

APPENDIX 1

Homeowner Project findings

Main findings of the research commissioned by officers into improving relationships with homeowners and drivers for increasing satisfaction

1.0 Perceptions

Homeowners do not feel they are treated like customers or residents. They are not viewed in consistent terms across the housing teams or in generally positive terms

Action

Perceptions of homeowners need to change internally and their status to be re-evaluated in order to build a firm basis for sustaining relations in the long-term

2.0 Engagement

Main responsibility for engagement with homeowners resides in the wrong place with the billings team. There is little engagement other than through billings

Action

Engagement needs to be put in the hands of the engagement specialists to put relationships on a more proactive footing and to promote a better understanding of the council and its aspirations for its residents. The process should mirror engagement activity and property management at estate level for tenants and homeowners. Wider methods of communicating with all homeowners need to be identified

3.0 Relationships

Relationships with the formal consultation groups and most critical groups are frozen, adversarial and occupy entrenched positions

Action

Reaching out and unfreezing these relationships will require a change in relationship management and business approach with greater homeowner involvement as a prerequisite for re-establishing trust

4.0 Consultation

Engagement with homeowners is limited to a narrow base for consultation

Action

Creating new relationships and developing new interventions will help to provide balance and introduce vigour to existing dialogue

5.0 New Homeowners

Important groups are not being targeted for engagement at critical moments in the formulation of the relationship e.g. prospective and new homeowners

Action

Identify opportunities to inform homeowners and get relationships right from the start – “You never get a second chance to make a first impression”

6.0 Language

The wider context for anchoring the homeowner relationship and Southwark’s commitment to residents is absent from communications. The relationship is narrowly defined within a legalistic framework and there is a perception amongst homeowners of an overdependence on legal recourse for resolving disputes

Action

A wider, customer-service orientated focus and tone needs to be adopted in communications with homeowners reflecting service commitment, but which also informs and manages expectations on Southwark’s responsibilities and duties

7.0 Promotion

Much good work is already being done to improve the service provided to homeowners and tenants, and the Council is going above and beyond its duties. This is not being adequately promoted to the audience and is consequently being lost or drowned out

Action

Opportunities need to be identified and adequate resources put in place to promote new services, innovation, the advantages of a social landlord and the on-going investment in homes to change negative perceptions of the Council and re-position the relationship

Drivers for increasing homeowner satisfaction

Homeowners want:

- To be treated as customer and valued in equal terms as a resident
- A more empathetic approach that relates to their situation and issues
- Transparency on costs and confidence that billings accurately reflect the provision of services provided
- Consistent help and support without falling between the cracks
- To feel that the Council is joined up in the provision of their service
- To see a real and substantive change and commitment to improving homeowner experience.