



**Record results and record value**

# Domus - record results and record value

## Introduction

Shepherds Bush Housing Group (SBHG) established in 1968 now owns and manages nearly 5,000 homes across every west London local authority, while maintaining a strong local ethos in our core areas of Hammersmith & Fulham, Hounslow and Ealing. Our residents tell us that repairs are our number one service. SBHG is working towards being the best housing association in London. We know that we can be this only by offering the best possible repairs service.

So we're delighted that through our ongoing investment and innovation, Domus – our repairs and maintenance service is now one of the best in London. We take pride in the fact that our residents tell us they are increasingly satisfied with the service provided by Domus. So how do we know this? Both external assessments and our own internal satisfaction surveys confirm the progress we've made - our tenant satisfaction is sky high!

This year satisfaction with the repairs service hit 97.6%, making it among the (if not the) highest in the country. A combination of our high standards and innovative approach means that we're now sharing our best practice with others. Domus is leading the way in providing quality services to other providers. Our journey shows how Domus continues to look at new ways to be the best for our residents, staff and the wider community.

## What is innovative about the service provided?

Domus was established in August 2009 as a result of a joint venture company (JVC) being formed between SBHG and CMS Ltd. By taking the rare, and we think unique step, of setting up a JVC we brought our repairs service in-house. To ensure residents were at the heart of Domus, a residents' panel (maintenance forum) was part of the working group which set up the joint venture.

Leroy Taylor is a resident on the maintenance forum. He said: "The forum was fully involved throughout. Residents' views and input were welcomed and acted on and we are confident that this is why we have continued to see improved services and increased satisfaction."



Two years on Domus goes from strength to strength: 94.9% of residents tell us that they are happy with the quality of the repairs carried out and of these repairs 99.3% are completed on time. Our innovative IT system – Accuserv - now gives us real-time information on the progression of repairs, through mobile working. Mobile working allows our operatives to utilise originally desk based applications on a day to day basis via PDA technology, increasing operational efficiency by creating a 'real time' working environment.

In addition remote working has enabled any of our users, from any location with an internet connection, via the use of Citrix & VPN technology to have full access to Domus systems as if they were at their own desk. This has been enhanced by the introduction of Voice over IP (VoIP) that allows them to also access their telephone services remotely.

We are able to book reliable appointments with residents at their first point of call and give them the name of the operative or subcontractor who will be attending. Text messages are also sent to residents and we phone people to remind them about appointments. This dramatically improves efficiency and value for money – only 0.10% of appointments were missed during the year ending March 2011. This directly cuts down on operative's non-productive time and results in a better service for our residents.

Our extended repairs desk now offers a full call centre service. Based at our own offices in Hammersmith – within the very heart of our customers (over 60% of our customers homes are in Hammersmith and Fulham). Operating from 8:00am to 10:00pm seven days a week people now have a far better chance of speaking to a Domus staff member after work and on weekends. We know that our customers really value the opportunity to speak to members of our own team as opposed to an outsourced provider. Last year we received more than 49,000 calls and Domus made over 16,000 repair visits. We also use the out of hour's service to conduct telephone satisfaction surveys so we have an increasingly accurate picture of how our customers really feel.



Residents can also report repairs online and by email. In consultation with our residents, operatives and our repairs desk we produced a video (available on our website) giving residents instructions on the most commonly reported repairs issues enabling them to solve simple household problems before calling Domus.

Over the last twelve months Domus has continued to rationalise our business processes, improve our customer experiences and to deliver real value. One of the key tools towards achieving this has been our Customer Relationship Management or CRM system. An across business project team was established and we worked in partnership with Serengeti Systems on the development and implementation of the technology.

We're currently developing a complaints workflow and our residents will be able to access enhanced repairs reporting functionality via our website from April 2012 – an illustrative fault finder will allow them to exactly pinpoint their repair issues and give more accurate and detailed information to our repairs desk improving the opportunity to get it right first time.

Anticipating problems before they become an issue for residents is important. To help cut the number of complaints we receive, a handyman makes monthly visits to our estates to complete on site repairs and maintenance. 70% of repairs to common areas on our estates are completed on site. This includes changing light bulbs; carpentry work and coordinating with lift and door entry contractors. This gives residents better value for money and helps keeps service charges under control.

Our culture of evolution and innovation means that Domus has made a major contribution in SBHG's achievement in providing one of the best empty property turnaround performances in London. Domus also helped us achieve 100% gas safety compliance throughout 2010/11.

We really want to know what our residents think about our repairs service and so annually we conduct our Big Conversation: where all employees – both front and back office - visit residents in their homes to find out about our services.

This year's event was carried out in July 2011. All of our staff – from the Chief Executive down - visited 14 locations in west London and targeted 1,700 general needs homes in and around the area. The survey looked at key areas of our service, including maintenance and repairs.



In total almost 400 surveys were completed. Results showed that repairs and maintenance remains the single most important service we provide to residents. We were delighted that the Big Conversation showed a continued increase in the way SBHG deals with repairs. Importantly, the survey showed a year-on-year improvement with our repairs service - in October 2008, a year before Domus was established, satisfaction with repairs service was below 60%.

## What are the benefits?

### For residents

Domus is now a fully integrated part of the Group's structure – we are all working together for 'our residents'. Our services have been developed and improved with residents at the heart of everything we do. As a result we have achieved a high level of resident satisfaction and this continues to improve.

While external and internal inspections monitor the effectiveness of our service, it is the day-to-day views of residents which really show the value of Domus. We are proud to say that residents influence our work. We give them an important voice. SBHG has been holding quarterly repairs focus groups for five years. Anyone who has had a repair carried out is invited to attend. Their opinion is a good barometer for SBHG to see how the service is perceived.

But we wanted to go further so at the beginning of September 2011 we sent out voting forms to all of our 4,500 homes across west London so our residents could have their say in Resident Voice. Resident Voice will represent the views and ideas of other residents. In the Resident Voice election, tenants were voting for 10 representatives and leaseholders were voting for two leaseholders to make up the panel of 12. We had 23 tenants who put themselves up for election and four leaseholders. We were particularly pleased that there was such a breath of candidates.

We received 430 votes and the newly elected 12 members met for the first time in October 2011. As part of their induction Paul Doe – Chief Executive, Amanda Morrison – Director of Housing, Greg Birch – Director of Property Management and Chair of Domus and David Blackburn – Director of Business Support and Domus Board Member presented information about the Group. We'll also be developing a training programme to support the members in their new roles.



Resident Voice will work alongside our board to review, influence and direct our work on a strategic level as well as having four resident places on the Board of Shepherds Bush Housing Group. We truly believe that this doorstep to boardroom process puts our residents' views at the centre of helping Domus to improve its services and further increase satisfaction.

Our residents benefit from the fact that Domus is part of SBHG. Being part of SBHG means they have ownership and pride in what they do. Residents know Domus staff and have a built a relationship with them. Similarly, Domus operators know the residents, the area and are familiar with the properties they work on.

### **For the wider community**

SBHG is community based housing association in west London. Domus has a commitment to employ local people. We want the wider community to benefit practically from our skills and experience. This gives staff a sense of ownership as they know they are serving their local area and go that extra mile for our residents and communities. They dedicate some of their Saturdays to working at our sheltered scheme for elderly residents, doing small repairs, tidying the gardens and chatting to our residents. We are committed to working in partnership with local suppliers and sub-contractors, helping to keep money in the pocket of the local economy.

Domus helps to build on the skills and potential of local people in the community by providing apprenticeships to young adults both as maintenance operatives and as administrators. The benefits apprentices receive not only includes training and support, they are installed with an ethos of putting residents first and to strive to give a better service to the wider community.

From April 2012 we will be looking to offer a maintenance service, on a not-for-profit basis, to small socially orientated organisations. As well as benefiting the community, this forms part of our business plan to lower our overhead costs for Domus and deliver even greater value for money to residents.

We are already in discussions with Inquilab Housing Association to provide a responsive repair service to more than 1,100 properties in west London. The Inquilab Housing Association works closely with tenants, local authorities and specialist agencies to provide housing and services at affordable prices. It also manages a small number of shared ownership homes and has plans for future development, to enable people to get on the housing ladder. Inquilab aims to improve the quality of life for whole neighbourhoods. It works closely with a wide range of partners to support initiatives that encourage education, training and employment opportunities for residents and makes a perfect partner for Domus who are committed to regenerating neighbourhoods through a high quality repairs and maintenance service.

We also work with the Oswald Stoll charity, which provides housing and support for vulnerable veterans and their families. The Oswald Stoll Foundation helps vulnerable ex-Servicemen and women to live with dignity. Founded in 1916, the foundation is devoted to serving Britain's veterans from World War 1 to the unique challenges of today's conflicts.

Based in Fulham, west London – within our core customer area, the foundation provides rehabilitative support, IT tuition, health and well-being activities and back-to-work apprenticeships to over 230 veterans. The Foundation is committed to building and sustaining communities within which ex-Service people can live independently, positively and healthily. Yet another way in which

Domus is stretching its reach to help the communities in which we operate.

SBHG has a commitment to step lightly. From securing carbon neutral status for our head office through to sourcing local goods, it is environmentally responsible. We extend that to our services. Domus' outstanding service and commitment to getting it 'right first time' means our vans usually need only make one journey to sort out a job. Latest figures show that in almost eight out of ten cases, our operatives don't need to make a second visit, further cutting our carbon footprint.

Domus fosters a spirit of repair rather than replace. When things need replacing, this is done in the most energy efficient way. Energy saving boilers is now fitted as standard when replacements are needed. Staff also advise and help residents make their homes greener including installing energy saving measures such as insulation.

### **For staff**

Domus and Shepherds Bush Housing Group (SBHG) both genuinely believe that people work well if they are kept fully informed of the decisions and actions of the company and the reasons behind them. We know that this is particularly so when proposals relate to jobs, working environment, career prospects, the activities of the business, and the major objectives or activities of the company.

Over the last three months we've completely reviewed the terms and conditions of our operatives, introduced paying for performance, paid them an exceptional performance bonus for their outstanding work in driving up standards over the last two years and increased the opportunities for training and development.

In August 2011 SBHG achieved Gold Investors in People accreditation for the first time – placing us in the top 1.23% of over 30,000 UK employers. In addition we were also recognised as Investor in People Champions – one of only 8 housing associations nationally – which means that we share our best practice with others. Domus and our operatives have been at the very heart of achieving this recognition.



## **What are the financial costs and benefits?**

Domus has already started to expand our services in line with our growth strategy. Increasing our workload gives a wider spread for our running costs and improves value for money for our existing services. Domus aims to:

- Provide a fair days pay for a fair days work
- Achieve set target dates
- Achieve a level basis of working for all staff
- Achieve value for money
- Deliver a high quality service to our customers
- Ensure that staff workers work a minimum 40 hour week
- Provide a fair mechanism of working to reflect the appointment system
- Provide a first time fix, where possible
- Prevent non productive time being accumulated

We are confident that our new paying for performance system implemented this October will continue to drive up standards and increase customer satisfaction.

We've continued to develop our supply chain, negotiating better deals and managing performance that will provide better value for money and improve our services. We continue to work closely with Procurement for Housing - Procurement for Housing is the only organisation in the UK dedicated to the needs of the social housing sector. It prides itself on being an essential business tool for social landlords. By reducing procurement costs, organisations can reinvest resources in front-line services, decent homes and vibrant neighbourhoods.

Better value for money means we can re-invest in planned maintenance services. We make cost savings of more than £250,000 in VAT from labour costs per year since the JVC. SBHG has not increased its budget for repairs and maintenance since the JVC which means direct saving for residents.

The money is put back into the group to spend on cyclical repairs or bathroom and kitchen replacement programmes. In the past year income has paid for ten additional kitchen and bathrooms and allowed us to continue our home adaptation work for our most vulnerable residents.

SBHG's approach to repairs and maintenance has led to high levels of resident satisfaction because it was led by residents. From the start of the project residents knew what they wanted and SBHG helped to facilitate this in a cost effective way.

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

SBHG is supporting others to follow our lead. We advise that setting up a joint venture company is ideally suited to small to medium sized housing associations with long term relationships with their responsive maintenance contractors. It is a logical step to take for those organisations, who already have established partnering arrangements in place.

Greg Birch said: “Domus Maintenance Services is one of the first, if not the first, joint venture contract set up by a Housing Association and contractor to deliver a responsive maintenance service to residents. This innovative solution has attracted great interest in the social housing sector. Several Housing Associations from all over the country have visited us to learn more about Domus. I have been invited to speak at several housing and maintenance sector conferences and seminars on the arrangement.”

## Conclusion

The last year has been about delivering record results and record value. Setting up Domus in 2009 was bold move and not risk free. However the results of this innovative approach over the last two years have been outstanding.

We now one of the highest overall resident satisfaction levels in London. Domus has been a crucial part in achieving this and will continue to play a crucial role in our future. Our residents and the wider community are reaping the direct rewards and the wider social housing community can benefit from our experience. We are looking forward to next stage in our journey with Domus and residents.

