

CASE STUDY: MIDLAND HEART AND CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE (CSE)

WHAT LESSONS CAN BE LEARNED FROM MIDLAND HEART AND CSE?

This case study shows how an organisation can develop a strategy at the corporate level and then make the strategy operational so that the customer experience is enhanced and improved. Midland Heart are a leading housing organisation in England, delivering homes and services across the Midlands that enable people to live independently. They have 33,000 properties that provide homes for people from different backgrounds.

In 2017, they launched their *Fit for the Future* corporate plan which has been used to transform their business. Within the strategy there are four key themes including improving and maintaining services offered to their customers (the other three themes are around finance, growth and organisational readiness).

HOW HAS MIDLAND HEART IMPROVED THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE THROUGH CUSTOMER FIRST: THERE ARE SOME VERY EVIDENT WAYS IN WHICH CUSTOMERS BENEFIT FROM IMPROVED SERVICE AND SUPPORT?

- Customers receive advice and guidance from well trained and informed Customer Service Officers when they contact the Customer Hub at Midland Heart.
- The Customer Services Officers are empowered to make decisions and give direction which has meant that 93% of Queries are resolved immediately on the first contact. Midland Heart provides different communication channels (including phone, Facebook, Twitter, e-mail) that the customer can choose to use.
- Immediate face to face communication is possible between Customer Hub Staff and other colleagues and partners within Midland Heart to answer customers' queries when they phone or e-mail.
- The need for customers to register complaints has been reduced with the number of complaints reducing from between 80 – 90 per 1000 homes in 2015 to it currently being 24 per 1000.
- New online systems and processes were introduced that are accessed via Midland Heart's web site which allow customers to be more self-sufficient.

The customer theme was taken forward by the development of our own internal *Customer First* strategy. This set out to transform how Midland Heart interacted with customers in three significant ways. This included targeting resources to the right areas, resolving queries quicker and increasing levels of customer satisfaction. In order to achieve these three aims, various actions took place including:

- Delivering a cross-directorate Customer Hub
- Setting up a People Team to provide expert services that tackle complex issues that impact on their customers (such as Anti-Social Behaviour)
- Creating a Place Team to ensure neighbourhoods are managed to a high standard
- Promoting a positive customer experience and service improvement by listening to customer feedback

WHAT HAVE BEEN THE BENEFITS FOR MIDLAND HEART OF CUSTOMER FIRST?

There were some clear strategic imperatives that Midland Heart were able to achieve through *Customer First*. Midland Heart like other Social Housing providers had an annual 1% rent cut imposed on them by change to government policy effective between 2016 and 2020, meaning that efficiencies needed to be made in service delivery. Midland Heart were able to achieve this by the structural re-configuration behind *Customer First*. They also had to adapt to changing customer expectations in terms of how the customer wanted to interact with the organisation. Customer satisfaction levels were improved after the *Customer First* changes were introduced. Prior to the *Customer First* strategy, there was a heavy volume of avoidable contact with customers, however the changes have resulted in significant reductions to avoidable contact.





HOW HAVE MIDLAND HEART'S STAFF BENEFITTED FROM THE CHANGES?

The Customer Hub Team and the Repairs Teams' staff have gained in various ways.

- The customers benefit from Midland Heart staff being able to resolve calls at first contact as now customers are not being passed elsewhere as frequently as before. More and more of their queries are resolved on their first call.
- Their work is more interesting as they can provide more detailed and informed support to customers.
- The People and Place Teams can focus on more complex tenancy management issues as a result of the Customer Hub staff dealing first hand with customer queries that they would have had to do previously.
- Staff have acquired a wider range of skills and experience which will help them in their future career.
- The recent Midland Heart staff engagement survey has shown that since Customer First was introduced, staff engagement has improved from 63% to 93%.

HOW DID MIDLAND HEART TAKE FORWARD THE CUSTOMER FIRST STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENT THE CHANGES NEEDED FOR SUCCESS?

When seeking to implement the *Customer First* strategy, various actions and developments were applied. An away day was held for all staff where the strategy was explained and outlined. Workshops took place with staff to review processes and design new ones that would support the changes. Each member of staff received 30 hours of training to equip them with the skills and knowledge needed for their new roles. Rather than rely on scripts, banks of knowledge were established to enable staff to deliver accurate and current information and advice. Staff helped develop and refine the expectations that Midland Heart could reasonably have on their performance as individuals. Leaders worked with staff so they could clearly understand their role and purpose in the organisation. Staff are observed when answering calls for quality assurance purposes and all staff have monthly 1 to 1 meetings with their line managers to review their work. Leadership and Aspiring Leadership courses have been set up internally in Midland Heart to develop individuals

and help them take forward their careers.

Midland Heart re-configured the work space so that staff from the Customer Hub and Repairs team were brought physically together to improve the communication across teams. Contractors were also moved to be near the Midland Heart staff to support collaboration and information sharing.

WHAT HAS MIDLAND HEART GAINED FROM APPLYING CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE?

Midland Heart have identified clear benefits from Customer Service Excellence accreditation:

- They are provided with a framework that provides external recognition of their quality customer services.
- It supports their commitment to continuous improvement.
- In terms of governance, it demonstrates to its Board that it is performing effectively.
- Triangulation is provided that Midland Heart is working in the right areas and focusing on the key issues.

To find out more information about our Customer Service Excellence then register to attend one of our free awareness sessions here:
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