



# Getting better all the time...

Improvements to the ways that we deliver our services to you, our customers, continue apace at Muir. We have developed our new service improvement plans. These are based around the key areas of service considered by the Audit Commission when they carry out inspections of social landlords. They focus on:

- Stock investment and asset management, ie our responsive and planned maintenance services
- Housing income management
- Resident involvement
- Tenancy and estate management
- Allocations and lettings
- Supported housing

In addition, we have developed service improvement plans which focus on the way we deliver our services to you across all areas, again based on the Audit Commission criteria. These plans focus on:

- Access and customer care
- Equality and diversity
- Value for money
- Our prospects for improvement.

We have now started to work towards the targets set in these very comprehensive plans, with the majority of improvements to be undertaken within the next twelve months.

To help us to focus more intensively on improving the way we do things, we have been undertaking a series of service improvement “Quick Wins” since the start of 2008. Many of these improvements have already been put into place, with examples ranging from ensuring that all staff wear identity badges at all times, to putting telephone call monitoring and recording software in place, through to setting up regular scheme and estate visits to which residents are invited to accompany their community housing officer.

Some of the major changes and improvements that we have undertaken are outlined below.

## Respect

You may recall that Muir signed up to the Respect Standard for Housing Management last summer, demonstrating our commitment to tackling and preventing anti-social behaviour.

We have now developed a Respect action plan to help us improve our services relating to dealing with antisocial behaviour (ASB), and to assist us in building relationships with the partners who can best help us to deal with ASB, such as the police, local authorities and Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnerships.

We have produced an updated ASB Factsheet, which was approved by our editorial panel, providing better definitions for customers of the different types of ASB and how we deal with it.

## Complaints, Compliments, Comments and Suggestions (CCCS)

We have produced a new complaints policy and procedure, with tighter timescales for dealing with complaints. The new policy and procedure also deals with compliments, comments and suggestions.

An emphasis on the importance of using CCCS to improve service delivery to customers is central to this new policy and procedure.

An overall target timescale (30 working days) for dealing with all three stages of the complaints procedure has been introduced. This includes a target timescale of 10 working days for the Board to deal with complaints at stage 3 of the process.

Previously, complaints which reached Board level at stage 3 had to be considered by Muir’s Board at a full Board meeting before a decision was made.

The new policy and procedure also incorporates sections on closing and learning from complaints, as well as dealing with inappropriate or persistent complainers.

A new CCCS Factsheet, which will outline the new policy and procedure for customers, is being produced.

## Compensation

We have also produced a new compensation and payments policy, which complements the CCCS policy. Information for customers about compensation will be included in the same Factsheet.

This policy gives our customers and residents a clear understanding of their rights and potential entitlements when service levels delivered by Muir are to an unsatisfactory standard.

The policy will also ensure that Muir complies with the requirements relating to the Right to Repair, Right to Compensation for Improvements and Home Loss and Disturbance payments.

## Lettable Standards

When one of our homes becomes vacant, we are committed to ensuring that it is presented to the new resident in a good condition.

We have undertaken a review of our existing standards and in consultation with the 'Think Tank' have come up with our new lettable standards fact sheet. This clearly sets out this new standard and includes photographs that clarify what meets the standard and what does not.

This fact sheet will be included in the tenancy pack which is presented to all new Muir residents.

If any of you transfer to a new home in the future, you will also benefit from the factsheet, as it will be passed to you before you move, reminding you of how your original property should be left, and the standard you should expect from your new property.

## Asbestos

The Control of Asbestos Regulations 2006 imposes a responsibility on housing associations for managing asbestos. In particular, an assessment and physical inspection needs to take place on all non-domestic properties to ascertain whether asbestos is or likely to be present on the premises.

To meet legislation Muir has commissioned a firm of specialist asbestos consultants, PKL, to undertake asbestos surveys of all our communal areas. In addition, asbestos surveys will be undertaken to a sample percentage of our homes to identify the extent of any asbestos containing materials.

We do not need to remove all asbestos from our properties. In the vast majority of cases it is better to leave the asbestos in place rather than remove it as the risk to health occurs when fibres are released into the air and then breathed in. Provided that asbestoscontaining materials are intact and in a position where they will not be damaged they will not pose a risk to health.

The obligation under the legislation is to produce an asbestos management plan, which identifies how we deal with any identified asbestos.

Following a risk based assessment, the asbestos management plan sets out what we need to do to minimise risk to residents and any maintenance workers we ask to carry out repairs where the asbestos may cause a hazard. It also sets out an inspection regime, where identified asbestos is inspected within a 12 month period to monitor its condition and to ensure it has not been tampered with or disturbed.

We have developed a new factsheet to provide information about asbestos, what it is and how we deal with it.

## Recharges

When Muir has to carry out repairs that are the result of wilful damage or neglect, it is reasonable that we expect the resident responsible for causing the damage to pay for this work. The same applies where residents have left furniture or carpets in properties when they have moved out.

To do this, we raise a recharge invoice that is then sent to the resident. It must be made clear that customers are not expected to pay for repairs other than those set out as being their responsibility under the tenancy agreement and any that are necessary as a result of wilful damage or neglect. You do not have to pay for any repairs which are due to genuine wear and tear.

We have developed a new recharges policy, which is fair, transparent, and will help to ensure that the way we raise charges to residents is consistently applied across the Association. The policy promotes our approach to residents, reminding residents of their responsibilities, which will help to minimise the amount necessarily recharged to residents.

Making sure that we recharge residents where they should be responsible and pursuing those debts more effectively reduces the negative impact on our maintenance budget, where, in essence, rental income has subsidised repairs for which the Association should not be responsible.

A recharges factsheet, which will make the policy clear for all customers, is being produced. If you're interested in receiving a copy of any of our new factsheets, please contact our customer services team on 01928 728049. They can also be downloaded from our website:

**[www.muir.org.uk](http://www.muir.org.uk)**