods due to delays
- Failure to provide services as stated in the contract specification Monday to Saturday 8am to 8pm and Sunday 8am to 2pm- but only working 8am to 5pm Monday to Friday and no weekend working (which is required to deal with uncapping of gas for new tenancies), causing concern for new customers in particular, and those working
- Costings are included in the contract to factor in overtime working and yet engineers confirm this is not offered but included in the overall tender cost which is paid by mhs
- Voids are not given the priority required to assist turn around and get homes back to earning rental income, this need reviewing as included in the contract
- Liberty Gas complaints policy out of date and was due for review May 2022 - needs to offer a complaints template to assist customers reporting a complaint and clear timescales for investigations and resolution that are achievable
- No annual schedule of contract meetings - there is no pre-set dates and times set as part of an overall project plan, arrangements are very fluid
- There is no evidence to support delivery of social value obligations as detailed in the contract, apart from 2 apprentices being employed to date
- There is no parts disposal policy so potential opportunity for fraud - need to ensure that the use of photographic evidence as detailed in the contract is consistently used, but was not witnessed as part of job shadowing
- Warranty offered on new boilers is 2 years by Liberty Gas in the contract but the manufacturer offers a 7 years warranty if purchased directly and installed by an approved ideal logic boiler engineer - this means that potential replacement parts are being paid for that could be under warranty for 7 years, this requires reviewing to maximise warranty period and reduce cost to mhs
- Replacement boilers should be based on a planned asset management replacement programme separated from the annual checks and repairs -

facilitated by the asset management team so that consistent priority is related to older boilers only

- Understand the Customer Service Offer - what is the customer journey, develop a gas services responsibility process map, complete service gap analysis against contractor contract specification and mhs contract project team
- Total review of client and contractor performance - bring professionalism and have clear boundaries and formal review and recording on contract compliance and reporting
- Decision making on variation of contract arrangements must be at Director level - instead of mhs gas contract manager Customer Scrutiny Panel Gas Services Report March-June 2023 6
- Definition of obsolete - needs to be understood in line with the contract clause as evidence of this not being followed by all- definitive clear criteria required
- Understanding the contract - lack of knowledge of the detailed contract specification was evident and needs to be a working document to ensure compliance - understand the outputs required so that compliance can be assured, lack of knowledge identified through interviews
- Review compensation and support for customers - thinking outside the box and being proactive and focused on the individual essential – need a clear policy based on learning from the delivery of the contract. Evidence that the automatic payment detailed in the contract for missed appointments of £30 not paid for all missed appointments, needs to be monitored at contract review meetings
- Liberty Gas - to provide better feedback to mhs from home visits on instances of identified fuel poverty vulnerability and damp and mould
- Accurate contract data - review data collected, monitoring, framework for decision making and supporting documentation- too many assumptions that things are monitored, failure to provide information for this review

1.7. Overall, customers are gaining confidence in the gas service as the increased new boiler replacement program of 540 a year makes a significant difference to keeping homes warm and more energy efficient. The provision of gas services is a high profile contract and failing to deliver effectively could affect reputational perception of mhs, who strive hard to always put the customer first.

1.8. The key principles followed by the CSP for this review were:

- Reviewing customer experience and business delivery on behalf of mhs/Heart of Medway customers ensuring that mhs and Liberty Gas provides services to the highest standard
- Promoting and encouraging transparency and evidenced based reporting
- Provide an independent check and critical challenge to drive up and influence improvements to standards, processes and performance
- Reflecting the needs and aspirations of the customer
- Provide insight and learning to the Executive and the Board
- Making recommendations based on evidence
- Ensure that mhs and Liberty Gas positions residents at the heart of the business
- Understanding roles and responsibilities of customers, mhs, and Liberty Gas working together