Community Counts
Milnbank
Housing Association
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TO:	Management Committee
PREPARED BY:	Paul Martin (CEO)
SUBJECT:	CUSTOMER FIRST STRATEGY
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CUSTOMER FIRST STRATEGY

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CUSTOMER FIRST STRATEGY

CONTENTS

1. MHA's Strategic Objectives
2. MHA's Values
3. Regulatory & Legislative Compliance
4. Strategy Introduction
5. Principles of Customer First Strategy
6. Communication
7. Staff Training
8. Supporting Staff Wellbeing
9. Leadership Accountability
10. Digital Transformation
11. Equality & Human Rights
12. Data Collection
13. Monitoring & Review of Strategy

Appendix 1 – Customer First Action Plan

1. MILNBANK HOUSING ASSOCIATION (MHA) STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

MHA's mission is to provide excellent homes and services in a thriving community. We believe that people living in the MHA community should:

- Have warm, safe, and affordable homes, and receive excellent services from MHA.
- Live in neighbourhoods that are clean and well cared for, with real community pride.
- Have access to opportunities and services that promote a good quality of life.

2. MHA's VALUES

Working as 'One Milnbank' so that we offer the same quality of services, support and housing to all tenants and residents.

3. LEGAL & REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

The Management Committee leads and directs MHA to ensure good outcomes for its tenants and other service users. The Scottish Social Housing Charter Outcome 1 Equalities, Outcome 2 Communication and Outcome 3 Participation. MHA adheres to all relevant legal requirements associated with this strategy.

4. STRATEGY INTRODUCTION

MHA is a Community-Based Housing Association committed to providing a first-class service to our customers. Since it began in 1975, MHA has always focused on putting our customers first and community first.

MHA's Customer First Strategy is a comprehensive plan designed to place our customers at the heart of everything we do. By improving communication, enhancing staff training, holding leadership accountable, increasing the use of technology, and ensuring inclusivity, we are committed to delivering a first-class service that reflects our core value: ***"We Care and It Shows."***

Appendix 1 provides an action plan which demonstrates how MHA will implement our Customer First Strategy.

5. PRINCIPLES OF THE CUSTOMER FIRST STRATEGY

This Customer First Strategy demonstrates our commitment to the local community and our customers. It explains how we plan to improve communication, train our staff better, make sure our leaders are accountable and use technology effectively. We aim to make sure everyone in our community feels included and gets the best possible service and support.

6. COMMUNICATION

6.1 Improving Communication

Communication plays an important role in the relationship with our customers. At MHA, we understand that effective communication is crucial to building trust, reducing misunderstandings, and a strong community.

Our key aim is to ensure that every customer feels heard, informed, and valued throughout the customer journey.

6.2 Improving Communication During Key Processes

We are committed to enhancing our communication practices, especially during processes such as repairs, maintenance, and rent management. We aim to make these customer experiences as seamless and stress-free as possible for our customers.

6.3 Repairs and Maintenance

Repairs and maintenance are among the most frequent points of contact between MHA and our tenants. To improve communication in this area, we will:

- We will ensure tenants receive notifications at each stage of the repair process, including confirmation of repair requests, a timeframe for completion, and updates if there are any delays.
- We will provide clear, step-by-step instructions on how to report repairs and what to expect during the process, ensuring tenants are fully informed.
- After repairs are completed, we will follow up with tenants to request feedback on their experience. Feedback and complaints will be shared with the Leadership Team.

6.4 Service Updates

Keeping customers informed about changes in services and policies is crucial to building trust and relationships with our customers.

- We will distribute regular updates via the Milnbank Messenger and Annual Report, emails, text messages, and our customer portals, ensuring that our customers are always informed about important changes.
- For significant changes that affect specific customer groups, we will ensure that communication is targeted and personalised to meet needs.

6.5 Communication Strategy

We are committed to providing a wide range of contact and communication options for our customers, we will provide a wide range of contact options:

- Tenants and owners will be able to access information, report issues, and communicate with us via our customer portals that have been configured to meet their requirements
- There will be dedicated telephone lines to deal with customer queries
- Email and Text Messaging
- As a community-based Housing Association we will continue to provide access at our Head Office and ensure customers can book face-to-face appointments with staff.

7. Staff Training

7.1 To provide first-class service, it’s crucial that our staff are well-trained, knowledgeable, and understand MHA’s customer-first values.

7.2 Training Programs - We will implement a comprehensive training program that focuses on key areas essential to delivering excellent service

7.3 All staff will undergo training in customer service, with a focus on:

- Training staff to listen actively and respond to tenant concerns.
- Skills to communicate and professionally in all situations.
- Train staff on techniques to resolve conflicts efficiently and amicably.

7.4 For staff involved in specific operational areas, such as repairs and maintenance, we will provide bespoke training:

- Training staff to accurately assess repair issues and explain technical details to tenants in an understandable way.
- Training on health and safety protocols to ensure the safety of both staff and tenants during all maintenance activities.

8. Supporting Staff Wellbeing

We recognise that supporting the well-being of our staff is essential to maintaining high service standards:

- Mental Health Support: Providing access to mental health resources and support for staff.
- We will consider flexible working arrangements to help staff maintain a healthy balance between work and personal life.
- A Rewards and Recognition Scheme will be introduced to ensure employees feel valued and needed.

9. Leadership Accountability

The Leadership Team is committed to accountability and continuous improvement. We believe that strong leadership is key to achieving our goal of providing first-class service.

9.1 Complaint Review and Resolution

A critical aspect of leadership accountability is the effective handling of complaints. To ensure that we learn from every complaint and improve our services, we will:

- Ensure a Leadership Team member reviews all complaints, particularly those that are complex or unresolved at the initial stages, to ensure that they are handled appropriately.
- Conduct investigations to identify the root causes of complaints and take corrective actions to prevent similar issues arising in the future.

9.2 Complaints Reporting:

- The Leadership Team will review regular reports on the number and types of complaints received, how they were resolved, and the steps taken to improve our services based on these complaints.
- We will actively seek tenant feedback on our complaint resolution process and adjust based on their input.

9.3 Improvement Initiatives

Continuous improvement is a key component of our customer-first strategy. We will establish new procedures to ensure there is ongoing evaluation and improvement of our services. To assist with this:

- We will conduct regular tenant satisfaction surveys to gather feedback on our services and identify areas for improvement.
- Tenants will have the opportunity to submit suggestions for service improvements through our customer portal, in person, or by phone.

9.4 Service Audits and Benchmarking

- We will conduct regular audits of our processes and services to identify inefficiencies and areas for improvement.
- We will benchmark our performance against other housing associations to ensure we are delivering the highest quality service.

9.5 Leadership Development

To maintain a high standard of leadership, we will invest in ongoing development for our leadership team:

- Strategic Management Training: Ensuring our leaders are equipped with the skills needed to drive the organisation forward and implement the Customer First Strategy effectively.
- Leadership Mentorship: Providing mentorship opportunities to emerging leaders within the organisation to help develop future leaders.

10. Digital Transformation

10.1 The Role of Technology in Service Delivery

Technology plays a crucial role in improving the customer experience. At MHA, we will use technology to provide more accessible, efficient, and responsive services.

10.2 Development of our Customer Portals

The customer portal will be a key feature of our digital strategy, offering customers a convenient, easy-to-use platform for accessing our services:

10.3 Key Features of the Customer Portals

- Repair Requests: Tenants can easily submit and track repair requests, receive updates, and schedule appointments through the portal.
- Rent Payments: The portal will offer multiple payment options, allowing tenants to view their payment history, set up automated payments, and receive reminders.
- Document Access: Tenants and owners will be able to access important documents, such as tenancy agreements, policy updates, financial statements and proposed works
- Feedback Submission: A feature allowing tenants and owners to submit feedback, suggestions, or complaints directly through the portal, with a promise of prompt responses from our team.

10.4 Ensuring Digital Inclusion

While technology can greatly enhance service delivery, it is crucial that we ensure all our customers have access to and can effectively use the digital options available to them:

10.4.1 Digital Support

- Training Programs: We will offer digital training sessions for tenants and owners who need assistance using the customer portal or other online services.
- In-Person Support: For those who are less comfortable with technology, in-person support will be available to help make use of the portal.

10.4.2 Access to Technology

- Public Access Points: We will provide access to computers and the internet at our community halls for tenants who do not have access at home.
- Assisted Digital Services: For tenants who are unable to use the portal, we will offer assisted services where staff can help manage their requests and access information on their behalf.

10.4.3 Digital and Service Inclusion

We are committed to ensuring that all tenants and owners, regardless of their background, abilities, or circumstances, have equal access to our services. We will actively work to understand and address the diverse needs of our tenant population:

10.4.4 Regular Needs Assessments

- We will conduct regular surveys to assess the needs of our customers and identify any barriers they may face in accessing our services.

11. EQUALITY & HUMAN RIGHTS

MHA's is committed to equal opportunities, and we will respond to the different needs and service requirements of individuals, and we will not discriminate against any individual for any reason outlined in Equality & Human Rights Legislation.

12. DATA COLLECTION

MHA will manage all personal data in accordance with our obligations under the GDPR regulations and the Association's Policy.

13. STRATEGY MONITORING & REVIEW

The Customer First Strategy is not just a document but a commitment to continuous improvement and excellence in service delivery. MHA will review this strategy annually to ensure it meets the evolving needs of our tenants and remains aligned with our mission to be a trusted and caring partner in the community.

APPENDIX 1

CUSTOMER FIRST STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

AREA	ACTION REQUIRED
Communication	1) Review MHA's Communication policy & working practices. 2) Range of contact & communication options will be available including customer portals, dedicated telephone lines for customer queries, email, text & face-to-face.
Repairs & Maintenance	3) Repairs Journey - Tenants receive notifications at each stage of the repair process, including confirmation of repair requests, a timeframe for completion, and updates if there are any delays. This includes clear instructions & updates on the repair. 4) Repairs Feedback – Upon completion, tenants will be contacted to attain their feedback on their experience. These will be shared with the Leadership Team.
Service Updates	5) We will distribute regular updates via the Milnbank Messenger and Annual Report, emails, text messages, and our customer portals, ensuring that our customers are always informed about important changes. For significant changes, we will ensure that communication is targeted and personalised to meet needs.
Staff training	The Organisational Training & Development Plan 2024/25 includes training for the following: 6) All staff to undergo training in customer service to ensure they have the required skills to deliver the Customer First Strategy. 7) Provisions for bespoke training where required. (e.g. repairs staff trained to accurately assess repair issues and explain technical details in an understandable way). 8) H&S protocols to ensure the safety of both staff and tenants during all activities.
Supporting Staff Wellbeing	MHA recognise that supporting the well-being of our staff is essential to maintaining high service standards. We will do this through: 9) Continue to promote the mental health support the is currently in place. 10) Our Working Flexible Policy considers flexible working arrangements to help staff maintain a healthy balance between work and personal life.

	11) We will explore introducing a suitable Rewards and Recognition Scheme.
Leadership Accountability Leadership Development	12) The Customer First Strategy will form a monthly agenda item at the Leadership meetings. To maintain a high standard of leadership, we will invest in ongoing development for our leadership team through: 13) Strategic Management Training: to ensure our leaders are equipped with the skills needed to drive forward and implement the Customer First Strategy effectively. 14) Providing mentorship opportunities to emerging leaders within MHA to help develop future leaders.
Complaint Review and Resolution	In terms of complaint handling, we will introduce the following practices: 15) Ensure a Leadership Team member reviews all complaints, particularly those that are complex or unresolved at the initial stages, to ensure that they are handled appropriately. 16) Conduct investigations to identify the root causes of complaints and take corrective actions to prevent similar issues arising in the future. 17) The Leadership Team will review regular detailed reports and the steps taken to improve our services. 18) Have mechanisms to actively seek feedback on our complaint resolution process and adjust based on their input.
Improvement Initiatives	As continuous improvement is a key component of our customer-first strategy, MHA will establish new procedures to ensure this happens. To assist with this: 19) We will conduct regular tenant satisfaction surveys to gather feedback on services and identify areas for improvement. 20) Encourage tenants to submit suggestions for service improvements through our customer portal, in person, or by phone.
Service Audits and Benchmarking	21) Through our Internal Audit Strategy, MHA will conduct regular audits of our processes and services to identify inefficiencies and areas for improvement.

	22) We will benchmark our performance against other housing associations to ensure we are delivering the highest quality service.
Digital Transformation	23) Development of our Customer Portals will be a key feature of our digital strategy and implementing Customer First. The portal will provide customers to request a repair, make a rent payment, access documents & provide feedback. 24) Digital Support will be provided to our customers through offering training programmes and in-person assistance using our portals or other online services. 25) Access to Technology will be provided publicly to access to computers and the internet at our community halls for tenants who do not have access at home. 26) Assisted Digital Services for tenants who are unable to use the portal will be available where staff can help manage their requests and access information on their behalf.
Regular Needs Assessments	27) As one of the key Strategic objectives of our Business Plan, we will conduct regular surveys to assess the needs of our customers and identify any barriers they may face in accessing our services.