



# The QHS Criteria for Excellence

Revised January 2008

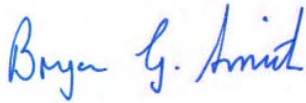


## **Preface to the Third Edition of the QHS Criteria of Excellence**

It is now two years since the second edition of these Criteria of Excellence was produced. Since then these Criteria have been adopted and used by many more Housing Associations. The resulting greater usage has shown us how they could be improved further and as a result several minor changes have been included which should make them easier to use and understand. Also some of the criteria will be assessed in a different way in future, - mostly this involves the use of on-site audits rather than mystery shopping wherever experience has shown us that this would be more appropriate.

I have no doubt that these Criteria will continue to guide the housing industry as it seeks to improve its customer service.

I commend them to you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bryan G. Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a faint, light-colored rectangular stamp.

Dr. Bryan G. Smith OBE, Chairman of QHS.

Price £35.00 UK sterling  
© Quality Housing Services Limited 2004

This Criteria for Excellence, was first published in May 2004 by Quality Housing Services Ltd [QHS] and reissued January 2008. No extract may be reproduced by either electronic or photocopying means, without prior permission in writing from QHS, unless permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act

## Table of contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	2
QUALITY HOUSING SERVICES - DEVELOPING SERVICE EXCELLENCE .....	2
<b>Definitions and Glossary of Terms</b> .....	3
<b>1 QHS CERTIFICATION</b> .....	4
<b>2. QHS's role in assuring service excellence</b> .....	5
<b>3. The QHS Excellence Criteria</b> .....	6
3.1 OPENING AND RECEPTION (PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY & APPEARANCE).....	6
3.2 TELEPHONE ACCESSIBILITY .....	7
3.3 INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTATION .....	8
3.4 DEALING WITH PEOPLE SEEKING HOUSING.....	10
3.5 MAINTENANCE.....	12
3.6 RENT PAYMENT AND COLLECTIO.....	13
3.7 COMPLAINTS HANDLING .....	14
3.8 ESTATE MANAGEMENT (INCLUDING ASB) .....	15
3.9 PARTICIPATION .....	17
3.10 DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY.....	18
<b>4. The QHS organisational structure</b> .....	19
Appendix 1 - Standard time schedule for maintenance appointments.....	20
Appendix 2 - Standard time schedule for estate repairs.....	21
Appendix 3 - Standard time for response on anti social behaviour.....	22
Appendix 4 - The Corporate Governance Structure of QHS .....	23

## **Introduction**

### **Quality Housing Services - Developing Service Excellence**

QHS stimulates and supports Housing Associations in their development to become customer focused. Our mission is:

To be recognised as the centre of excellence and knowledge for service quality within the housing sector, adding value to both consumers and Housing Associations by driving continuous improvements in service delivery.

We will achieve this through offering practical services and products and by functioning as a platform where Associations can meet and learn from each other.

Housing Associations become scheme members of QHS to improve and maintain the quality of their services and ensure that their customers expectations for customer care are not only met, but exceeded.

Our Criteria for Excellence forms a template which Associations can apply to create form and content to the process of continuous improvement in their provision of services. The Criteria for Excellence achieves this by defining requirements for performance levels within Housing Associations and establishing a conformity assessment methodology.

The power of the Criteria for Excellence lies in its ability to ensure Housing Associations focus on their customers. The approach used to monitor and certificate Housing Associations takes the customer as a starting point and focuses on improving the level of customer care delivered to them.

Every Association is monitored in the same way. This ensures that the customer care levels of all Associations achieving QHS certification meet the same high standards of performance. In addition to this, reporting and feedback loops built into our procedures, ensure all scheme members benefit by being able to drive continuous improvement year on year.

This document details QHS service components and the individual characteristics of excellence. Finally, an overview of the various stakeholders in the QHS organisation is presented.

## **Objectives and Values**

### **Objectives**

- ◆ To evaluate and report on the quality of service which landlords provide for their customers.
- ◆ To award a prestigious certificate to those landlords who provide a particularly excellent service to their customers.
- ◆ To provide other services consistent with the above objectives.

### **Values**

The Independent Board of QHS places particular value on:

- ◆ Providing a service based on objective measurement, logical analysis and independent observation against yardsticks that have been developed by scheme members and agreed by customers.
- ◆ Encouraging and facilitating a culture of self-improvement within a mutually supportive network of scheme members.
- ◆ Increasing the weighting that is given to QHS evaluations by Government and other regulatory bodies.
- ◆ Responding in a timely manner to all scheme members' needs and requests.
- ◆ Minimising the costs to scheme members.

## Definitions and Glossary of Terms

### Terminology

*Customer:* Is to cover all possible customers / customers / residents of a Housing Association whether they be a customer, person seeking housing, joint owner, lease holder etc.

*Person seeking Housing:* Prospective customer or existing customer seeking to move to another property

*House:* Is to cover all types of property/ accommodation owned or managed by the Housing Association in part or full. Properties could be flats, houses, forums etc

*Scheme Member:* In the context of this document a scheme member is a Housing Association which has full membership of QHS. As part of the membership package they do receive a number of assessment checks

*QHS Certificated Scheme member.* These are scheme members that have successfully achieved the service delivery levels as set out in the certification rules and agreed by scheme members, and are entitled to promote themselves with the certification marque.

*Services:* In the context of this document services relates to those activities which Housing Associations carry out on behalf of the customer and includes such areas as choice based lettings etc.

*Operator:* Any person answering an external call directly

*Estate:* Two or more houses with areas or facilities of communal use or responsibility

### Conformity assessment methodology

*Telephone accessibility survey:* QHS use a professional service to call and monitor response of scheme member organisations at intervals described in its procedures. Records of these calls are kept and assessed as part of the certification decision.

*Mystery Shop:* This is a visit carried out by a party unknown to the Housing Association who will act out the part of a customer in a pre scripted and realistic scenario . The output of the visit is a written report on the service delivery of the Housing Association to be used as part of the certification decision. Such visits take place at intervals and against scenarios described in QHS procedures.

*Customer Polling :* QHS gathers information on Customer opinion through polling against information supplied via its scheme members. The output of this is fed into the QHS reporting and certification mechanism and back to scheme members at appropriate intervals.

*On Site Audit:* Pre booked audit visits are carried out by QHS auditors at intervals described in QHS procedures. These audits are to review the achievement of the Housing Association in the context of this Standard and to ensure that there is enough objective evidence to support the recommendation for certification. The audits are focussed on identifying weaknesses and supporting continuous improvement in the customer care offered by the Association.

### Abbreviations

ASB:	Anti-social behaviour	HA:	Housing Association
BME:	Black and minority ethnic	QHS:	Quality Housing Services Ltd
CEO:	Chief Executive Officer	RSL:	Registered Social Landlord

## 1. QHS Scheme Member Certification

QHS has identified the key components of services delivered within Housing Associations - from the moment a person seeking housing makes first contact with an Association, to the time they terminate their tenancy agreement. QHS scheme member Certification demands that all services provided and subsequent events, are delivered to an excellent quality level.

QHS Scheme Member Certification has been created to define service excellence in the following delivery areas:

- Opening and reception (physical accessibility & appearance)
- Telephone accessibility
- Information and documentation
- Dealing with people seeking housing
- Maintenance
- Rent payment and collection
- Complaints handling
- Estate services (including management of anti social behaviour)
- Participation
- Diversity and equality

To establish whether customers receive the level of customer care guaranteed by the award of QHS scheme member certification, an assessment methodology has been developed.

Monitoring through continuous assessment assures customers that the excellence of service is of primary consideration to QHS scheme member associations. The assessment results clarify:

- To what extent the QHS scheme members comply with the Criteria
- What improvement actions are required, if identified as an outcome of an audit, for the QHS scheme member to remain entitled to carry the QHS scheme member marque
- The period of time in which any required actions should be implemented.

QHS certificated scheme members are those which have achieved targets as agreed by the scheme members and set out in the QHS certification rules.

## 2. QHS's role in assuring service excellence

The QHS approach provides an integrated instrument which helps scheme member Housing Associations to meet their social objectives and responsibilities in a customer focused, flexible and professional manner.

The service components, their related characteristics and conformity assessment methods are important tools that a QHS scheme member association may use to develop its level of customer care.

A periodic QHS Certification audit is guaranteed to be objective, independent and reliable and is an essential tool for Housing Associations to keep a "finger on the pulse".

Excellence criteria are intended to be developed over time and may be modified according to the current situation. It is essential that quality and the related standards are regularly evaluated through a dynamic process.

- The focus of QHS is on the quality of service to customers, the level of customer care and facilities.
- Other forms of excellence management have a wider scope than the QHS criteria. However, QHS assumes that when scheme members comply with the requirements of QHS certification, it can be expected that other aspects of excellence (management, organisation and employees) are developed as part of the improvement process. Special attention for organisational aspects is recommended. How to organise the process of achieving certification is the responsibility of the scheme member, as the focus of the QHS certification is about delivery of customer care.

Internal processes and other areas of management within organisations are the subject of detailed analysis for quality management tools, such as the Business Excellence Model, Investors in People and ISO 9001. All sit comfortably alongside the QHS approach.

### 3. The QHS Excellence Criteria

Each identified component relating to Housing Association services, contains identified and measurable characteristics of customer care and identifies a method of conformity assessment. These are detailed in the following pages:-

#### 3.1 Opening and reception (Physical accessibility & appearance)

##### 3.1 Opening and reception (physical accessibility appearance)

For this component, the quality characteristics apply to visiting the reception area and other rooms used for consultation

**The Service Characteristics: Reception** – Waiting is annoying; therefore, QHS aims to reduce waiting time for Housing Association customers to a minimum. For the customer, QHS scheme members guarantee fast and direct assistance by an appropriate employee during office hours. Customers can visit a QHS scheme member without restrictions during published office hours and all scheme members are expected to have a minimum of one full time office. On request, an indication can be provided on the time it will take before assistance is available.

- 3.1.1 Full time offices are open a minimum of 36 hours per week this being between 8 and 6 Monday to Friday
- 3.1.2 For full time offices, physical accessibility is guaranteed during lunch time
- 3.1.3 Where members have offices with limited opening hours, opening hours appear wherever the offices are mentioned and:
  - 3.1.3.1 These hours are clearly indicated on the outside of their premises
- 3.1.4 The hours for all offices are strictly adhered to
- 3.1.5 The reception area is tidy: empty coffee cups, paper and other waste are cleared frequently
- 3.1.6 Appropriate rooms are made available for private discussion if required by the customer and it is incumbent upon the organisation to make that known to the customer. Further facilities requirements are:-
  - 3.1.6.1 There are sufficient private rooms as determined by the waiting time
  - 3.1.6.2 There is access to toilets
  - 3.1.6.3 Drinking water is available
  - 3.1.6.4 There are child friendly diversions
  - 3.1.6.5 There are adult diversions (e.g. Newspapers Magazines)
- 3.1.7 Every visitor is to be welcomed and invited to indicate the reason for visiting
- 3.1.8 Every visitor is informed about the expected waiting time
- 3.1.9 The employees receiving the visitor actively monitor the assistance provided in terms of time and privacy and keeps the visitor informed
- 3.1.10 The employees actively monitor that the visitor's privacy is respected, e.g. by escorting visitors to the relevant room (for financial transactions, complaints about neighbour nuisance, etc.)
- 3.1.11 Referrals to persons and places is correct the first time
- 3.1.12 An appointment system is operated and the waiting time for a visitor with an appointment has a maximum of five minutes beyond the appointed time
- 3.1.13 The waiting time for a visitor without an appointment has a maximum of ten minutes
- 3.1.14 Employees are friendly, patient, helpful and presentable.
- 3.1.15 Reception staff (including temporary cover) are clearly identifiable by the use of a name badge

The Conformity Assessment			
Mystery Shopping	Customer polling	Telephone Accessibility	On Site Audit
			✓
			✓
	✓		
			✓
	✓		
			✓
	✓		✓
			✓
			✓
			✓
			✓
			✓
✓			
✓			
	✓		✓
	✓		✓
	✓		
✓			
	✓		✓
			✓



		Mystery Shopping	Customer polling	Telephone Accessibility	On Site Audit
3.2.7	The caller is greeted in the correct manner on all occasions. This means:-				
3.2.7.1	With a connected call, the employee answers with: good morning or good afternoon followed by their identifiable name				✓
3.2.7.2	With a direct call, the employee answers with good morning or good afternoon followed by the associations' name and their identifiable name				✓
<b>The Service Characteristics:</b> Call backs – For accessibility during closing hours, the following quality standards apply: Further requirements related to maintenance response and telephone accessibility are contained in section 3.5 Maintenance response					
3.2.8	Call back promises are honoured (within 24 Hours) there is an audit trail to ensure this happens		✓		✓
3.2.9	There is an out of hours response which clearly states when the caller should call back and offers an appropriate alternative number for any emergency maintenance response requirement			✓	✓
<b>The Service Characteristics:</b> Diversity and equality issues in telephone accessibility					
3.2.10	Interpretation services for customers telephoning who do not speak English as their first language is provided upon request			✓	
3.2.11	Minicom service for deaf callers is provided on a dedicated number with an answering machine facility when not covered by trained personnel			✓	
<b><u>3.3 Information and documentation</u></b>					
<b>3.3 Information and documentation.</b>					
The availability of practical, dedicated documentation is an important instrument in the communication between the Housing Association and the Customer.					
QHS scheme members are equipped with housing information in or near the reception in an accessible manner. Information is available from other sources relating to services provided by the Association and other relevant issues. This printed material is freely available to any interested parties. There are further written information requirements defined in section 3.4 dealing with those seeking housing					
The Service Characteristics: Availability of information					
3.3.1	A QHS scheme member organisation will maintain a listing of all available documents in public view at or near the reception area				✓
3.3.2	A QHS organisation will have an order form available located near the reception area and will provide all documentation requested by visitors by post				✓
3.3.3	A QHS Housing Association will offer documentation on separate elements of its services, describing those services, who can apply and how each application will be considered				✓
3.3.4	A QHS organisation will also have a generic property stock listing and details of its geographic coverage in written format				✓
3.3.5	All Documentation is accurate and up-to-date				✓

		Mystery Shopping	Customer polling	Telephone Accessibility	On Site Audit
3.3.6	Brochure displays are well stocked at all times				✓
	As a minimum the brochures on display will include:				
3.3.6.1	A handbook of information on the Associations policies and practices including their policy on joint tenancies				✓
3.3.6.2	Information about how the Association is performing and results of inspections				✓
3.3.6.3	Information about how the Association is benefiting the local community				✓
3.3.6.4	Information on customer purchase options				✓
3.3.6.5	Complaints procedure				✓
3.3.6.6	The Residents Charter				✓
3.3.7	The information is free of errors and is written in clear language				✓
3.3.8	This information is displayed in a well-organised manner near the reception.				✓
3.3.9	Employees are able to provide assistance to visitors to help them to find the right information and documentation		✓		✓
3.3.10	Written information is free of charge for customers				✓
3.3.10a	How would you rate staff in being able and willing to help explain the written information and documentation		✓		
3.3.11	Scheme membership details and the role of QHS is clearly displayed				✓
3.3.12	Local information supportive to the services offered by the Association is readily available and on display		✓		✓
3.3.13	All information supplied above is also available on the Associations web site, where they have one				✓
<b>The Service Characteristics: Diversity and equality in information and documentation</b>					
3.3.14	All documentation is either provided in alternative formats or it is clearly stated that it can be made available in other formats upon request				✓
3.3.14.1	This is to include different languages, large text, audiotape and Braille.				✓
3.3.15	All documentation is easily accessible for wheelchair users				✓
3.3.16	If the QHS scheme member organisation provides supported housing for customers with learning difficulties, pictorial guidance to the Tenancy Agreements should be available				✓
3.3.17	Support is always made available where the customer needs assistance in completing forms and other documentation				✓
3.3.18	QHS scheme member websites related to customers are accessible. The content can be made available for all customers. This should include as appropriate, information on or free access to large text converter, text translation				✓

**3.4 Dealing with people seeking housing**

**3.4 Dealing with People Seeking Housing**

This is concerned with the excellence of the services experienced by a person seeking housing, from the initial application for a property through the sign-up or assignment process and afterwards to post sign-up or assignment support. It is applicable to both new customers and those seeking transfers.

**The Service Characteristics:** The application – The process of application is an everyday occurrence for Housing Associations for applicants. The role of the Association is to make the process simple to follow and as uncomplicated as possible.

- 3.4.1 Written information on the process is made available to those seeking housing
- 3.4.2 Detailed requirement and options are explained.
- 3.4.3 Help is provided to assist the applicant complete the application (should they wish to use it)
- 3.4.4 Applicants are advised of the next steps in the process

**The Service Characteristics:** The sign up or assignment and handover process

- 3.4.5 A properly completed application form (when required) is assessed, a written decision as to eligibility of the applicant is given within 14 days.
- 3.4.6 Written information on properties is supplied. The information is to include as a minimum:
  - 3.4.6.1 A description of the property
  - 3.4.6.2 A specification of the property (including room sizes)
  - 3.4.6.3 Neighbourhood characteristics
  - 3.4.6.4 Rent
  - 3.4.6.5 Other service charges or related costs
  - 3.4.6.6 The Residents Charter
- 3.4.7 A person seeking housing is offered the opportunity to view a property and can be accompanied by an employee of the Association or by the existing customer.
- 3.4.8 An applicant will be provided with information about their rights and responsibilities together with other leaflets or information about the agreement prior to signing. This information will be fully explained to the applicant.
- 3.4.9 The condition of the property will be established usually in the presence of the new customer and certainly to the agreement of the new customer. If required, a remedial works agreement will be completed. (Subject to tenancy agreement type)
  - 3.4.9.1 This is recorded by means of a form or checklist. This record is verifiable and complies with standards for transparency.
  - 3.4.9.2 The condition of the property will be established by a suitably approved person
- 3.4.10 Delivery of the property takes place by appointment which is made in consultation with the person seeking housing

	Mystery Shopping	Customer polling	Telephone Accessibility	On Site Audit
				✓
	✓			
		✓		✓
		✓		✓
				✓
		✓		✓
				✓
				✓
				✓
				✓
		✓		
		✓		
		✓		
				✓
				✓
		✓		

		Mystery Shopping	Customer polling	Telephone Accessibility	On Site Audit
3.4.11	During the process at or before signing the customer is provided with a customer pack. The content of which is as a minimum:-				✓
3.4.11.1	Residents Charter				✓
3.4.11.2	Direct Debit Forms / Bank mandate				✓
3.4.11.3	Instructions on use of equipment				✓
3.4.11.4	Legal paper on prescribed information (registered office, summary of section 325,326,327 of the Housing Act 85)				✓
3.4.11.5	Moving Home - Key Points Document				✓
3.4.11.6	Customers Handbook				✓
3.4.11.7	Signed copy of Tenancy Agreement				✓
3.4.11.8	Safety Certificates				✓
3.4.11.9	Information about how to request and order repairs				✓
3.4.11.10	Advice on obtaining finance				✓
3.4.11.11	Anti social behaviour				✓
3.4.11.12	Information about how to influence decision making processes of their landlord				✓
3.4.11.13	Council Tax				✓
3.4.11.14	Information about utilities				✓
3.4.11.15	Emergency contact details for the Housing Association				✓
3.4.11.16	A handbook of the Associations Policies & Practices (see 3.3.6.1)				✓
3.4.11.17	Details of the complaints procedure and the subsequent process (see 3.3.6.5)				✓
3.4.11.18	The customers right to compensation				✓
3.4.11.19	Advice and support about customer modifications to the property				✓
3.4.12	The customer will receive information concerning housing benefit (verbal or written)		✓		
<b>The Service Characteristics: Post sign-up or assignment</b>					
3.4.13	The customer is visited, interviewed or called by the Association within six weeks of signing the contract, as an element of an 'after sales programme'		✓		
3.4.13.1	Outstanding maintenance		✓		
3.4.13.2	Payment mechanisms		✓		
3.4.13.3	Identification of special requirements		✓		
<b>The Service Characteristics: Throughout the Housing transactions</b>					
3.4.14	All incoming correspondence is dealt with within 14 days of receipt. If this is considered to be insufficient time for the Association to achieve a satisfactory conclusion, the customer will receive a message within three days of receipt which informs the customer about the probable time it will take to deal with their application				✓
3.4.15	The information provided is complete and well written		✓		
3.4.16	The privacy of the customer during their application is safeguarded		✓		
3.4.17	Employees are always friendly, patient and helpful		✓		

**The Service Characteristics:** Diversity and equality in dealing with those seeking housing

- 3.4.18 Systems are in place to ensure that the application process is clearly explained to applicants who may find it difficult to fully understand the complexities of the process
- 3.4.19 Systems are in place to ensure that relevant issues relating to applicants with special needs are discussed at an early stage

**3.5 Maintenance**

**3.5 Maintenance**

Scheme Member Associations provide the complete range of property maintenance services to all customers.

**The Service Characteristics:** Responsive Maintenance – to minimise inconvenience, repairs need to be made promptly and competently. All QHS Associations requests for repairs can be made in person, by writing or by telephone. In consultation with the customer, the Housing Association will make an appointment for repairs. A target time frame of two hours is made for each appointment.

- 3.5.1 A telephone call concerning a repair request or maintenance problem is answered before the fourth ring
- 3.5.2 A customer is contacted within two working days upon receipt of a request for maintenance, provided the customer has indicated where and when he / she can be reached by telephone during office hours
- 3.5.3 A telephone request for repair directly to the maintenance department / contractor who will carry out the repair will result in an immediate appointment if required
- 3.5.4 In all cases assessment of responsibility is made immediately and the customer will be advised
- 3.5.5 In all cases an appointment is offered (with the exception of category 1 items detailed in Appendix 1, which require immediate attention)
- 3.5.6 Appointments are made against the time schedule and repairs categories as laid out in Appendix 1
- 3.5.7 It will be recorded and measured as a successful appointment with no impact on the Housing Associations performance statistics, when the customer requires an appointment at their own convenience, which fail the normal criteria and, is not safety related.
- 3.5.8 A maximum time frame of two hours applies for the attendance at an appointment with the Customer
- 3.5.9 All appointments and agreements are monitored and observed closely, QHS organisations achieve a minimum of 95% success rate
- 3.5.10 If the attendance at an appointment cannot be kept due to unforeseen circumstances, the customer is informed before the two hour window is over. At this point a new appointment is made
- 3.5.11 When calling at the property, the Association employee or the third party employee will introduce themselves and explain the purpose of the visit
- 3.5.12 The visiting employee will always provide identification

Mystery Shopping	Customer polling	Telephone Accessibility	On Site Audit
			✓
			✓
		✓	
	✓		
			✓
	✓		
			✓
	✓		✓
	✓		
			✓
	✓		
	✓		
	✓		

		Mystery Shopping	Customer polling	Telephone Accessibility	On Site Audit
3.5.13	After carrying out or partially completing the required repairs the employee takes due care to leave the property tidy and in good order when leaving the site		✓		
3.5.14	Where the repair cannot be completed the customer will be advised of the completion date before the employee leaves the property, (or within 24 hours if this is not possible - due to provision of parts)		✓		
3.5.15	Employees or the third party employees are friendly, patient and helpful		✓		
<b>The Service Characteristics:</b> Planned maintenance					
3.5.16	QHS scheme members have a publicly available planned maintenance program		✓		✓
3.5.17	QHS scheme members have an inclusive customer consultation program in place to determine the optional element of planned maintenance programs		✓		
3.5.18	QHS scheme members offer alternative choices to customers where possible		✓		
3.5.19	Feedback is given to customers on consultation and choice		✓		
<b>The Service Characteristics:</b> Diversity and equality in maintenance					
3.5.20	QHS scheme members have a system in place to ensure that the special needs of vulnerable customers are taken into account within the maintenance area				✓
3.5.21	Access is provided to an Aids and Adaptations service				✓
<b><u>3.6 Rent Payment and Collection</u></b>					
3.6 Rent payment and collection (Including service charges or other financial transactions): The scheme member Association provides a policy in which the process for making payment, is made as convenient as possible for the customer. If a customer, despite support and advice of the Association that is unable to pay and has overdue rent, the Association will offer a quick and clear procedure to assist them.					
<b>The Service Characteristics:</b> Managing payment arrangements and minimising arrears					
3.6.1	When a rent agreement is signed the customer receives written information. As a minimum this covers the following:-				✓
3.6.1.1	An outline of the full rent charges				✓
3.6.1.2	What the rent charges cover				✓
3.6.1.3	Methods of payment				✓
3.6.1.4	Frequency of Payment				✓
3.6.1.5	The procedure followed in the event of non payment				✓
3.6.2	Customers are kept informed of any projected impact on service charges as a result of intended major works		✓		
3.6.3	A QHS organisation offers alternative methods of payment This will allow payment to be made by the customer in circumstances where they do not have a bank account				✓

		Mystery Shopping	Customer polling	Telephone Accessibility	On Site Audit
3.6.4	To minimise overdue rent situations the automatic collection of rent is encouraged				✓
3.6.5	A QHS organisation has a system in place to minimise rent arrears				✓
	As a minimum this system includes the following elements:-				
3.6.5.1	A monitoring system which also ensures continuity in management of rent payments				✓
3.6.5.2	An early notification to customers of non payment. Customers who find that they are in the situation of owing overdue rent, receive information about the procedures concerning rent collection				✓
3.6.5.3	The consequences of continued non payment are made explicit.				✓
3.6.5.4	Advice on financial support or referral to that support				✓
3.6.6	Wording of correspondence related to non payment is positive, appropriate and considerate of vulnerable customers	✓			✓
3.6.7	Particular consideration is given to handling of Possession Notices where slow payment by agency is the cause				✓
3.6.8	All arrangements concerning overdue rent and rent collection are recorded in writing				✓
3.6.9	Statements can be supplied on demand				✓
3.6.10	Statements are supplied twice per year at regular intervals (usually 6 monthly)		✓		✓
3.6.11	The privacy of all financial transactions is respected				✓
<b>3.7 Complaints Handling</b>					
3.7 Complaints Handling – A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about action or lack of action or the standard of a service whether considered by the Association to be justified or not. QHS views complaints as an opportunity to identify faults within their service and subsequently to generate actions for continual improvement. In cases where dissatisfaction is expressed there needs to be a procedure in place to resolve the causes of dissatisfaction. A QHS organisation will have in place a robust procedure to investigate and wherever possible resolve the causes of dissatisfaction.					
<b>The Service Characteristics:</b> Policies and procedures for the handling of complaints from customers					
3.7.1	The Association has written information about the procedure and instructions about how to file a complaint and the ensuing process				✓
3.7.2	Complaints can be lodged either verbally or in writing				
3.7.3	Complaints are classified as such if the customer deems it so				✓
3.7.4	90% of complaints are resolved at a local (Organisational) level				✓
3.7.5	The QHS organisation has a system in place for monitoring customer satisfaction with complaints handling				✓
3.7.5.1	95% of customers are satisfied with the process they have experienced				✓
3.7.5.2	90% of Customers are satisfied with the action taken or proposed				✓
3.7.6	There is a maximum acceptable number of upheld complaints for each office, this is set and monitored on a per 1000 units basis				✓

- 3.7.7 Actioning excludes acknowledgement and escalation of complaints
  - 3.7.7.1 Stage 1 "General Staff" level complaints are actioned within 14 days of receiving the complaint
  - 3.7.7.2 Stage 2 "Supervisor" level complaints are actioned within 14 days of the next "escalation" response from the customer
  - 3.7.7.3 Stage 3 "Board" level complaints are actioned within 30 days of next "escalation" response from the customer
  - 3.7.7.4 At Stage 3 the opportunity for personal representation with support (if required) exists
  - 3.7.7.5 Stage 4 "The Housing Ombudsman" The actioning of these can be outside of the control of the Housing Association. The Housing Association has a system in place to actively monitor and pursue resolution
  - 3.7.7.6 The complainant is kept updated and informed throughout the escalation process
  - 3.7.7.7 Complaints are formally closed, date and time is recorded against closure
- 3.7.8 The organisation has a procedure in place to identify and resolve the root cause of complaints
- 3.7.9 A QHS organisation trains staff to welcome and manage complaints
- 3.7.10 Individuals are made responsible for the successful resolution of complaints
- 3.7.11 Where the corrective action for a complaint resides outside of the organisation, a QHS organisation will assist and direct the customer to ensure a satisfactory solution is obtained
- 3.7.12 The complaints procedure is well publicised and accessible to all
- 3.7.13 Complaints are dealt with impartially
- 3.7.14 Complaints are dealt with in a full and fair way
- 3.7.15 Customers confidentiality is respected when handling a complaint
- 3.7.16 Feedback is comprehensive and fully explained to the complainant

	Mystery Shopping	Customer polling	Telephone Accessibility	On Site Audit
				✓
				✓
				✓
				✓
				✓
				✓
				✓
				✓
		✓		
		✓		✓
				✓
		✓		
		✓		
		✓		
				✓
				✓

**3.8 Estate Management (Including ASB)**

**3.8** Estate Management (including ASB) This service component is concerned with the management of the estates in which the QHS scheme member organisation's properties are located and their approach to the management of Anti-Social Behaviour. Typically but not exclusively, this concerns the following issues : boundary disputes, communal areas, harassment, gardens, neighbour nuisance, pets, parking problems, fly tipping and refuse removal. A QHS scheme member organisation implements and administers a pro-active approach to dealing with estate management problems and does not simply rely on customers reporting problems.

**The Service Characteristics:** General estate management issues

- 3.8.1 The QHS scheme member organisation pro-actively monitors the condition of their estates through the undertaking of inspections, as a minimum:
  - 3.8.1.1 Monthly there is a general inspection of all of the estates under the Housing Associations management

3.8.1.2	The quality and reliability of services provided for the estate is monitored monthly			✓
3.8.1.3	Customers are always given the opportunity to be involved in the inspection	✓		✓
3.8.2	The QHS scheme member organisations arrange / provide services which support vulnerable customers in keeping their local environment tidy. (Assisted gardening scheme etc.)			✓
3.8.3	The QHS scheme member organisation operates a ground maintenance service across all its areas to ensure that open spaces are well maintained	✓		✓
3.8.4	Responsive repairs are carried out to the timescales outlined in Appendix 2			✓
3.8.5	Customers are consulted and advised of plans for improvements to the estate.	✓		
3.8.6	Consultation should indicate areas of choice			✓
3.8.7	Feedback on consultation results should be provided			✓
3.8.8	Customers are advised at appropriate intervals of progress and timescales on improvements to the estate	✓		
3.8.9	The QHS scheme member organisation clearly outlines customer responsibilities with regard to the maintenance of external / communal areas and the local neighbourhood	✓		✓
3.8.10	The QHS scheme member organisation works in partnership with other agencies with view to pro-actively tackling potential estate management issues (e.g. local agenda 21 initiatives, crime reduction etc.)			✓
3.8.11	The QHS scheme member organisation has proactive systems in place to effectively record and monitor all reports of estate management problems			✓
3.8.12	The QHS estate management system includes a review and ensures that preventative actions are taken to avoid any future re-occurrence			✓
3.8.13	The QHS scheme member organisation has clear policies and procedures in place for dealing with reports of estate management problems			✓
<b>The Service Characteristics:</b> Pro-active measures when dealing with reports of Anti-Social Behaviour (including reports of racial harassment)				
3.8.14	The QHS scheme member organisation clearly outlines customer responsibilities with regard to the behaviour expected of them throughout the duration of the term of their agreement and action that may be taken if these conditions are breached	✓		✓
3.8.15	The QHS scheme member organisation offers a number of methods for customers to report their ASB problems (e.g. in writing, in person, via telephone, via website etc.)	✓		✓
3.8.16	The QHS scheme member organisation has clear policies and procedures for dealing with reports of ASB.			✓
3.8.17	The QHS scheme member organisation has proactive systems in place to effectively record and monitor reports of ASB			✓
3.8.18	The QHS ASB system includes review and closes the loop with regards to taking preventative action for the future			✓
3.8.19	The QHS organisation operates within set timescales for response to ASB issues as set out in Appendix 3			✓
3.8.20	The QHS scheme member organisation adopts a multi-agency approach with regard to dealing with ASB and has well-established links with key agencies (i.e. The Police, third party reporting centres etc.)			✓
3.8.21	The QHS scheme member organisation actively encourages parties in dispute to resolve their differences through mediation and completes referrals as appropriate.	✓		✓
3.8.22	The QHS scheme member organisation has systems in place to offer	✓		✓

appropriate support to customers reporting incidents of ASB (i.e. during court cases etc.)

--	--	--	--

### **3.9 Participation**

3.9 Participation: The QHS scheme member organisation has systems in place which actively encourage and support all customers to participate in the development and operation of its services

#### **The Service Characteristics: Policies and representation**

- 3.9.1 Policies and procedures for resident involvement are published and widely available
- 3.9.2 The QHS organisation can demonstrate an approach to achieving representation which reflects the profile and demographics of its neighbourhoods and communities
- 3.9.3 The QHS organisation has a structured approach to representation which allows for the different needs and requirements of communities within its housing profiles (This can lead to a tiered system of representation )

#### **The Service Characteristics: Implementation**

- 3.9.4 There is a system of consultation with customers ensuring they have an input to the methods of consultation
- 3.9.5 There is a system of consultation with customers which ensures they have an input to the topics of consultation
- 3.9.6 There is as a minimum annual review of both methods and topics

#### **The Service Characteristics : Methods**

- 3.9.7 QHS organisations offer a range of methods and opportunities for participation
- 3.9.8 The methods and opportunities offered reflect the consultation in 3.9.3
- 3.9.9 The methods in 3.9.8 and opportunities reflects the need of local communities

#### **The Service Characteristics : Support to representative groups**

- 3.9.10 The QHS organisation offers the full range of support to recognised groups. These include as a minimum: child care, travel expenses, free venues, training, administration, advice on other available resources, involvement of Housing Association staff, facilitation of meetings, marketing , advice on or access to information source

#### **The Service Characteristics: Reporting outcomes**

- 3.9.11 Global and Local reports of activity and achievement resulting from participation are communicated quarterly unless otherwise specified by customers
- 3.9.12 There is a mechanism in place to ensure the results of participation and customers views (See also consultations in planned maintenance 3.5.16 and estate management 3.8.5) are given due regard and do in fact influence service delivery

Mystery Shopping	Customer polling	Telephone Accessibility	On Site Audit
	✓		
			✓
			✓
	✓		
	✓		
			✓
	✓		
			✓
			✓
			✓
			✓
			✓

**3.10 Diversity and Equality**

3.10 Diversity and Equality: - ensuring that diversity and equality are embedded into the day-to-day function of the QHS scheme member organisation.

**The Service Characteristics:** Tailoring service delivery to diverse needs

- 3.10.1 Availability of an interpretation service for customers who do not speak English as their first language, including contact in person, in writing or via telephone
- 3.10.2 Consideration made as necessary to facilitate religious beliefs / practices of customers
- 3.10.3 QHS organisations have an inclusive and flexible approach to address the diverse needs of their customer base
- 3.10.4 Service satisfaction levels are recorded. Customer satisfaction levels amongst vulnerable and BME customers should not be lower than the remaining customer base
- 3.10.5 The QHS scheme member actively supports vulnerable customers by offering a range of extra care support services where applicable
- 3.10.6 The QHS scheme member operates an equal opportunities and harassment policy which ensures that all customers are treated fairly and respectfully

Mystery Shopping	Customer polling	Telephone Accessibility	On Site Audit
			✓
			✓
			✓
			✓
			✓
	✓		

## **4. The QHS organisational structure**

### **The QHS organisational components**

#### **The Independent Board**

The Board is the highest body of QHS and meet at least twice a year. The responsibilities of the Independent Board are:

- To manage the QHS organisation according to its constitution
- To appoint members of the Certification Committee
- To establish and modify the Certification Committee's regulations concerning procedures and activities
- To co-ordinate the financial management of QHS
- To authorise the general management of QHS through annual reports.

#### **The QHS organisation**

The day to day activities and management of QHS are the responsibility of a Chief Executive Officer who is appointed by the Independent Board.

The main tasks of the CEO are:

All activities concerning the QHS Marque, which include:

- Acquisition, co-ordination of activities relating to initial audits with scheme members, to assist in the implementation of Marque components with scheme members, co-ordination of periodic compliance audits with QHS scheme members
- Organisation of workshops and training
- Organisation of meetings, based on a theme, e.g. company meetings at different branches
- Development of new services and products
- Training (with professional partners)
- Account management (retain relation with scheme members and potential scheme members)
- To formulate and execute marketing and information policies
- To prepare action plans and budgets (internal organisation)
- To prepare progress reports, annual reports which include financial reports
- Networking.

#### **The Technical Committee**

Made up of members, its role is to develop and monitor the criteria and approach used to assess against it ensuring they meet QHS objectives and the needs of members and customers

See Pro-active measures Appendix 4.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Standard time schedule for maintenance appointments**

Maintenance template for setting of appointments

#### **Category One**

Attendance within 4 hours or less

##### **Repairs Descriptions**

- Burst pipe / flooding / serious water leak
- Gas leak / carbon monoxide incident
- Manhole overflowing sewage / complete loss of water supply / blocked toilets (if no alternative)
- Electrical supply failure / no electricity supply
- Fires and flooding
- Property insecure / making a home secure after break in / window glazing (make safe)
- Other repairs deemed dangerous

##### **Comment**

Safety critical – Make safe element may be completed as prelude to full repair which may well fall under other category listing

#### **Category Two**

Attendance within 24 hours or less

##### **Repairs Descriptions**

- No heating in winter
- No hot water
- Electrical faults which are potential hazards
- Failure of warden call system / smoke detector not working (not inc batteries)
- Serious roof leaks / blocked drains / leaking pipe
- Lift breakdown

##### **Comment**

Temporary provision of alternatives may be an acceptable solution here

#### **Category Three**

Attendance within 7 calendar days

##### **Repairs Descriptions**

- TV aerial sockets
- Minor plumbing repairs
- External guttering and water management systems
- Electrical repairs where there is minimal risk

#### **Category Four**

Attendance within 21 calendar days

##### **Repairs Descriptions**

- Heating in summer
- All other non urgent repairs

Customer requirement (when longer) always takes precedence except for safety critical element.

## Appendix 2

### Standard time schedule for estate repairs

Maintenance template for completion of work

#### Category One

Completion within 4 Hours or less

##### Repairs Descriptions

- Burst pipe / flooding / serious water leak
- Gas leak / carbon monoxide incident
- Manhole overflowing sewage / blocked toilets (if no alternative)
- Electrical supply failure / no electrical supply
- Non operating lift (where no alternative) or occupied lift in communal area
- Unsecured access to internal communal area
- Fires and flooding
- Other requirements deemed dangerous

##### Comment

Safety Critical – Where responsibility lies with Housing Association (report may be sufficient action if) responsibility lies elsewhere.

#### Category Two

Completion within 24 Hours or less

##### Repairs Descriptions

- Tripping slipping or other “moderate” health and safety risks
- Lights not working
- Damage to play equipment (make safe or remove)
- Fire equipment
- TV systems
- Repairs to laundry equipment (where no alternative facility)
- Sheltered alarm call equipment
- Pest control (prejudicial to health)

##### Comment

Temporary provision of alternative may be an acceptable solution here.

#### Category Three

Completion within 7 calendar days

##### Repairs Descriptions

- Repairs to laundry equipment (alternatives available)
- Door entry repairs (not insecure)
- Removal of rubbish
- Pest control (non prejudicial to health)

#### Category Four

Completion within 21 calendar days

##### Repairs Descriptions

- Minor repairs
- Patios
- Fencing
- CCTV
- Clothes lines
- Other non essential repairs and improvements

##### Comment

Repairs to communal rooms, offices, lounges, guest suites will be in line with response times as laid out in attachment one for the customers homes section of the standard unless excepted in this section.

## Appendix 3 -

### Standard time for response on anti social behaviour

Timescales are for commencement of action.

#### Disorder – Severe

Immediate action

##### Examples

- Racial harassment (violent or threat of violence)
- Serious violence or threats of violence
- Domestic violence
- Vandalism causing a danger
- Drug usage paraphernalia (physical danger)

#### Disorder – Urgent

Within 24 Hours

##### Examples

- Racial Harassment (non violent)
- Abandoned cars (dangerous)
- Offensive graffiti
- Serious noise disturbance

#### Disorder – Moderate

Within 3 calendar days

##### Examples

- Non violent unreasonable behaviour
- Non violent intimidation
- Suspicion of drug dealing or other illegal activity (frequent visitors to the house)
- Rubbish and fly tipping

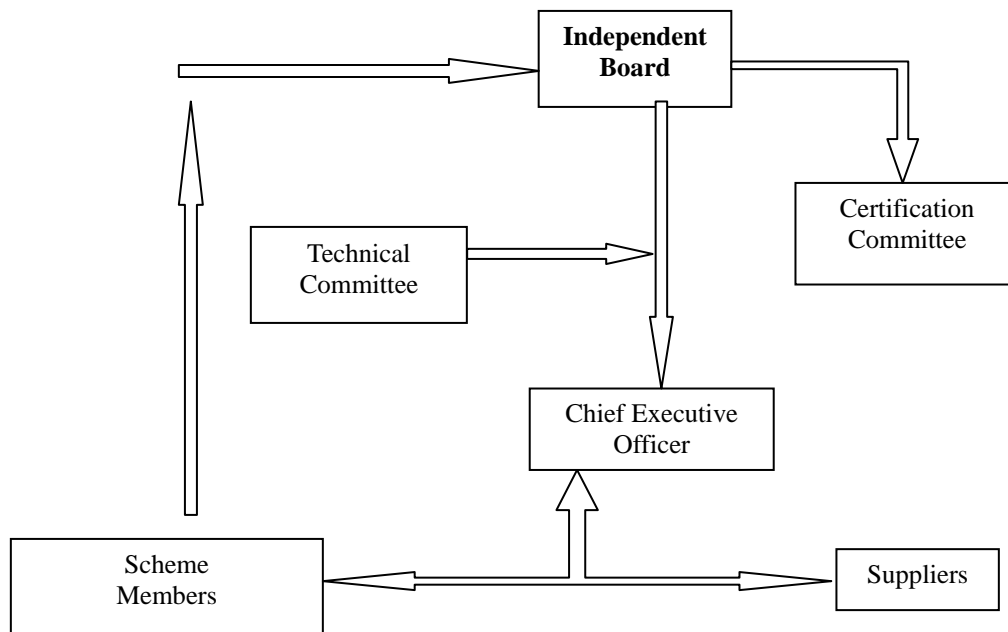
#### Disorder – Minor

Attendance within 7 calendar days

##### Examples

- Inconsiderate household noise
- Dog nuisance (fouling, barking, roaming)
- Un-roadworthy vehicles or vehicle repairs
- Inconsiderate parking
- Non offensive graffiti
- Non dangerous vandalism

Completion depends on exact nature of disorder, e.g. abandoned cars (not posing a health risk) must have a notice posted for 21 days.



### Key Roles and Responsibilities

**The Independent Board:** To ensure the independence and continuity of the business through the adoption of appropriate best business practice, policy, strategy and corporate governance.

**The Technical Committee:** Made up of scheme members, its role is to develop and monitor the criteria and approach used to assess against it ensuring they meet QHS objectives and the needs of scheme members and customers.

**The Certification Committee:** To assure the impartiality and independence of Quality Housing Services (QHS) as a third party certification body.