



L&Q entry for

**National Housing
Maintenance Forum**

Best Practice Awards 2010

Category

**“the organisation that was best at meeting residents’
needs in the provision of a maintenance service”**

L&Q



Background

L&Q is one of the UK's largest housing associations. Opening in 1963, for 46 years it has been dedicated to providing affordable homes and housing management services of the highest quality to our residents.

Although L&Q manages in excess of 64,000 homes, it maintains a customer focused and personal delivery through its local "neighborhood" structure. The four neighborhoods (South, South East, North East and West) deliver services throughout London and the South of England.

L&Q offer affordable homes for rent and shared ownership schemes, as well as specialist accommodation for older people.

Our mission is creating places where people want to live. **We are united by our mission and our values.**

Creating places where people want to live is more than our corporate vision, it is a passion that drives us to work together with a common focus, satisfying the need from so many people for a place to call home.

Key to this vision is engaging with our residents at all levels throughout our organization. We ensure they play an active role in the decision making processes that drive L&Q forward and shape its policy and direction.

Putting our customers first and engaging with them as partners has been a fundamental foundation of the success of L&Q since its establishment.

We give our residents choice and the opportunity to shape the environment within which they live. Through our many resident interfaces we listen to their needs and concerns and act upon the ideas and feedback we receive.

This resident partnership operates throughout L&Q, from corporate strategy, through procurement to performance monitoring.

Partnership working is of utmost importance to L&Q and we work with more than 90 local authorities in London and the South East and a further 70 specialist agencies in the supported housing sector.

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What is innovative about the service provided?

Listening to our residents

Residents told us that repairs and maintenance was their main priority and as a direct result we hosted a resident focused workshop. Nine residents attended the event with senior managers. The purpose of this was to engage with our customers and learn from them at first hand what they wanted from L&Q in the delivery of such services.

The consensus of opinion coming from the Resident Focus Group was that their overriding desire was for L&Q to enhance their responsive repairs service so that they:

“Delivered a high quality maintenance service without being complacent”

Quote: Jan Pitchell, Resident Board Member

It was clear from the workshop that the raising of standards in the quality of delivery of our responsive repairs service was essential. From the comments gathered we understood that a fundamental review was necessary and for it to be effective it needed to be undertaken in partnership with our residents.

The workshop identified the following resident issues:

- The service must be based around what matters to residents:
 - This means that standards, systems and practices are developed around delivering what matters to them
- Services must be reliable and responsive:
 - The need for clear standards and even clearer communication with residents is essential. When problems occur we rectify them quickly
- Services are fairly delivered and respond to diversity
- L&Q are to be honest and open with residents
 - We don't make promises we can't keep and get back to people when we say we will. Information is freely available
- Commitment to continuous improvement and value for money is essential
 - Feedback is used to improve both the service and overall efficiency. The approach to procurement is focused on value as well as cost





Acting on the outcomes

The workshop and feedback received made it clear that our customers wanted to see a cultural change in the way we deliver our maintenance service.

We undertook to deliver the following:

- Re-design the responsive repairs process using a system thinking approach, removing unnecessary hurdles and unproductive micro-management
- Agree all service standards portfolio wide and remove the practice of the setting of local standards
- Ensure all new contracts are corporately agreed and potentially corporately procured, using standard terms and conditions
- Reduce the list of contractors significantly over time
- Shift Key indicators away from completion times to a small range of quality indicators, mainly focused on resident satisfaction and cost
- Develop the role of the surveyor to focus on undertaking systematic condition surveys and a higher percentage of inspections during works and upon completion
- Expand the work being carried out by planned maintenance and cyclical and programmed maintenance

Delivering with success

A project delivery team was created comprising staff and residents. A partner consultant Faithorn Farrell Timms LLP (FFT) was also engaged to drive the procurement and document preparation processes forward.

The team developed the following proposals which formulated the new way of delivering the responsive repairs service:

Procurement

FFT managed an OJEU procurement process to procure new contractors under the new processes and procedures that were established. Contractors were procured portfolio wide for Responsive Repairs and Void Refurbishment services to create a distinct focus for each work activity. The works were split into Zones within each neighbourhood to maintain local delivery ideals. Prices were delivered utilizing a schedule of rates, with the commitment to move to a simplified measurement and payment system.

Residents were an integral part of the team to develop the new maintenance services and also played a key role in the contractor selection process. Resident representatives assisted in the adjudication of the quality submissions and sat on the interview panels.

Bidders Days Event

This event was held in central London, opened by L&Q Chief Executive David Montague. The event was to give contractors a better understanding of our aims and objectives. All prospective bidders were invited to attend L&Q workshops hosted by a wide range of departments including workshops hosted by our residents. This day was a huge success as we felt prospective contractors truly understood the importance of delivering a quality maintenance service to our residents.

“Very impressed with the day, no recommendations for improvement”

Quote: Carillion

Process changes

We restructured the property services teams with new processes and procedures based upon outcomes and service quality to eliminate waste from our procurement process.

We introduced collaborative working principals with L&Q staff focusing on post inspection services rather than pre contract delivery. The role of the Partnering Manager was created within each neighborhood to champion closer working with contractors. TPC 2005 (Amended 2008) form of contract was the contractual mechanism utilized to underpin the new methods, with its focus on key performance indicators and continuous improvement.

Partnering Conference

Once our contractors were selected, they were invited to attend the Partnering Conference. This conference gave our contractors the opportunity to give us feedback and ideas on the forthcoming contract. It was also an opportunity to get to know how our residents feel about the service our contractors will be delivering. This was successfully carried out through a number of Resident attended work shops.

Contractors

They are an integral part of our service delivery and have been embraced in the following ways to improve their quality and integration with L&Q.

Contractor's operatives were personally welcomed to L&Q as part of the pre contract process. All operatives were presented with a Code of Conduct document and a welcome pack consisting of an L&Q Thermos flasks, Tape measure, clipboard and torch. The feedback from individual operatives have been great.

“This level of attention has never been given to those who do the work! It has made us feel ‘part of the team’”

Quote: Contractor Operative

We also run tool box talks for operatives on issues pertinent to service delivery to our customers. We are now preparing to publish an operative's newsletter and have monthly operative awards for performance. We continue to host our contractor Awards Ceremony on an annual basis to recognize good performance.

Resident Engagement

We have a fully inclusive process for resident engagement. Our residents have worked with us in partnership to deliver this new responsive repairs service and continue to do so. They played an active role in interviewing contractors during the tender process, participating on an equal basis with L&Q officers in scoring all interviewees. They are also participants with equal status in post contract delivery. Our residents are represented at L&Q Board level, and at the newly convened Maintenance Performance Group which meet quarterly to review contractor performance. This group consists of residents and senior maintenance staff and complements the requirements of the TPC contract.

In addition, our residents as mentioned, have played an active role in our Bidders Conference, where they hosted one of the contractor workshops, and our contract commencement Partnering Conference. They continue to be represented at all such events.

“It is fantastic to be part of the structure of the maintenance service. It is essential resident get their point of view across in order to drive up the quality of the maintenance service L&Q delivers”

Quote: Stan Swan Resident board member

We have also introduced Resident Inspectors to enhance our post inspection services. We have 6 residents that are now fully trained who go out on site and review the standards of our properties once works have been carried out. This gives us a real insight into what our resident want from an L&Q property in order to drive up customer satisfaction.

“I can't believe how good the void standard is. It is excellent and I would be happy to move into one of these homes myself. Staff are very helpful and professional”

Quote: Beverly Gayi Resident Inspector

“Today has been a great experience and I would like to get involved again”

Quote: Jerry Ogbeide Resident members
of the Maintenance Performance Group

Accessibility to the Service

Our commitment to our residents is to make the repairs service more accessible. To fulfill this we have now brought in:

- an on-line repair logging system; developed from our own Arena IT system. This not only gives appointments in “real time”, but manages the post inspection process, with work allocation schedules and route mapping.
- Longer opening hours, with early evening and Saturday appointment slots
- Texting of appointment dates
- Free phone call system to our service centre

All of these innovations enable residents to access the repairs service more easily, using different media forms, and the opportunity to book convenient appointment times.

Continuous Improvement

We now have a significant focus on this element of the service we provide. Our bespoke Housing Maintenance system Arena, has been enhanced to reflect our residents requirements in key performance outputs.

We also have employed BMG Research as our strategic partners in measuring the success of our repairs service. As they are independent evaluators our residents can take comfort in the findings of their reports. BMG’s last published Responsive Maintenance Survey was for the period April 2008 to March 2009. BMG, as part of their service, also undertake monthly phone surveys with residents on the delivery of the repairs service. The latest dates in which surveys were undertaken (May 09 to September 09), have covered the period when our new contracts, procedures and IT systems went live. These results as shown on the next page have been very positive and show a significant increase in resident satisfaction with responsive repairs.

In partnership with BMG we are also now developing a “Performance Dashboard” for monitoring repairs and void performance in a more visual way.

Diversity

Accessing all residents is of paramount importance and to enhance this we have introduced the “Big Word” translation service. We have made this accessible to both residents and our contractor partners.

Promoting diversity further we have used our newsletters and our contractors to advertise and promote job opportunities. It was a requirement of the tender process and is now embedded in service delivery. As an example our “Back to Work” initiative has provided training and employment opportunities to many.

Finance

While listening to our residents we have also introduced an innovative payments system which is unique to the responsive repairs service.

This is based upon a “Visa” system whereby the contractor, from invoice, is paid within a four day period.

This system checks and balances all invoices, this greatly improves cashflow, reducing the need for overdraft facilities, for our contractor partners. In addition it has enabled us to streamline our payment processes and improve the efficiency of the data management system by removing thousands of paper invoices from the system allowing L&Q to focus on more post works reviews.

We believe that in putting our residents at the centre of all we do and by working with them to create a new system for holistic service delivery we have developed an innovative model for responsive repairs and void refurbishment works.

We strongly believe this is a model that should be recognized for this award, as well as for its root and branch changes to delivery and its introduction across the whole of L&Q.



“ It’s been hard work and a real challenge, but I am at the end now with a professional trade under my belt. ”

Elvon Shields

What are the benefits to:



a) the client

Although our new responsive repairs service was only introduced seven months ago we are already experiencing increases in resident satisfaction and the delivery of a more efficient service without cost increases.

Our results are encouraging and the following figures demonstrate this:

- Customer satisfaction figures pre May 2009 – 83%, post May 2009 – 86%.
- Repairs completed on first visit pre May 2009 – 66%, post May 2009 – 73%.
- Numbers of appointments placed on first attempt pre May 2009 – 82%, post May 2009 – 89%.
- Resident satisfaction on quality of work, pre May 2009 – 85%, post May 2009 – 89%.
- Resident satisfaction with L&Q as landlord, pre May 2009 – 72%, post May 2009 – 76%.

c) the residents and the neighborhood

- Our residents are now playing an even more active and participative role in the continuing development and monitoring of the responsive repairs service, that they were instrumental in shaping.
- They now receive a service that is helping to deliver a “right first fix” maintenance service.
- They have greater access to L&Q for booking appointments by many different methods and which delivers a first time appointment 89% of the time.
- The structure now in place, with more focused contractors delivering within L&Q Neighborhoods, means that communities are better served and delivery is better targeted.

b) the contractor

The following key benefits have already been shown to our contractors:

- Smoothed cash flow through new Visa payment system.
- Contractors receiving orders via email. Instantaneous notifications, making it more environmentally friendly by not having to rely on Faxes and paper based processes.
- Appointment managing. Through joint working with our contractors, we are able to better utilize the appointment system more efficiently, reducing high levels of telephone calls allowing contractors to focus on what is critical to their business.
- Web access for our contractors. More efficient way of working enabling real time updates and clearer communication.

Ten year long term contract agreement for greater investment.



What were the financial costs and cashable benefits?



In creating a new and more resident focused responsive repairs service utilizing new and untried processes and procedures, with delivery via a newly procured team of contractors we were taking a large risk. Rolling this out portfolio wide compounded this risk. However the opportunity for success via this new method of service delivery acted as a counter-balance.

At the outset of this process we achieved engagement from our customers by setting down the marker that it would be achieved without extra cost. We wanted to demonstrate that a better more quality driven repairs service would not cost more and would maximize L&Q's financial commitment where it was needed most, in service delivery to residents. We have seen a steady increase in customer satisfaction since introducing new contractors and processes.



To achieve this goal we undertook the following

- A commitment not to increase staff, but to re-define project roles based upon the new methods of service delivery. This was achieved with the new Partnering Manager posts.
- A reduction in administrative duties through the use of fewer contractors.
- Visa payment system to streamline invoice payments and ease cash flow for contractors though it's four day payment regime
- Advancement in our Arena IT system to enable automation of the collating of data from contractors, further reducing the burden on administrative staff
- Introduction of resident on-line repair logging, longer call centre opening hours and use of appointment text messaging, as initiatives to reduce missed appointments by giving residents more flexibility to access a response time they could meet.

Residents continue to be at the heart of our processes and the innovation we create is driven by our desire to be even more responsive to them.

The new service that is now in place delivers incidental savings in service enhancements to both ourselves and our Service Provider partners. The payment arrangements that we have in place, will be moving to a more innovative composite rate structure within 12 months and will be able to include a shared financial benefits package.

How relevant is this as an example that might be followed by other organisations?

In listening to its customers and responding to their needs and aspirations L&Q has developed a resident driven responsive repairs maintenance service. In so doing they have created an innovative model that would add value to any customer driven organization in the affordable housing sector. What we have achieved is not dependent upon our own unique circumstances, in being an extremely large social housing provider, and we are confident that this model could be adopted by much smaller organizations.

The pre requisite for this success has been the honesty and willingness of L&Q to embrace fundamental change in its existing processes and procedures, to the extent that it now bases its repairs service on performance driven outputs.

This was a direct response to the initial resident workshop in which customer representatives stated that the fundamental change they wanted was in the quality of the service they received.

In focusing their staff on post contract validation, embracing collaborative working, procuring a reduced number of contractors to deliver a higher quality product, achieving efficiency savings through innovative financial management and advancing performance monitoring and improvements through new IT developments in their Arena system, L&Q has driven quality improvements into all areas of the repairs service.

It is our belief that the only expertise that is needed is the ability to challenge ones existing practices, by listening to ones residents and being open to change. Any training that we have embraced, other than technical enhancements, has been in ensuring that all of our staff can engage effectively with our residents.

Resident engagement is now embedded in service delivery and runs like a golden thread from Board level down to Project Partnering Team.

Continuous feedback from our customers is actively sought at both local and individual levels, as well as Group wide. The next Partnering Forum for discussion will be held in the new year.

If we were to embark upon this organizational change again we would approach it in the same way, from engaging with our customers.

“The innovation in the service has enabled residents to play an active part in the delivery of responsive repairs. Just one such example of this is the creation of the Maintenance Performance Group.

It is my opinion that continuing resident engagement will deliver even higher quality services in the years to come.”

Irene Addis, Resident Board Member

Should you wish to contact us for any advice please see the details at the front of this case study.





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L&Q is an exempt charity

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