Solihull Community Housing setting the benchmark for Customer Service

If you have visited the customer service team at Solihull Community Housing, I am sure that you left feeling both amazed and impressed at what can be achieved in terms of providing service excellence to residents.

Solihull Community Housing (SCH) was established as an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) in 2004 by Solihull Council to look after properties owned by the Council. Awarded a three star rating by the Audit Commission, SCH are recognised as leaders in their field.

Here are just some of the reasons why SCH is a special and worthy recipient of a three star rating:

A true single point of information and enquiries
SCH has created a single customer services team that is responsible for all forms of communication to its residents from leaflets to newsletters, through to content on its website and the interactions in its contact centre and area offices. This results in all aspects of customer service being consistent and joined up.

All publications are posted on the website and made available to both customers and staff. Using the same information results in consistency and only having to make updates once. This also means customers get the same up to date information whether they call, visit, or log on!

"This approach not only reduces duplication of effort in maintaining multiple sources of information, it also enables SCH to quickly respond to changes" said Lourdes Sharpe, Head of Customer Services. "If the customer services team finds they are receiving calls regarding a particular subject where the information available is not clear, we can quickly change this and it is instantly available to everyone."

SCH provides a single point of contact for its residents through their Customer Contact Centre. This acts as the front-line for all customer enquiries with a single published telephone number, email address, SMS number and entry point for enquiries via digital TV. For customers who prefer to visit an office, the advisors in these offices work to the same standards and have access the same systems. It provides a highly accessible and consistent service to customers who can contact SCH in whatever way they prefer.

Customer relationship focus
The SCH set up is far from a front line enquiry service; it truly provides relationship management to the SCH customers. Advisors are able to handle any enquiry and even where

multiple topics need to be discussed; these are dealt with in a single conversation.

SCH have implemented Keyfax Contact•View contact management from Omfax to provide them with a single view of the customer and a single source of all customer contact information. Advisors can view the full history of contact ensuring both quality and continuity of service.

"Contact•View enables us to deliver on both efficiency and effectiveness" said Lourdes. "It allows us to deliver on an initiative we call the 'eggs & bacon.' What we mean by this is that we are not only able to talk to the customer about the enquiry they have called about, 'the eggs', but we are also able to discuss and signpost to other services. 'The bacon' is the personalised bit of the service which meets the customers' needs and adds value to the contact."

Empowering advisors through scripting
SCH first introduced scripting almost ten years ago whilst setting up a contact centre to deal with housing repairs. Their objective was to provide advisors with the tools to empower them with the technical ability to deal with a broad spectrum of repair enquiries while maintaining their focus on customer service.

Implementing Keyfax Inter•View intelligent scripting from Omfax enabled repairs to be quickly classified. Using keywords to drive the scripts, advisors accurately identify and log repair jobs. As a result, jobs are raised with the right priority, the right contractor is allocated and all the required information is collected at the point of contact.

"By empowering the front line with the Inter•View scripts we were able to schedule-up far more jobs first time" said Lourdes. "Previously, non-technical staff would put repair requests through to surveyors to deal with; by using intelligent scripting this was significantly reduced."

The use of intelligent scripting within SCH was then expanded to support every interaction that the customer service team have with customers and has enabled SCH to offer this single point of contact for all enquiries.

The customer services team at SCH handles over 189,000 calls, as well as 50,000 visits into their three area housing offices each year. By using Inter•View they are able to deal with over 80% of enquiries at the first point of contact. Although an impressive achievement, SCH is continually striving to improve this with the development of additional scripts to address each and every type of enquiry they receive.

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Obtaining true insight

SCH has a real focus on continually improving the service offered to customers and they are constantly seeking to gain insight into why customers are contacting them and how best to serve them.

Through the use of contact management and intelligent scripts, SCH gain valuable insight into every interaction. Inter•View scripts are used not only to guide the advisor through the enquiry, but also to classify why the resident has called and accurately record the outcome of the contact.

"Contact centres tend to be focused on call volumes and average handle times and although important to us, we do things differently at SCH", said Lourdes. "We focus on how effective we are at dealing with customer enquiries. We know if we continue to get this right, the other metrics will be right."

Gaining this level of customer insight helps drive two key areas. First, understanding why customers contact enables SCH to identify which contacts could be avoided or reduced via pro-active communications or promotion of self-service options. Second, by understanding which enquiries do not get resolved on the first contact stimulates continuous evolution.

Continuous evolution

SCH do not rest on their laurels. The insight gained is used to analyse each enquiry and process and everyone in the customer services team is focused on looking at ways to streamline these processes, expand their capability and improve services.

For example, by analysing housing repair calls, SCH identified repairs which should be tenant's responsibility. Thinking pro-actively they issued tenants with the Omfax Handy Hints Guide that showed them how they could do simple repairs themselves. SCH have now built on this success by introducing DIY Days and repairs staff runs workshops for residents wanting to gain skills to do simple home improvements.

Advisors continually provide feedback on the scripts that they use, highlighting new types of enquiries they are receiving. This input is immediately incorporated into the Inter•View scripts to ensure that knowledge and experience is not just at the individual level, but is established across the entire team.

"The Keyfax system is also enabling us to deliver on some key SCH initiatives" explained Anthony Smith, Service Support Coordinator. "As part of our Green Policy we are looking to reduce the amount of printed material we post out. We addressed this by making a simple change to our scripts; rather than just fulfilling enquiries with posted letters, advisors are prompted to ask the customer if they would prefer correspondence by email or could access the information from our website. This has both reduced postage costs and made a significant contribution to our Green Agenda."

SCH is also capitalising on the technology that they have put in place to expand the services they offer and provide a connected service. Access to contact management and intelligent scripting is provided to SCH's out-of-hours partner to enable a consistent and effective service 24 hours a day. Tailored scripts using Inter•View scripting has given SCH advisors the knowledge and confidence to handle other types of enquiries – for example SCH provide contact centre services on behalf of another local social housing organisation.

A further significant development is the recent introduction of Keyfax Case Manager – a tool for managing cases ranging from complaints to money advice. Based on Microsoft Dynamics CRM and fully integrated with Contact•View and Inter•View scripting, Case Manager allows advisors to both view information about a case and to instigate or update a case from within the contact centre. Once created, cases are assigned to specialist service teams who use Case Manager to hold information about the case and to maintain a record of activities and tasks. Workflow ensures cases are progressed and monitored and both specialist and customer service advisors have visibility of what stage each case is at. This system enables advisors to collect all relevant information up-front allowing specialist colleagues to focus on dealing with these cases.

A Win-Win for SCH and its residents

There is no better case of the phrase 'working smarter, not just harder' being appropriate than with SCH. Their investment in providing their front-line teams with the right tools to be effective has certainly paid off.

Customers are provided with a true single point of contact and service; SCH has established a greater understanding and relationship with their customers and advisors are happy to work at SCH, demonstrated by their exceptionally low attrition rate.

"We have been able to expand the hours customers can contact us. We have also significantly increased the services we offer and improved our efficiency and effectiveness" commented Lourdes. "And what is more, we have achieved all of this without additional staffing resources. That's a Win Win."