

Service Performance and Improvement

Dear Customer,

This newsletter provides an overview of the performance of Guinness Northern Counties from April 2008 to March 2009.

Throughout the year we monitor how we are doing in all our service

areas and each year, we collate and comment on the year-end performance.

From April 2008, Guinness Northern Counties was set up, and so for the first time performance is that of the combined organisation, across

all 26,000 homes.

Where we can, we also compare our internal performance with customer satisfaction. This helps us to see which service areas are most important to you. We use this feedback, along with further

consultation, to make improvements to services which are described in this newsletter.

Resident Involvement

We increased the number of "Key Players" (involved customers) this year to 447, from 429 last year, as we became Guinness Northern Counties. This means we have included more customers in all of our involvement opportunities and have gained from their experience and points of view, and we also have fair representation across the regions.

The methods of involvement that customers are involved in include Regional Committees, Customer Panels, Residents Council,

tenants and residents associations as well as many other focus groups and survey opportunities.

In 2008/09, we ran 2 focus groups, giving customers the opportunity to influence the National Tenant Voice, and the National Housing Federation's Code for Service Delivery and Accountability.

We also held focus groups and events throughout all five regions to enable customers to contribute to the Tenant Services Authority's National Conversation. Approximately 450 questionnaires were sent to the Tenant Services Authority, from customers.

The 2009 STATUS survey asked customers how satisfied they were that Guinness Northern Counties take their views into account. 61% of customers were very satisfied or fairly satisfied.

Planned improvements for 2009/10 include:

- More involvement from under-represented groups
- Customer involvement in the development of Neighbourhood Plans
- Development of resident scrutiny roles, in line with guidance from the Tenant Services Authority
- Develop and embed role of Customer Panels across all 5 regions
- Keep customers better informed through website and newsletters.



Complaints and Compliments

792 complaints were received in 2008-2009, which is an increase on 647 the previous year, and is not altogether surprising given the increase in the number of homes managed.

Our customer service standards set target times for acknowledging and responding to complaints. In 2008/09, we acknowledged 98% of complaints within the target time of 2 working days, and we responded to 85% of complaints within the target time of 10 working days.

As our biggest service area, Repairs complaints made up 68% of the total complaints received, followed by Estate management, which includes window cleaning and gardening.

The STATUS results of 2009 showed that only 55.3% of customers were aware of the Guinness Northern Counties formal complaints procedure, and only 33% of customers had made a complaint because they were dissatisfied with the outcome of the first point of contact.

54% of customers have said they would prefer to make a complaint via our website and so we have now made this option available. We have also improved the online guidance and information regarding making a complaint and the full complaints process

Our new complaints management system, Resolution, launched in June 2009 will only allow a complaint to be closed when we have completed a “learning point”, so each complaint should lead to a service improvement, and teams are working hard to ensure this happens.

We launched a Complaints Scrutineers group, of customers trained to examine and feed back on our responses to complaints. Their feedback is shared with the business to further drive improvements.

In 2008/09 we recorded 240 compliments. Examples included thanks for dealing quickly with an enquiry, thanks to contractors for speedy response to a repair request, and thanks to the ASB team for helping to make a customer safer in their home.

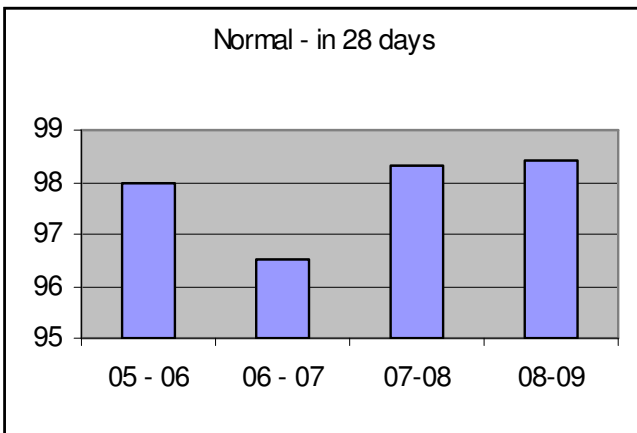
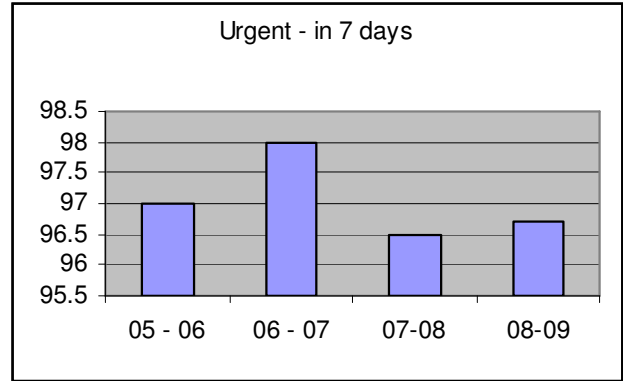
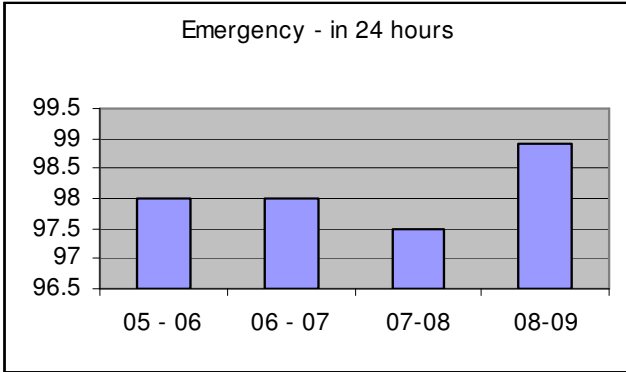
Feedback	Satisfaction 2008/09
Ease of making a complaint	66
Complaints process easy to understand	80
Received an acknowledgement within 2 working days	33
Member of staff contacted to discuss complaint in more detail	66
Helpfulness of staff	57
Complaint resolved to satisfaction	54
Overall satisfaction with response	47

This table shows satisfaction taken from the closed complaint feedback forms, which are sent to all complainants.

Planned Improvements for 2009/10 include:

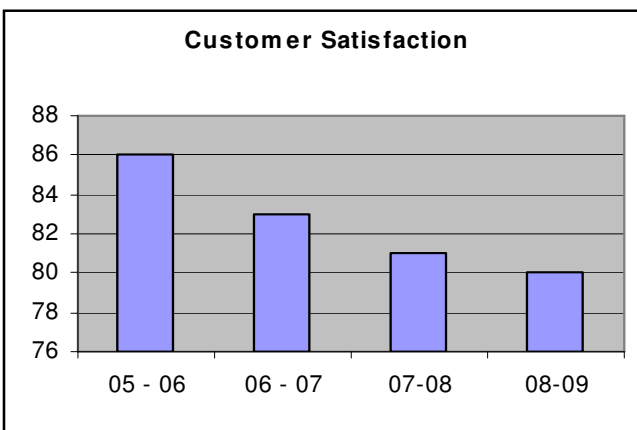
- Develop Complaints Scrutineers project to help us learn from feedback and improve our service
- Update website with information on the complaints process and procedure, and with performance information
- Produce quarterly complaints newsletter and share with customers and business

Day to Day Repairs



These performance graphs compare year-on-year the percentage of repairs that show as completed within the timescales published in the Customer Charter. We have combined the results for former Guinness Trust North and Northern Counties properties for 2006/07 and 2007/08, so we can compare results with 2008/09.

It is pleasing to note a continued excellent performance for Normal repairs, which accounts for almost 80% of repair work.

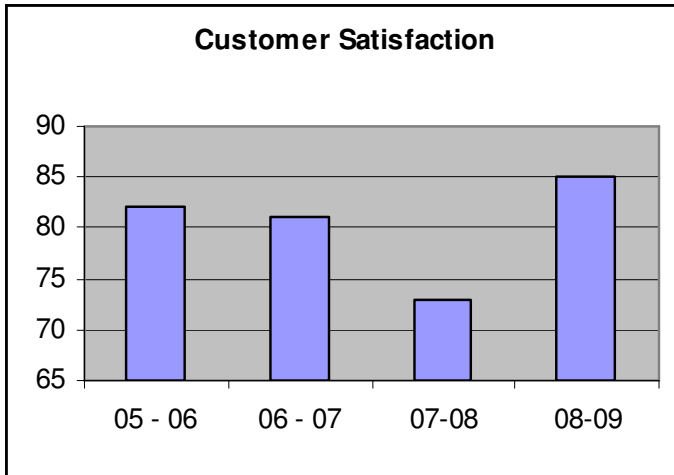


Overall satisfaction with responsive repairs has continued to fall. More detailed research has concluded that customers are particularly dissatisfied with the time taken to complete repairs.

Customers are also not satisfied with our communication processes when work is delayed, and when a repair takes more than one visit and these are two key areas we will be working with contractors to improve in 2009/10.

This satisfaction information is taken from the repairs satisfaction slips, which are sent to all customers after they have had a repair completed. In STATUS 2009, 88% of respondents said that repairs were the most important service for them, and 75% were satisfied or very satisfied with the way Guinness Northern Counties deal with repairs and maintenance.

Planned Maintenance



This satisfaction information is taken from repairs satisfaction slips, which are sent to all customers after they have had planned maintenance completed.

There has been a big improvement in the overall satisfaction score for Planned Maintenance, but it's evident that a lot of work remains to improve services in this area.

Key areas for improvement during 2009/10 are around customer consultation, communication and progress review before and during planned maintenance projects.

Decent Homes

Decent Homes is a government standard that all social housing must meet by 2010. A decent home must be warm, weatherproof and have reasonably modern facilities. At March 2009, only 0.2% of Guinness Northern Counties properties failed the Decent Homes standard, which is due to us continuing to follow our maintenance and replacement programme to ensure that compliance is met by the target date.

Guinness Trust North properties are monitored separately, and at March 2009, only 2.5% of homes failed the Decent Homes standard. They are also on course to meet the standard fully by the target date.

Gas Safety

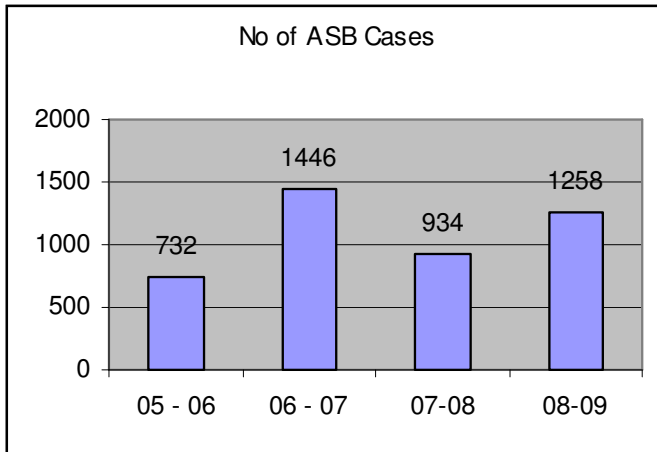
For the first time, Guinness Northern Counties achieved our goal in 2008/09 of every home in need of a gas safety check being 100% compliant. This means that every one of our homes has been visited by a qualified gas engineer, all have had a personal visit from member of staff, and where necessary legal action has commenced.

This is excellent news, especially considering the extra homes the Gas Safety Team took on last year.

Planned Improvements for 2009/10 include:

- The establishment of a cross service Customer Repairs Forum to involve customers in shaping repairs services.
- Introduction of a stock management system with our main contractor to address falling numbers of repairs fixed at first visit – monitor success of this
- Regional Asset Managers in post to better manage consultation, and involve customers before planned programmes are delivered.
- Involve customers in the recruitment and monitoring of contractors.
- Improve monitoring of mobility and accessibility adaptations to homes.
- Ensure homes comply with current standards of security and sustainability e.g. make them ecologically sound
- Improve process for rechargeable repairs, including providing support for vulnerable customers.
- Project Alliance established to carry out a service review on void repairs and responsive repairs, with specific focus on time taken issues

Anti-Social Behaviour

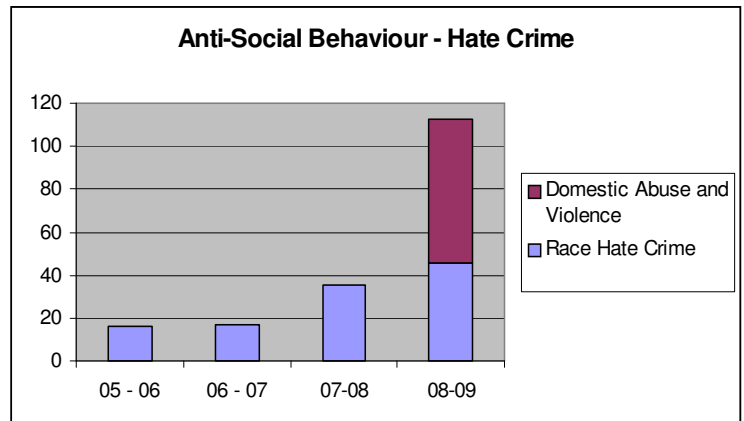


The increase in the number of anti-social behaviour cases reported in 2008/09 can partly be explained by the number of additional homes taken into management as Guinness Northern Counties was set up.

The target for a visit to a complainant within 5 working days is 90%, and for 2008/09 we achieved a performance of 94.3%, which is above target and a fantastic improvement on the 2007/08 performance of 55.8%.

During 2008/09, 113 hate crimes were reported, 46 of which were in the category of race hate crime, which shows the improvement in the accessibility of our reporting process.

We also introduced a new category of domestic abuse cases, of which 67 were reported. This increased three-fold the number of “rapid response” cases for the ASB team, and 95.8% of them were dealt with in timescale.



In 2008/09, Guinness Northern Counties held their first Standing Together awards ceremony. This celebrated the achievement of our partnership working with customers who had witnessed anti-social behaviour, and helped bring legal action against the perpetrators.

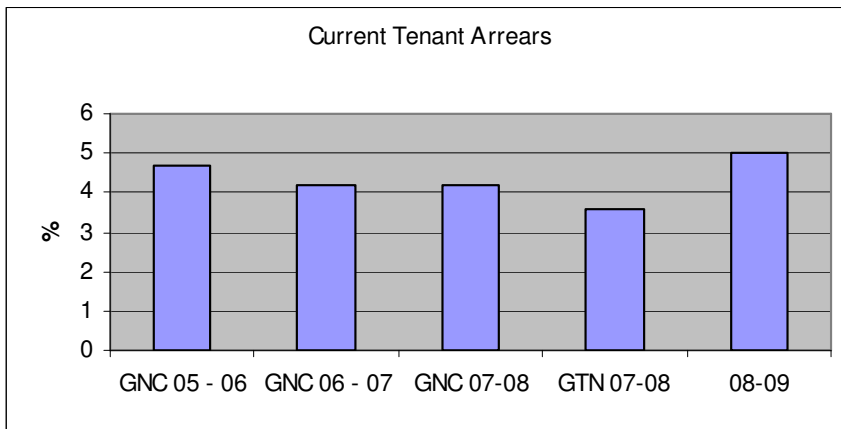
According to STATUS 2009, only 51% of customers were satisfied with the final outcome of their last anti-social behaviour report.

82% of customers think that the way the landlord deals with crime and anti-social behaviour is important.

Planned Improvements for 2009/10 include:

- Introduce a witness support network for witnesses and victims of anti-social behaviour.
- Develop “good neighbour” leaflets, in consultation with customers, to cover 15 categories of nuisance
- Identify “hotspots” of ASB, and target resources more effectively towards them.
- Expand Standing Together awards ceremony to include staff and “perpetrator” categories.
- Vulnerability Manager in the ASB Team to be involved in strategic work around the prevention of anti-social behaviour perpetrated by vulnerable people and against vulnerable people.

Rent Arrears and Financial Support



The Current Tenant Arrears figure refers to the amount of rental income owed to Guinness Northern Counties by its current tenants. The figure is shown as a percentage of total rental income – the higher the percentage, the more money is owed.

The graph above shows that the level of current tenant arrears increased in 2008/09. This can partly be explained by the current economic climate meaning that some customers are finding it difficult to pay their rent. The more customers fall into arrears, the less income Guinness Northern Counties, as a not-for-profit organisation, have to put back into improving services. It is therefore important that we try to reduce the level of arrears, both by improving our internal processes, and by providing support and advice to customers who are falling behind in their rent payments.

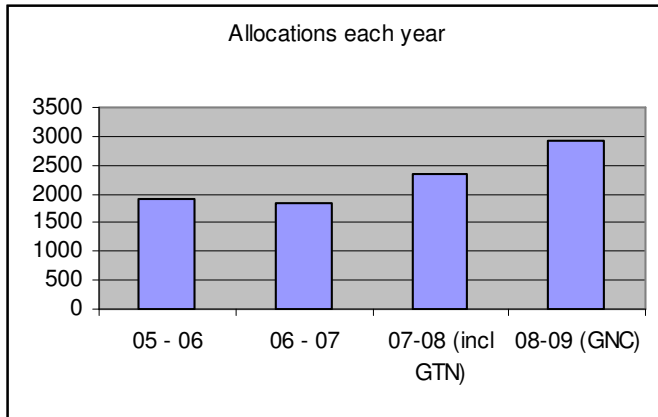
The STATUS 2009 results show that 24% of customers who responded had fallen into rent arrears in the previous 12 months, and of these 50% rated the support received from Guinness Northern Counties to reduce rent arrears as "Good". 71% were satisfied with the help received with benefits and debts in the last 12 months.

In late 2009 the Customer Accounts team was set up to provide benefits support and guidance to customers over the telephone, provide a benefit check for all new customers, and to work with Neighbourhood Teams on rents and arrears.

Planned improvements for 2009/2010 include:

- Develop Allpay payment method to make it available for all customers (target date April – Sept 2010)
- Review website, in partnership with customers, to contain up to date debt, benefit, and income management advice
- Provide customer advice leaflets on benefits, debt, low cost credit etc
- Develop staff training to lead to improved debt and benefit advice for customers
- Undertake a targeted benefits take-up campaign
- Develop Customer Accounts team and rent arrears processes to create efficiencies.

Allocations and Lettings



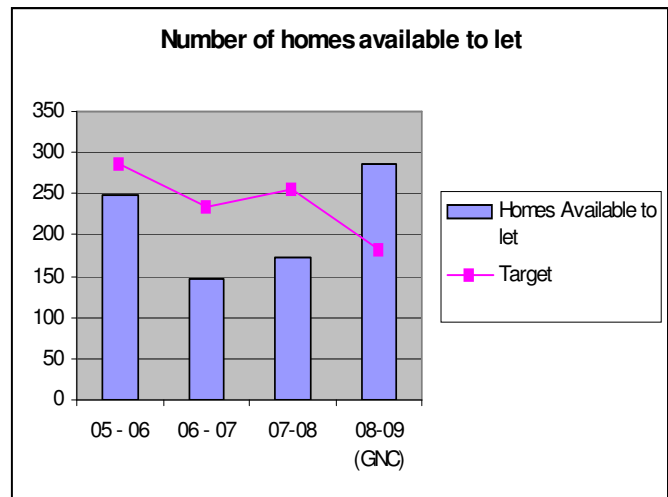
This graph shows an increase in the number of allocations (new lettings) we make year on year.

The increase is partly due to more new properties becoming available in 2008/09, and also more previously unavailable to let homes have become available.

Void Management

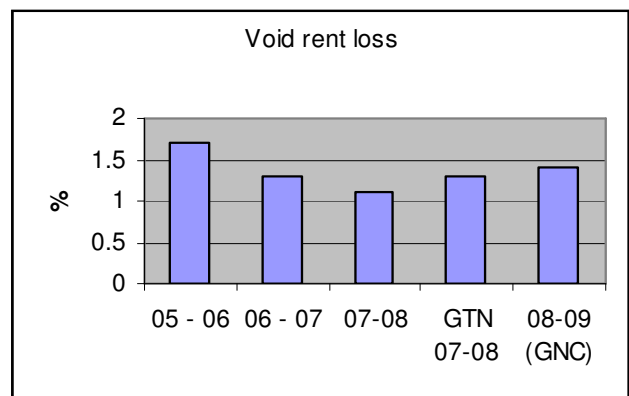
This graph shows the number of homes we have available to let, which remain empty (figures up to 07-08 only include former Northern Counties homes). The increase in this number, and the fact that we are significantly above target means that the process of letting homes once they have been vacated needs to be improved.

The reasons for this result include delays in receiving nominations from the local authority and delays in processing choice-based lettings application.



Void rent loss refers to the percentage of our total rental income that we lose over the course of the year through our homes being "void", or empty.

The higher this percentage, the more money Guinness Northern Counties is losing, and so internal processes need to be improved so that empty properties are let to a new customer as soon as possible.



As the graph above shows, there has been an increase in void rent loss in 2008/09, and a number of issues have had an impact on this decline in performance, including the impact of a new void process, and some pockets of low demand across our geography. This is one of the key areas for improvement for Guinness Northern Counties for 2009/10.

Value for Money... More than Money!

Value for money is all about getting the best quality service at the best price, from contractors that share our aim to really make a difference to our customers and homes. In recent times, this has been even more of a priority as we all watch the pennies. By focusing on value for money, we are able to make your money go further, investing not only in your homes but in the wider community and training our staff to deliver excellent customer service.

So how do we achieve value for money?

Being part of The Guinness Partnership has enabled us to negotiate better deals with our best contractors and our customers have played a crucial role in this. Deals such as:

- Residents content insurance –14% reduction in premiums overall with a wider choice of cover across most categories.
- Savings of over £130,000 on our window cleaning contract in the West Region.
- The Anti-Social Behaviour team have secured outside funding for a youth worker (currently based in the North region) at no cost to Guinness Northern Counties.

But for us it's also about giving you the best possible service:

- We've extended our service recently to more than 6000 former Guinness North customers who now enjoy the benefits of using our customer service centre extended opening hours.
- Our elderly and vulnerable customers now receive enhanced service from Guinness Care & Support, a specialised company within the Partnership and experts in their field.
- Our customers now have a wider choice of where they'd like to live using the Homewapper scheme. This investment joins many registered social landlords together to offer our customers greater choice.
- We have recruited 3 new Community Investment Managers so that there is one in each region. Their role is to embed involvement at a local level and support community investment.

By far the greatest cost to Guinness Northern Counties and any responsible landlord is the repairs and maintenance of homes;

- Last year we spent around £6m making sure your homes are in good condition. This included a wide range of things such as replacing kitchens, windows, roofs, doors, fences and boilers. Also adapting homes for residents with special needs, re-decorating communal areas, landscaping and improvements to car parking.
- To ensure our customers safety, we recently achieved 100% of Gas Safety Certificates in place or in process.