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<b>Organisation / Service Assessed :</b>	<b>Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association</b>
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### 1. Key Information.

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## 2.Introduction and Background

Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association (MTHA) is a housing association operating exclusively within the county borough of Merthyr Tydfil. It provides a range of housing options including general needs, supported and sheltered accommodation. It was established in 1977 as a non-profit making Industrial and Provident Society with non-charitable rules (which were changed to charitable based rules in 1998).

In keeping with its strong sense of history and community the Association has developed a number of landmark schemes which have assisted in the preservation of historic buildings. It has made a major impact on the town centre in its work in transforming the Town Hall building into a very popular arts centre.

In 1989, the Association had 513 units in management and through targeting acquisitions and rehabilitation had considerably improved the fabric of communities. It has continued developing primarily new buildings on infill sites and has well over 1000 units in management in 2016.

In very recent years, new appointments have been made to the senior management team. There has been a need for consolidating and reviewing where the organisation is going up until recently. The most significant recent development has been the completion of the Options Review. This looked at options for the future and was undertaken by an external consultant to ensure robust challenge. The Board approved the recommendation in 2016 that it should remain independent and follow a strategy of diversification and growth.

The strong relationships evolved over these years with the district and county councils are continuing with the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council. Close links are also maintained with other voluntary organisations in the housing field with MTHA providing accommodation through a number of supported housing schemes.

### 3. Methodology

Various approaches were used to gather evidence for the assessment of Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association for Customer Services Excellence accreditation. It was agreed that there was no need for a pre-assessment visit as MTHA had been accredited with Customer Services Excellence for a number of years. A wide range of evidence was submitted via OwnCloud by MTHA. This included meeting agendas, minutes, spreadsheets, leaflets, brochures, newsletters and reports. This was supplemented by some further reports being made available on the assessment day. Accessing the organisation's web site and their social media communication channels also took place.

The on-site assessment was spread over a day and a half and consisted of meetings with individuals and groups as well as telephone conversations. There was a tour of MTHA's accommodation and office space.

Individual meetings took place with four contractors used by MTHA in maintaining properties. A huddle meeting was observed involving MTHA's management and senior management team. Telephone interviews took place with the local authority, the internal and external auditor, the bank and manager of a local charity. It was possible to undertake extensive discussions with the Tenant Service Standards Group and also join them for lunch. Smaller meetings occurred with members from the Reception, Housing, Maintenance and Development and Community Development Teams. The on-site visit was completed with a meeting with members of MTHA's Board.

#### 4. Summary of Strengths

Over the past year, MTHA has worked hard to identify what its strategic direction will be to ensure it meets the challenges ahead. This has resulted in a clear mission statement and set of values to support the direction. The Senior Management Team have shown a commitment to placing the tenant at the centre of the organisation and what it is looking to achieve (2.1.1).

MTHA staff all showed initiative and willingness to bring up ideas and proposals to improve the service they provide for tenants. The 'stories book' was used frequently to record ideas that had arisen, their rationale and how the customer experience would improve as a result. Various examples were presented showing how individual staff had taken proposals forward that had made improvements (2.1.6).

There is absolute clarity to all tenants and partners about the accountability between the different stakeholders. On every occasion, people indicated very clearly that the boundaries between the different providers were very much understood (3.4.2).

A major strength of MTHA is the contribution it makes to the Merthyr Tydfil community. At the broad level, its work on the transformation of the Town Hall into an arts centre has been a great achievement. This positive contribution is also experienced by a wide range of people at the individual level (3.4.3)

Staff in MTHA presented many examples of where good practice has been brought in from outside the organisation to improve service delivery. This is exemplified by how the Senior Management Team used the 'wobble board' to determine future strategic direction (4.2.4).

## 5. Areas for Continuous Improvement

MTHA may wish to look at using mixed methodology (such as using focus groups combined with an online survey) to gather feedback/ information on a specific aspect of customer service (1.1.1).

Tenants very much appreciate the personalised service they receive from MTHA. Consideration could be useful on how MTHA protects and develops its ability to provide this kind of service (1.1.2).

Engagement with tenants is an area that has a high profile in the housing sector. There may be some value in MTHA's Senior Management Team considering 'engagement' at the strategic level and what it means (1.2.1)

The Customer Services Excellence assessment at MTHA came across various achievements and quality services. MTHA may benefit on looking at how the wider Merthyr Tydfil community can be informed about its work and successes (1.3.2).

It may be useful to complete some customer journey maps for specific tenants' experiences (1.3.5).

MTHA has developed a revised strategy that is supported by a mission system and a comprehensive range of values. It could be useful to measure the impact of the strategy explicitly on services to tenants after it is implemented (2.1.1)

Empowered staff are present in MTHA but this is not the case across the whole organisation. MTHA may gain from ensuring that all teams are consistent in their approaches to empowerment and communication (2.1.6)

Letters to tenants are being reviewed to make sure they are understandable and friendly in tone and style. It could be beneficial to assess whether the revisions to letters do achieve the intended outcomes (3.2.1).

MTHA seeks to convey information to tenants that is complete and accurate. accurate. Consideration could be given as to whether this is the case or not (3.2.4). Merthyr Tydfil Council co-ordinates housing applications from Merthyr Tydfil citizens for the different housing providers. It would appear that people do not receive appropriate support from the Council in this process which has a knock-on effect for MTHA. This points to potential benefits if MTHA was consider exploring in more detail the situation with the Council (3.4.1).

## 6. Assessor Findings

### Criterion 1 Customer Insight

#### 1.1 Customer Identification

Element	Assessor Report
1.1.1 We have an in-depth understanding of the characteristics of our current and potential customer groups based on recent and reliable information.	MTHA collates information about its customers using a pro forma. This ensures key information about individuals' requirements are available when needed. This is currently being reviewed to include information on financial inclusions so it is possible to anticipate those who may need support around finance. In 2016, the Summer consultation took place which was the first annual assessment of services with tenants which will feed into the self-assessment process. MTHA has been exploring tenants; access to the Internet and have established that it is increasing. The Summer consultation indicated that 51% of tenants have access. For this reason, it is not appropriate to use on-line surveys only.
1.1.2 We have developed customer insight about our customer groups to better understand their needs and preferences.	The Tenant Service Standards Group (TSSG) has a key role in informing customer insight. The Group meets monthly with the Association to consider tenants' needs. An example of their contributions is the work around establishing tenants' perceptions of the service they receive from Liberty. This company provides gas service, emergency heating and hot water call out. A report was produced om 2016 by MTHA summarising what the tenants' experience was like when they received a call out from Liberty. Another approach to gain insight are the visits which take place 4 weeks after they have moved in. After this initial visit, there are annual visits to assess any additional support or any changes in circumstances. MTHA took part in a Sector Wide Survey across Wales for the housing sector. There were 6,017 surveys completed, from a total of 41,447 randomly selected Housing Association residents. Tenants feel there is a very personal service provided by MTHA which is important to preserve.
1.1.3 We make particular efforts to identify hard to reach and disadvantaged groups and individuals and have developed our services in response to their specific needs.	MTHA does invest significant effort into meeting the needs of hard to reach groups. This is typified by the work with the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB where they collaborated on the Visibly Better programme to make information and properties more accessible for those with a visual impairment. Staff membership of forums supporting hard to reach groups (including homeless, domestic abuse, children and young people) which ensures there is good insight into these groups' needs. By having Google Translate on their website it is possible to engage more effectively with those who do not have English as their first language.

#### 1.2 Engagement and Consultation

Element	Assessor Report
1.2.1 We have a strategy for engaging and involving customers using a range of methods appropriate to the needs of identified customer groups.	MTHA has a communication policy which aims to "establish a corporate approach to communicating with our tenants, stakeholders and the general public, using simple straightforward language that is easily understood by everyone involved". Various platforms are used to take forward the policy such as the Monthly Board meetings, Monthly Departmental and the, Staff/Employer Partnership Group (SEPG), as MTHA has an "ongoing commitment to tenant participation and believes that the views and opinions of its customers are a fundamental part of their business". Face to face, telephone, email and postal communication channels are open to customers and MTHA have asked all tenants for their preferred method of contact on the census form.
1.2.2 We have made the consultation of customers integral to continually improving our service and we advise customers of the results and action taken.	The tenant participation policy is at the centre of how MTHA consults with customers. Consultation take place at both formal and informal levels. The Post development questionnaire is used to ask for feedback on the property and design features of any new properties built. After every repair, maintenance repair cards are sent out requesting feedback. If there are issues or negative comments, the tenant is contacted to find out the reason for the response and what action is needed to put it right. The Tenant Service Standards Group (TSSG) also contributes significantly to service improvement and consultation. There is a survey of tenants with the last survey in 2012 finding that 87% of tenants' properties. reported being satisfied with how MTHA deals with repairs, a figure which had not changed significantly since 2008. Post development questionnaire are also issued to tenants after new accommodation is provided such as that for Corona Court, a new development of 12 units made up of one, two and three bedrooms.
1.2.3 We regularly review our strategies and opportunities for consulting and engaging with customers to ensure that the methods used are effective and provide reliable and representative results.	The communication policy and procedure is reviewed every 3 years. The Tenant Participation strategy is also regularly updated and reviewed. Social media communication channels such as Facebook and Twitter are now used for those who prefer being consulted in these ways. There is an ideas book which staff can use to show how engagement and consultation with customers can be improved. For example, one suggestion for MTHA's 40th birthday was to "have dongle with a collection of old photographs of images of Merthyr Tydfil, that would run on a loop for people to watch".

### 1.3 Customer Satisfaction

Element	Additional Comments/Evidence
1.3.1 We use reliable and accurate methods to measure customer satisfaction on a regular basis.	MTHA gives a lot of consideration on ensuring it is not too intrusive when measuring customer satisfaction by approaches such as only having a tenant survey every 4 years. Customer satisfaction to individual repairs is also gathered on each occasion. MTHA publishes a self-evaluation report every year stating how they have performed against the delivery outcomes set by Welsh Government. MTHA has moved away from annual customer satisfaction surveys to have shorter, more focussed surveys on specific topics.
1.3.2 We analyse and publicise satisfaction levels for the full range of customers for all main areas of our service and we have improved services as a result.	The Beacon Newsletter is used to communicate with tenants on a range of developments and performances. The Beacon gives feedback on how well MTHA is doing in areas such as answering the telephone in a friendly manner or responding to telephone message within 24 hours. Information about repairs' satisfaction levels goes to Board on a quarterly basis. The Annual Report also includes information on performance. For example, the 2016 Annual Report indicated that on average emergency call outs took 1 hour and 55 minutes. In its work, MTHA provides a good quality service for the Merthyr Tydfil community which do not appear to be disseminated outside the organisation.
1.3.3 We include in our measurement of satisfaction specific questions relating to key areas including those on delivery, timeliness, information, access, and the quality of customer service, as well as specific questions which are informed by customer insight.	Following works undertaken such as a kitchen or bathroom refit, a post contract review is carried out with tenants. This is then shared with the contractors. Service Level Agreements are in place for tenants for kitchen refits etc. This to "ensure residents are given sufficient information, choices and service standards the Association expects from its contractors and staff and are aware of their responsibilities to ensure the smooth progress of work".
1.3.4 We set challenging and stretching targets for customer satisfaction and our levels are improving.	MTHA has tried to improve the completion of the service standard monitoring cards by including them on their website. RAG rating is used to assess performance using Balanced ScoreCards. MTHA is at the early stage of using Housemark to assess its performance levels against other similar organisations.
1.3.5 We have made positive changes to services as a result of analysing customer experience, including improved customer journeys.	A good example showing how positive changes have resulted from considering the customer journey is the work around changing painting properties prior to tenants moving in. A redecoration allowance is now made where appropriate which enables tenants to choose their own colours. This has resulted in savings of £45,000 per annum with vouchers for Wilkinson's given to tenants who can then purchase their own products. Good practice around the Tenant Journey was shown in the Continuous Improvement Meetings minutes for the 28th June 2016. There is more potential for MTHA by considering extending the customer journey mapping process.

## Criterion 2 The Culture of the Organisation

### 2.1 Leadership, Policy & Culture

Element	Assessor Report
<p>2.1.1 There is corporate commitment to putting the customer at the heart of service delivery and leaders in our organisation actively support this and advocate for customers.</p>	<p>There are clear values, mission and purposes that give strategic direction to MTHA. The current purpose is "Working with People to Improve their lives" but that is being reviewed at the moment. The vision is 'to be recognised as the best provider of housing and housing services within the County Borough of Merthyr Tydfil, creating and sustaining environments and communities where people want to live.' MTHA is entering a very important phase in its development as it embeds its new strategic direction. There is a key consultation meeting with staff on the 6th December 2016. MTHA staff commented on the open-door policy shown by Senior Managers. They also indicated a level of trust for the Senior Managers and a sense that the organisation was going in the right direction.</p> <p>MTHA is clear that in terms of groups they value, the customer is at the centre. The Leadership and Management charter states that the "way in which we work with our customers is important to us. Customers can be internal to our organisation – our colleagues and managers - or external, in the form of our applicants and tenants, contractors and suppliers. Consultation and engagement with staff and stakeholders is seen as critical to the successful development and deployment of the business plan. The Leadership &amp; Management Strategy aims "to ensure the Association has staff with the key skills and behaviours required to lead and manage successful delivery of the Business Plan". It is intended that the strategy will link recruitment, induction, appraisal, development and the identification and development of future leaders and managers.</p>
<p>2.1.2 We use customer insight to inform policy and strategy and to prioritise service improvement activity.</p>	<p>Various strategies and approaches are in place to take customer insight and use it to shape policy and strategy. When this covers tenants and their properties, the TSSG are included in the processes. A spread sheet was provided showing the policies and procedures monitoring schedule for the past few years and also for 2017. As part of the process, the Continuous Improvement Team reviews 1 or 2 service areas each year. A good example of how policy and strategy is informed by customer insight is the findings from the voids review. In terms of contractors, a review took place to assess the value of works allocated and their VAT registration thresholds. It was also established that building surveyors has to challenge contractor's costs.</p>
<p>2.1.3 We have policies and procedures which support the right of all customers to expect excellent levels of service.</p>	<p>The Tenants Handbook makes it clear what tenants can expect from MTHA and also what is expected from them. Feedback on whether expectations are being met is gathered using a Likert scale questionnaire. On a quarterly basis, policies and procedures are updated by the Association Procedures Working Group. All staff are made aware of additions or changes to procedures at team meetings.</p>
<p>2.1.4 We ensure that all customers and customer groups are treated fairly and this is confirmed by feedback and the measurement of customer experience.</p>	<p>Diversity is given high priority in MTHA. On an annual basis, MTHA reports the makeup of the Board to the Welsh Government. Achieving Leading Diversity has been signed up to by the Chief Executive Officer by 2020. MTHA has a Single Equality Scheme which defines its policy around diversity and equality. The Strategy Map first listed aim is to "ensure our Board is multi skilled and representative of the community". Progress is monitored on a regular basis.</p>
<p>2.1.5 We protect customers' privacy both in face-to-face discussions and in the transfer and storage of customer information.</p>	<p>MTHA is very much aware of the need to ensure customers' privacy is respected in all interactions with themselves. This is supported and directed by a Data Protection Policy and procedure which has recently been updated. The policy states that it "recognises the importance of confidentiality and security with respect to all personal information processed by the organisation. Data will be stored safely, treated as strictly confidential and used only for the legitimate purposes of conducting the business of the Association".</p> <p>Data exchange protocols are in place with partner organisations and Egress is used to ensure encryption of sensitive emails and password protect sensitive documents. There are private interview rooms to discuss issues with tenants. Password protected login is necessary for staff to systems. A specialist company is used to collect and dispose all documents containing any information relating to customers.</p>
<p>2.1.6 We empower and encourage all employees to actively promote and participate in the customer focused culture of our organisation.</p>	<p>The annual appraisals include a section on customer service and how individuals and teams can improve. The strategy map is updated on a regular in a process that involves all staff. A powerful example of how staff are involved is the spreadsheet where staff can record their ideas on how services can be improved. For example, one suggestion was for "all staff to sign a confidentiality clause annually to reiterate the importance of confidentiality and its impact if this is breached. This can be done at Appraisals". The MTHA staff member who proposed this saw the benefits of this being it would "refresh the memory of all staff of the importance of maintaining confidentiality within the workplace as we are dealing with a lot more complex and highly sensitive cases".</p>

## 2.2 Staff Professionalism and Attitude

Element	Assessor Report
2.2.1 We can demonstrate our commitment to developing and delivering customer focused services through our recruitment, training and development policies for staff.	Achieving Investors in People at Gold level is evidence that MTHA is committed to developing its staff. It was concluded that "MTHA shows strength and has practices that are both embedded and innovative in how it empowers and involves people. It demonstrates a passion to constantly deliver continuous improvement. Various examples of good practice were present in MTHA. There is an organisational and training plan which is kept live and monitored for progress. Core training courses are provided in stress awareness, complaints handling, alcohol awareness, equality and diversity. The 'Colourworks' profile scheme is used so staff can understand how each another works.
2.2.2 Our staff are polite and friendly to customers and have an understanding of customer needs.	Various interactions between MTHA staff and tenants were witnessed which were friendly and polite. In the 2016 Summer Consultation, 96% of the tenants who responded felt the MTHA staff were friendly and courteous. Reception staff knew the first name of tenants and it was apparent that some tenants very much valued this personal touch.
2.2.3 We prioritise customer focus at all levels of our organisation and evaluate individual and team commitment through the performance management system.	Customer services is included in the core competencies at MTHA. In terms of customer service competencies, it is stated that "we put tenants at the heart of everything we do. All employees must demonstrate an understanding of their needs and expectations to enable development and delivery of quality services. We must demonstrate the same courtesy to our internal customers". The behaviours that people are expected show that they: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can articulate our vision and always puts tenants at the heart of what they do</li> <li>• Demonstrate an understanding of the services that are important to our tenants</li> <li>• Seek feedback to continually improve the quality of service offered</li> <li>• Try to find innovative ways to engage with tenants</li> <li>• Show respect to tenants at all times</li> </ul> The discussions with staff and tenant show that the above competencies are present.
2.2.4 We can demonstrate how customer facing staffs' insight and experience is incorporated into internal processes, policy development and service planning.	The ideas spreadsheet captured many good ideas demonstrating how staff insights were used to develop customer services. For example, one staff members suggested that "a payment card be issued to all tenants with recharges/court costs showing a running balance when payments made. If they forget the payment card, they can keep the receipt given on reception for updating the card at a later date". The improvement would result as "many tenants have expressed surprise when told that they have no document for reference when payments are made only a small receipt given. They also expressed how nice it would be to see the balance of their debt reducing". The book is available on the Corporate Drive where all staff are able to make suggestions. There is a process to deal with the suggestions as it forms part of the SEPG agenda to ensure ideas are approved and actioned. Staff were consulted when the office was refurbished in 2015. Another example showing change originating from staff was in the reception area where the security screens were removed to create a more welcoming reception area as a result of reception staff observations. People can also bring forward their suggestions etc. at their 1-1 meetings.
2.2.5 We value the contribution our staff make to delivering customer focused services, and leaders, managers and staff demonstrate these behaviours.	The reward and recognition scheme is being reviewed which includes consulting staff on should be developed and what provides motivation.

## Criterion 3 Information and Access

### 3.1 Range of Information

Element	Assessor Report
3.1.1 We make information about the full range of services we provide available to our customers and potential customers, including how and when people can contact us, how our services are run and who is in charge.	MTHA is reviewing the leaflets and booklets made available in printed form. These are not being used by tenants and in Reception, access to leaflet is provide by a PC with an option to have pdfs printed for customers. Another aspect of communication being reviewed is looking to provide alternative formats that are more user friendly such as a DVD version and summary version. Detailed information is contained (and reinforced) via various channels such as the Tenant Handbook, the Beacon newsletter and the web pages. The web site includes a 'meet the team' section so people know who to contact. Only staff who have given permission have their photo included. Customers have various options when contacting MTHA including by letter, face to face, phone, via the website and email. There is an out of hours' number for tenants to report any emergencies. Google Translate and access to Language Line are provided for non-English speaking customers.
3.1.2 Where there is a charge for services, we tell our customers how much they will have to pay.	Tenants are sent annual rents notification and pre-void inspection letters informing them what they will need to do before handing the property back. MTHA invests significant effort and thought into ensuring customers know the charges for various services. The information is available via the web site, handbook, leaflets and also face to face. Customers are informed about the prices of any work before it is carried out so as there are no unexpected bills. This includes covering a variety of payment methods and the availability of affordable instalments if needed. Recharges are a problem which the sector faces and MTHA constantly reviews the approach so a fair service is provided for all tenants. When discussing charges with tenants, there was general satisfaction on how it was communicated.

### 3.2 Quality of Information

Element	Assessor Report
3.2.1 We provide our customers with the information they need in ways which meet their needs and preferences, using a variety of appropriate channels.	When tenants complete the census, they are asked to provide information on their preferred method of communication together with their preferred language. Various approaches are taken by MTHA to provide customers with information in their preferred format and style. This includes collaborating with the RNIB to determine how written documents are best presented. Another strand in giving access to people with visual impairment is the availability of BrowseAloud on the web site. The system recording information about specific tenants also covers how people would like to be communicated with. For customers wishing to use social media for communication channels, Facebook is provided. The tone and style used on pro formats for various letters from MTHA to tenants is currently being reviewed.
3.2.2 We take reasonable steps to make sure our customers have received and understood the information we provide.	MTHA has set up various mechanisms and services to ascertain whether customers have received and understood the information provided. It is possible to have a family member, neighbour, social worker etc. present when exchanging information if appropriate. If there are literacy issues, communication will be over the phone and/ or forms will be completed for the tenant by staff. There is an induction loop for visitors to the office. New tenants receive a 4-weekly visit to check that they have read and understood the information they have received. Exchanging information about contractors' appointments is challenging for various reasons. For this reason, it is possible to phone the office and an appointment can be made for a time to suit the tenant.
3.2.3 We have improved the range, content and quality of verbal, published and web based information we provide to ensure it is relevant and meets the needs of customers.	MTHA needs to ensure staff give quality and accurate information to customers. Staff are kept up to date at team meetings regarding the latest policy and procedure updates. These are reviewed annually or every 3 years depending on content. Performance against the 10 Welsh Government Delivery Outcomes is being measured regarding information provided to tenants. Consideration is also being given to how tenants can receive information equally distributed across the year. For this reason, it is proposed to distribute the Beacon, the self-evaluation report and the annual report in a staggered way.
3.2.4 We can demonstrate that information we provide to our customers is accurate and complete, and that when this is not the case we advise customers when they will receive the information they requested.	Tenants receive a written account on a quarterly basis of their rent statements. They are also informed by Works of any work to be carried out and the date by when they can expect the work to be done.

### 3.3 Access

Element	Assessor Report
3.3.1 We make our services easily accessible to all customers through provision of a range of alternative channels.	MTHA provides ease of access to services by various approaches. This ranges from the specific such as the Manager at the sheltered housing complex receiving training in sign language to customers being able to contact the organisation via telephone, in person, in writing, via the website, email, Facebook and Twitter. Across all channels, a minimum font of size 12 is used in all communication so it is legible for people who may have a visual impairment. Web access is enhanced by BrowseAloud and Google translate.
3.3.2 We evaluate how customers interact with the organisation through access channels and we use this information to identify possible service improvements and offer better choices.	The Summer consultation that took place in 2016 provides good evidence on the quality of interaction between the MTHA and its customer. For example, 91% respondents are either very satisfied or satisfied with the way MTHA listens to tenant's views and acts upon them. The same percentage are very satisfied or satisfied with how MTHA understands and responds to tenants' individual circumstances and needs.
3.3.3 We ensure that where customers can visit our premises in person facilities are as clean and comfortable as possible.	MTHA has introduced various improvements to the Office. The reception area was remodelled so it is now more open as the reception team had previously sat behind security screens. Comfy chairs and activities for children are provided there as well. Access to the office and toilet facilities is easy for wheelchair There is a hearing loop and Language Line provided. Customers also benefit from free parking off site. Onsite parking facilities are reserved for disabled visitors and staff who have regular appointments out of the office.

### 3.4 Co-operative working with other providers, partners and communities

Element	Assessor Report
3.4.1 We have made arrangements with other providers and partners to offer and supply co-ordinated services, and these arrangements have demonstrable benefits for our customers.	MTHA has effective partnerships with various organisations that result in benefits for customers. For example, Steddy carries out assessments on properties where tenants may need aids and/or adaptations to their property. Local arrangements were not possible to carry out an assessment within an acceptable time period. An arrangement was made with Steddy which now enables tenants to benefit from a quicker assessment. This lessens the time for the aids and adaptations to be installed. At the national level, there are good working relationship with MTHA's Regulation Manager at Welsh Government. The contractors have their own processes for establishing when a repair etc. has been completed which sometimes can appear challenging to the tenants.
3.4.2 We have developed co-ordinated working arrangements with our partners that ensure customers have clear lines of accountability for quality of service.	MTHA has set up systems so there is no difference in how tenants can complain about partners/contractors/ MTHA services. When properties are upgraded in areas such as kitchens or bathrooms, a tripartite agreement is set up between MTHA, the tenant and the contractor. regarding any upgrades such as kitchens and bathrooms, this ensures there is absolute clarity about the different roles and expectations that each party should fulfil. This clarity is further enhanced by the newly created role of Tenant Liaison Officer. MTHA and its partners also show sensitivity in how they collaborate where tenants may feel uneasy about using external to MTHA services such as mental health charities, foodbanks and credit unions.
3.4.3 We interact within wider communities and we can demonstrate the ways in which we support those communities.	MTHA makes a wide range of contributions to the wider Merthyr Tydfil community. There is an annual Global Village multi-cultural event which is directed by MTHA. There is an active Community Development department which provides activities such as the food co-op. A high-profile example of MTHA's community contribution is the refurbishment of the old Town Hall to become an arts centre. There have been various benefits such as it acting as a catalyst for other developments in the Town Centre. MTHA is seen by the Local Authority as a preferred partner when they look to refurbish other buildings. Various tenants recounted personally how MTHA had impacted positively in their lives.

## Criterion 4 Delivery

### 4.1 Delivery Standards

Element	Assessor Report
<p>4.1.1 We have challenging standards for our main services, which take account of our responsibility for delivering national and statutory standards and targets.</p>	<p>Performance against standards is monitored in the Strategy Map, specifically for those from the Welsh Government Delivery Outcomes. A recent trends report was presented which summarised information for the past three years around certain liquidity measures, financial covenants and other financial ratios and Housing Management and Maintenance Information. Targets and limits were included on each graph to indicate the position in which MTHA might wish to be, or wishes to avoid. There are also service standards for tenants where smiley faces are used to indicate performance levels. The Balanced Scorecard system is used which is completed monthly and reflects performance against the previous month and 12 months ago. These key performance indicators are used by the Board to easily ascertain how it is performing against the targets set.</p>
<p>4.1.2 We monitor and meet our standards, key departmental and performance targets, and we tell our customers about our performance.</p>	<p>The tenants service standards are reported in the Beacon. For example, in the Summer issue it showed that there were 100% satisfactions with e-mails being replied within 2 days. The Strategy Map is used to monitor and review standards. For example, it includes showing how MTHA is supporting tenants' education and development. The records showed that the strategy was complete and had been agreed by the Board. The Annual Report and report to tenants recorded the tenant numbers supported in education and training. Tenants also are informed by MTHA's self-evaluation reports which is both sent to every tenant and is available on the website. Some instances were viewed where the feedback loop had not been completed.</p>
<p>4.1.3 We consult and involve customers, citizens, partners and staff on the setting, reviewing and raising of our local standards.</p>	<p>Consultation takes place with a range of stakeholders such as the meetings with other local housing associations to develop a common housing policy. A good example showing how MTHA involves people in developing standards etc. is the business planning sessions with staff. A recent business planning meeting with staff explored how MTHA can grow and the standards that can monitor growth. This covered areas such as increasing residential dwelling by X %, increasing non-residential dwellings by X %, purchasing land for future development by X plots and increasing training opportunities by X %. In terms of working with tenants, the TSSG is involved in MTHA's decision making and MTHA reports back to them on the impact of those decisions</p>

#### 4.2 Achieved Delivery and Outcomes

Element	Assessor Report
4.2.1 We agree with our customers at the outset what they can expect from the service we provide.	MTHA uses various approaches to ensure there is agreement with customers from the outset about what they can expect. Where there are major refurbishments, there is a Service Level Agreement in place between the tenant, MTHA and the Contractor setting out what is expected of each party. The Assured Tenancy Agreement that a tenant signs when they take up accommodation is very clear about what they can expect. A range of Service Level Agreements are in place with partners where responsibility is made explicit. In relation to any major works carried out a property such as kitchen or bathroom replacement.
4.2.2 We can demonstrate that we deliver the service we promised to individual customers and that outcomes are positive for the majority of our customers.	A range of evidence was presented showing how MTHA proves the service promised is delivered. A societal issue is anti-social behaviour and MTHA is investing resources and effort into resolving some of the resulting problems. This includes anti-social behaviour questionnaires being sent once a complaint has been closed about whether they were satisfied with the process. Surveys are also used to show how the services provided match what is promised. These include a maintenance repair satisfaction card regarding recent repairs in tenants' property.
4.2.3 We can demonstrate that we benchmark our performance against that of similar or complementary organisations and have used that information to improve our service.	It is expected that using the Housemark service will prove future benefits showing how MTHA compares with other housing providers. It is not possible to demonstrate this as statistics have only been submitted for one full year. HouseMark provides a data analysis and benchmarking service that allows members to "layer strategic cost comparisons with operational performance data to see the bigger picture of their businesses and evidence data-driven decisions for change". Further work around benchmarking is currently in progress as MTHA look at other organisations' practices in salaries and reward and recognition
4.2.4 We have developed and learned from best practice identified within and outside our organisation, and we publish our examples externally where appropriate	MTHA shows good practice itself that other similar organisations can learn from. The Welsh Government Regulation Team has indicated that MTHA's initial publication for tenants explaining how regulation works is exemplary. MTHA has held the RSPCA Housing Footprint award for the last 8 years and they have been asked to share their experience with other housing associations. Adapting best practice is shown in the work MTHA is currently doing in the benchmarking of salaries and reward and recognition. This has involved looking at what other organisation do and how staff are rewarded. The Senior Management Team exemplified the willingness to bring in practice from the outside such as the use of the 'Wobble Board' principle in determining strategic direction. Other examples of external practice were brought forward by other staff.

#### 4.3 Deal effectively with problems

Element	Assessor Report
4.3.1 We identify any dips in performance against our standards and explain these to customers, together with action we are taking to put things right and prevent further recurrence.	MTHA has experienced occasions where their service has not been at the level they would like. When this occurs, they have approaches in rectifying the position. For example, at Taff and Crescent Street the tenants occupy properties scheduled for demolition but it is uncertain when this will happen. To make the situation easier for the customer, tenants have been kept up to date with progress on the development of their replacement homes. It is also explained to them the length of time the process is taking and the reason for not investing in these properties. A key strategy in identifying dips in performance is the balanced scorecard which is completed on a monthly basis. Any dips in performance are noted and reviewed by the Board where any action or pending action to be taken. The tenants service standards are reported in the Beacon. The Strategy Map is used to monitor and review standards
4.3.2 We have an easy to use complaints procedure, which includes a commitment to deal with problems fully and solve them wherever possible within a reasonable time limit.	There is an easily understood complaints procedure which has the overall aim of allowing MTHA to "function more effectively as well as to increase levels of satisfaction amongst tenants". Complaints can be made by writing a letter, by telephoning, emailing or speaking to a member of staff in person. A leaflet entitled "Complaints" is located in the reception area. An example of a recent complaint about the erection of a garden shed was used to show the stages a complaint goes through to resolution. In terms of timeliness, the relevant standard is to investigate and respond to a complaint within 10 working days. If it is not possible to resolve or close the complaint within this time period, the individual will be informed accordingly. Comprehensive complaints file are kept detailing staff involvement
4.3.3 We give staff training and guidance to handle complaints and to investigate them objectively, and we can demonstrate that we empower staff to put things right.	It is compulsory for all staff to complete training on complaints handling A spread sheet was submitted showing the evaluation outcomes from the training supplied to over 30 MTHA staff on handling complaints. This showed that it was successful and gave staff a good insight. There is an expectation that any member of staff is empowered to investigate a complaint. A complaint investigation will be assigned to a relevant member of staff.
4.3.4 We learn from any mistakes we make by identifying patterns in formal and informal complaints and comments from customers and use this information to improve services and publicise action taken.	Complaints are used to identify where problems have emerged and also what should be done to avoid in future. There is also a complaints and compliments database. Negative comments made on the maintenance repair satisfaction cards are discussed with the relevant parties. Actions are identified and the tenant informed about what will take place. The Board considers every 3 months the complaints received by Housing Services. Reports are presented to the Board every quarter with a breakdown of complaints. Regarding learning from mistakes, the MTHA Senior Management Team will ensure it takes ownership of the complaints process and also what it has done to improve service delivery as a result.
4.3.5 We regularly review and improve our complaints procedure, taking account of the views of customers, complainants and staff.	MTHA has recently undertaken a review of its complaints procedure and various improvements have resulted. The Procedures Working Group completed this review as part of a 3-year cycle. As a result of the review, it has been streamlined to reduce delays with steps taken to empower staff to carry out the investigation and respond appropriately.

4.3.6 We ensure that the outcome of the complaint process for customers (whose complaint is upheld) is satisfactory for them.	MTHA has found it challenging to engage with its customers around when the loop is close around a complaint. The closure letter received by complainants was submitted as evidence. MTHA's approach is to acknowledge there may be instances where the customer feels the complaint has not been resolved, despite MTHA doing its utmost. In these cases, the individual is informed, as part of the complaints procedure, that should they not be satisfied with the outcome they should contact the Ombudsman.
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## Criterion 5 Timeliness and Quality of Service

### 5.1 Standards for Timeliness and Quality

Element	Assessor Report
5.1.1 We set appropriate and measurable standards for the timeliness of response for all forms of customer contact including phone calls, letters, e-communications and personal callers.	<p>Timeliness is a key component of MTHA's approach to standards. The following relevant standards are present in those measuring tenants' satisfaction levels with timeliness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responding to your telephone message within 24 hours</li> <li>• Responding to your letters in 5 working days</li> <li>• Responding to emails in 2 working days</li> <li>• Responding to written request for you to do work to your property in 10 working days</li> <li>• Acknowledging your complaints, whether made by letter, email, telephone or face to face within 5 working days</li> <li>• Providing you with a full response in 15 working days</li> </ul> <p>In the SLAs for installation of kitchens/ bathrooms, timeliness features such as being given a minimum of 4 weeks advanced notice that the kitchen is to be replaced and upgraded. If a tenant wishes to decline the offer a new kitchen they should give a minimum of 2 weeks' prior notice unless in the event an unforeseen matter.</p>
5.1.2 We set comprehensive standards for all aspects of the quality of customer service to be expected in all dealings with our organisation.	MTHA is reviewing its leaflets which will make it clear what services tenants can expect from MTHA. A very thorough and detailed list of standards is included in those for property letting. The Estate management agreement provided between MTHA and the residents of Dowlais Stables outlined that the caretaker will spend 8 hours every fortnight at the scheme April to September and 2 hours every fortnight at the scheme October to March.

### 5.2 Timely Outcomes

Element	Assessor Report
5.2.1 We advise our customers and potential customers about our promises on timeliness and quality of customer service.	There is a web site ( <a href="http://www.mtha.org.uk">www.mtha.org.uk</a> <a href="http://www.merthyrhousingchoice.org.uk">www.merthyrhousingchoice.org.uk</a> ) which offers information about rented and affordable accommodation in Merthyr Tydfil. MTHA uses this service to advise customers and potential customers about its services. MTHA indicates in this website that it their "local roots and knowledge means that we provide tenants and residents of the borough with a service that is second to none". It is also clear to tenants the service standards about the timeliness and quality provided by MTHA.
5.2.2 We identify individual customer needs at the first point of contact with us and ensure that an appropriate person who can address the reason for contact deals with the customer.	MTHA acknowledges that the first point of contact is important for the customer. Verification visits will take place with a customer when they are being considered for a property. A very detailed lettings pack is made available to customers and prospective prospectors. It includes such information as the Tenancy Agreement and the Property Letting Standard. The Tenant Census form (which is currently being reviewed) is used to identify what the individual customers' needs will be.
5.2.3 We promptly share customer information with colleagues and partners within our organisation whenever appropriate and can demonstrate how this has reduced unnecessary contact for customers.	After establishing from the tenant census the preferred method of contact, the information is shared with partners and contractors etc. for the benefit of the customer. Data sharing protocols are in place. An example of information shared is in identifying tenants who may be affected by the proposed benefit cuts. MTHA also has access to information from partners such as the Housing Benefit portal at the Local Authority
5.2.4 Where service is not completed at the first point of contact we discuss with the customer the next steps and indicate the likely overall time to achieve outcomes.	There is a compensation policy in place if MTHA does not deliver or services fall below an acceptable standard. MTHA has ensured that contractors carry out the work on their to MTHA's standards. Regular meetings take place with contractors which includes reviewing what has not been delivered at the first point of contact. There is a handover contract that has to be signed by the tenant and contractor once a service has been provided. When a service is not completed at first contact point, explanation is given verbally.
5.2.5 We respond to initial enquiries promptly, if there is a delay we advise the customer and take action to rectify the problem.	MTHA acknowledges that customer communication needs continual improvement. Repairs are seen as being a key area with MTHA reviewing repair to ensure that these are not falling below the target. The Board Meeting's review this information monthly. The tenants service standards also make it explicit what tenants can expect in terms of timeliness

### 5.3 Achieved Timely Delivery

Element	Assessor Report
5.3.1 We monitor our performance against standards for timeliness and quality of customer service and we take action if problems are identified.	Agendas for meetings with contractors were provided which show how MTHA works with partners to monitor timeliness and quality standards. At these meetings MTHA monitors its own and contractor's response times to "ensure both are meeting the expected standard and these are discussed at the review meetings. Their performance is discussed along with any compliments/complaints. Our service to them is also discussed and any issues addressed". A complaints update was included in the Housing Services Report which showed how performance is monitored and what happens if problems arise. MTHA reviews its contractors every 3 years and removes any not performing at the required standard.
5.3.2 We are meeting our current standards for timeliness and quality of customer service and we publicise our performance against these standards.	The Beacon Newsletter is used to report performance on timeliness and quality standards such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responding to your telephone message within 24 hours</li> <li>• Responding to your letters in 5 working days</li> <li>• Responding to emails in 2 working days</li> <li>• Responding to written request for you to do work to your property in 10 working days</li> <li>• Acknowledging your complaints, whether made by letter, email, telephone or face to face within 5 working days</li> <li>• Providing you with a full response in 15 working days</li> </ul> The Board reviews key performance indicators using the Balance Scorecard reports and if these are falling below target and the reasons are discussed.
5.3.3 Our performance in relation to timeliness and quality of service compares well with that of similar organisations.	MTHA has various initiatives to enable it to compare timeliness and quality with others. They are gathering data on informal complaints to see how this compares with others in relation to the time taken to deal with complaints. They are also looking at how to change data collection regarding repair response times in comparison with others. It is anticipated that having joined Housemark, MTHA will be able to compare timeliness and quality performances with other housing associations and other organisations such as local authorities.

<b>Totals</b>	<b>Compliant Plus</b>
	5
	<b>Compliant</b>
	49
	<b>Partial Compliant</b>
	3
	<b>Non Compliant</b>
	0

## 7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association has experienced major changes in recent years with some level of uncertainty about its future direction. It is now much clearer how the organisation will move forward and this is supported by both a strong mission statement and robust values. It will still have to respond and react to the changing external environment including the introduction of Universal Credit and Brexit. It is also clear that MTHA is at the front line in supporting various disadvantaged groups in Merthyr Tydfil where it has to help individuals more than just supplying accommodation. They provide this support in a caring manner and make a positive difference to many tenants' lives. As a relatively small housing association, they are able to deliver a personalised service that is very much appreciated by tenants and partners. These partners and tenants show great trust and respect for MTHA's services and working practices. There are no actions that require immediate attention and I am pleased to pass on the security screens were removed to create a more welcoming reception area as a result of reception staff observations. People can also bring forward their suggestions etc. at their 1-1 meetings. successful development and deployment of the business plan. The Leadership & Management Strate

Annual Review Year 1

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your kind hospitality and cooperation during this assessment.

Name Graham Walton  
Registered CSE Assessor for Assessment Services  
Date 3rd December 2016

## 8. Compliance against the Customer Service Excellence Standard

### Criteria 1

	Element	Accreditation
1.1	1.1.1	Compliance
	1.1.2	Compliance
	1.1.3	Compliance
1.2	1.2.1	Compliance
	1.2.2	Compliance
	1.2.3	Compliance
1.3	1.3.1	Compliance
	1.3.2	Compliance
	1.3.3	Compliance
	1.3.4	Compliance
	1.3.5	Compliance

### Criteria 2

	Element	Accreditation
2.1	2.1.1	Compliance plus
	2.1.2	Compliance
	2.1.3	Compliance
	2.1.4	Compliance
	2.1.5	Compliance
	2.1.6	Compliance plus
2.2	2.2.1	Compliance
	2.2.2	Compliance
	2.2.3	Compliance
	2.2.4	Compliance
	2.2.5	Compliance

### Criteria 3

	Element	Accreditation
3.1	3.1.1	Compliance
	3.1.2	Compliance
3.2	3.2.1	Compliance
	3.2.2	Compliance
	3.2.3	Compliance
	3.2.4	Compliance
3.3	3.3.1	Compliance
	3.3.2	Compliance
	3.3.3	Compliance
3.4	3.4.1	Partial Compliance
	3.4.2	Compliance plus
	3.4.3	Compliance plus

### Criteria 4

	Element	Accreditation
4.1	4.1.1	Compliance
	4.1.2	Partial Compliance
	4.1.3	Compliance
4.2	4.2.1	Compliance
	4.2.2	Compliance
	4.2.3	Compliance
	4.2.4	Compliance plus
4.3	4.3.1	Compliance
	4.3.2	Compliance
	4.3.3	Compliance
	4.3.4	Compliance
	4.3.5	Compliance
	4.3.6	Compliance

### Criteria 5

	Element	Accreditation
5.1	5.1.1	Compliance
	5.1.2	Compliance
5.2	5.2.1	Compliance
	5.2.2	Compliance
	5.2.3	Compliance
	5.2.4	Compliance
	5.2.5	Compliance
5.3	5.3.1	Compliance
	5.3.2	Compliance
	5.3.3	Partial Compliance