

CSP Review of the Customer Safety Service Communications

1. Why we chose the Customer Safety Service Communications

The Customer Safety Team ensure that Stockport Homes' customers receive their annual gas safety check and an electrical test every 5 years. In order to ensure that every customer receives their service check the Customer Safety Team have in place a process of letters and text messages to arrange appointments.

The service has identified that whilst it is 100% compliant in carrying out gas and electrical checks, on occasion the tone of the letters is not well received by customers and some customers can receive several letters and texts before an appointment is made and kept. The service wishes to increase the number of appointments made and kept at the first point of contact and to ensure that communications are clear and customer friendly. The service therefore made a request to the Customer Scrutiny Panel (CSP) to consider this issue.

As all customers receive this service, we felt that undertaking a review would be of benefit to customers and Stockport Homes.

2. Scope of the review

Following a briefing from staff on the service we chose the following areas for review:

- The timeliness, quality of information and format of the letters
- The range and effectiveness of communication methods used to make appointments
- The information available to customers on gas servicing and electrical testing

3. Our approach to the review

To focus on achieving the outcome of increasing the number of appointments made and kept at the first point of contact and ensuring that communications are clear and customer friendly we undertook the following activities:

- Briefing from staff on the service and its communications with customers
- Review of all letters against the customer journey map
- Review of information on the website
- Review of information in the tenant handbook.

We worked together as a group on this task to review all the letters. Individually we assessed the information available and discussed our findings. Our findings underpin our judgements and recommendations detailed below.

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4. Overview of CSP findings

We found that whilst the current letters are sufficient in ensuring gas and electrical checks are undertaken, they have not been reviewed for some time.

We felt that the letters would benefit from being re-written in a new format to ensure that the key actions that customers need to take stand out and to make clear the benefits the checks provide.

5.1 The timeliness, quality of information and format of the letters

We reviewed all the letters sent out to customers who require a gas or electrical safety test; this included letter content, format and timeframe.

5.1.1 Strengths

There is clear process and timeframe for sending letters out to customers.

5.1.2 Areas for improvement

The letters do not make use of icons or other visuals to illustrate key points or key actions that the customer needs to take. For example, letter three on gas servicing contains a lot of text, and it may be difficult for customers to pick out what action they need to take.

It is not emphasised on all letters that support is available for customers if they have difficulties in enabling a gas or electrical safety check to take place at their property.

It is not clear to the customer what the costs will be if they do not allow access to their property. For example, letter three uses the term 'associated costs' but does not set out what this means and what the costs are likely to be for the customer.

Not all letters emphasise that the service is of benefit to the customer to protect themselves, family, friends and visitors to their property. Customers may not be clear that by enabling gas and electrical servicing to take place they are helping to keep themselves and others safe.

The letters do not tell customers what option button to press if they call to re-arrange an appointment.

5.1.3 Recommendations

1. Re-write and update the format of the gas safety and electrical testing letters taking into account our findings detailed in the areas for improvement section. We have supplied you with additional information that we have gathered as part

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of this review to assist with this process. We would like you to present the revised letters to the CSP.

5.2 The range and effectiveness of communication methods used to make appointments

In addition to the letters, we reviewed no access cards, text messages and the support that is on offer for vulnerable customers to assist with arranging and keeping appointments.

5.2.1 Strengths

Text messages are sent to customers to remind them of their appointment, this is a helpful reminder for customers.

The Customer Safety Team and Neighbourhood Teams work together to provide support for vulnerable customers to enable a gas or electrical service to take place. We have seen evidence of a range of effective support that has been provided for customers.

5.2.2 Areas for improvement

The No Access Card does not contain the email address for the service. Customers who receive the card outside of office hours may not know that they can email the service to arrange an appointment.

5.2.3 Recommendations

2. Provide an email address on the no access card.

5.3 The information available to customers on gas servicing and electrical testing

We reviewed the information that is on the website and in the tenant handbook on gas and electrical testing.

5.3.1 Strengths

It is easy to find information on the website regarding gas and electrical testing. The information provided is clear and easy to follow. The guides on how to prepare for a test are useful for customers.

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5.3.2 Areas for improvement

There is no weblink or QR code on the letters that takes customers to the useful information on the website.

Electrical tests are described as 'Electrical Installation Condition Report' on letters whereas online it is called 'Fixed Wire Electrical Test'. Using two different terms to describe the test may be confusing for customers.

The Tenant Handbook contains out of date information regarding electrical tests. It states that they happen every ten years and doesn't state that they are mandatory. This may cause confusion for customers as checks are undertaken every five years.

The Assured Tenancy Agreement and Stockport Council Tenancy Agreement in section 4.17 and 6g respectively notes that access is required for gas servicing, but it does not mention electrical tests. Customers may not be clear that they must give access for an electrical test to take place.

5.3.3 Recommendations

3. Provide a weblink or QR code on letters to encourage customers to visit the website for further information.
4. Use one term consistently to describe electrical tests.
5. Update the information in the tenant handbook on electrical tests to reflect they are every 5 years.
6. Consider updating the tenancy agreement to include electrical tests in section 4.17 and 6g.

6. Support provided for the scrutiny

We would like to thank Grahame Bell, Zoe Bate, Jonathan Kelly and Alison Gray for their support and assistance with this scrutiny review.

We have been assisted by Jayne Boote from Engage Associates who has acted as our independent mentor. Jayne has provided advice and guidance on scrutiny activities and facilitated the production of this report to ensure our independence.