



OLON SOUTH WEST HOUSING ASSOCIATION LTD

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND CHOICE STRATEGY

Your home – your choice

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1 Introduction and Purpose

1.1 *The key drivers* for the Customer Service and Choice Strategy (CSCS) are:-

- Solon's Vision and Mission statement which declares our intention to be a 3-star housing association by April 2013.
- The requirement set out in the Vision and Mission statement to improve performance and achieve excellence.
- Business Plan objective to improve the standard of customer care and communication, and increase the involvement of residents in the management of their homes, enabling them to influence the quality and delivery of all services, thereby improving customer satisfaction.
- The emphasis on being customer focused in our key Business Plan objectives.
- The desire to improve performance of, and customer satisfaction with all our services but the repairs and maintenance service in particular.

1.2 Our residents have given us their views in a number of ways (see 2.1 below). However, the key messages we have received are clear. We need to communicate more, particularly when things have gone wrong and improve the outcomes of contact with us.

1.3 The change from the Housing Corporation's Regulatory code to the Framework set in April 2010 by the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) has seen a shift in emphasis very clearly towards working *with* residents and that the outcomes for residents are of paramount importance. Solon's CSCS is our way of setting out what we will do and how we will do it in response to this shift.

Customer Service and Choice is included in the Tenant Involvement Standard set out in the TSA Framework which covers:-

- Access to services
- Choice over services
- Treating residents with fairness and respect

One of the clear messages that emerged from the Short Notice Inspection (SNI) was also the need to ensure that our services are tailored to meet the needs of our residents and embrace their differing requirements. Customer Care was a cross cutting theme during the inspection and should be embedded through each of the customer facing services that Solon provides.

Despite the uncertain future of the TSA, we support the principles of co-regulation and the arguments for providing services as agreed with residents and putting their experience first are well rehearsed and compelling.

1.4 The *aims* that this Strategy will deliver are as follows:-

- We will achieve 3 stars by the end of 2012 measured against the Audit Commission KLOEs.
- We will achieve top quartile Customer satisfaction with overall service by September 2012. We will measure this via satisfaction forms and our STATUS survey.

The *Mission Statement* for the Strategy, agreed following suggestions gathered at the Staff and Stakeholder working group, is:-

“Your home- your choice”

1.5 This Strategy links with the following service standards:-

- Customer Care
- Working in your home

It should be noted that there are important statements within a number of Service Standards relating to customer service but the two listed above are key in terms of our resident’s experience.

2 Where does this Strategy come from?

2.1 Since August 2009, views on Customer Care have been sought in a number of ways.

Status Survey - 2008

There are two main areas that have provided the information used to focus our priorities in this Strategy; Contact with Solon, and Communication and Information. The key findings are outlined below:-

Contact with Solon

Question	%
<i>Method of contact - phone</i>	74
<i>Reason for contact - repairs</i>	63
<i>Getting hold of the right person- easy</i>	75
<i>Helpfulness of staff - helpful</i>	82
<i>Staff able to help with problem</i>	73
<i>Satisfied with outcome</i>	64

To summarise the above, residents main reason for contact with Solon is regarding repairs and although they find it reasonably easy to get hold of the right person and

that this person is helpful, there is less satisfaction with the outcome and with the staff's ability to help with the problem.

Communication and Information

Question	%
<i>How good is Solon at keeping you informed</i>	74
<i>How satisfied are you that Solon takes your views into account</i>	51

The clear message here is that residents do not feel listened to, so although we keep them relatively well informed, we are not demonstrating that we respond to their message.

Service Standards

Throughout 2009 and 2010, a significant number of residents have been consulted on the 12 Service Standards that have been developed. Customer service is a cross cutting theme through all of them.

A number of residents attended specific sessions on individual standards, other residents completed questionnaires by post or e-mail and in some cases, interviews were held to obtain more qualitative information.

The Customer Care Service Standard is attached at Appendix 7.3.

Short Notice Inspection (SNI)

As part of the inspection process, the Auditors held two sessions with residents regarding the areas they inspected, but again importantly, customer service was a cross cutting theme that was considered.

Their overall conclusion was that weaknesses significantly outweighed strengths in this area. Their findings are listed below:-

- The association has a weak understanding of the needs of its customers with which to tailor its services.
- Services are not always delivered in a customer-focused way. The association does not routinely offer appointments outside normal office hours. This limits accessibility for customers who have commitments during normal office hours.
- Customers are not routinely involved in shaping and designing the services that they receive. By failing to involve customers in managing the services that they receive it is uncertain whether the association is delivering a service that meets the needs of its customer base.
- Information that is available in leaflets and on the website is incomplete and does not provide customers with what they may need to know about services.
- There are no service standards in place to help customers understand and challenge the level of service that they can expect to receive.

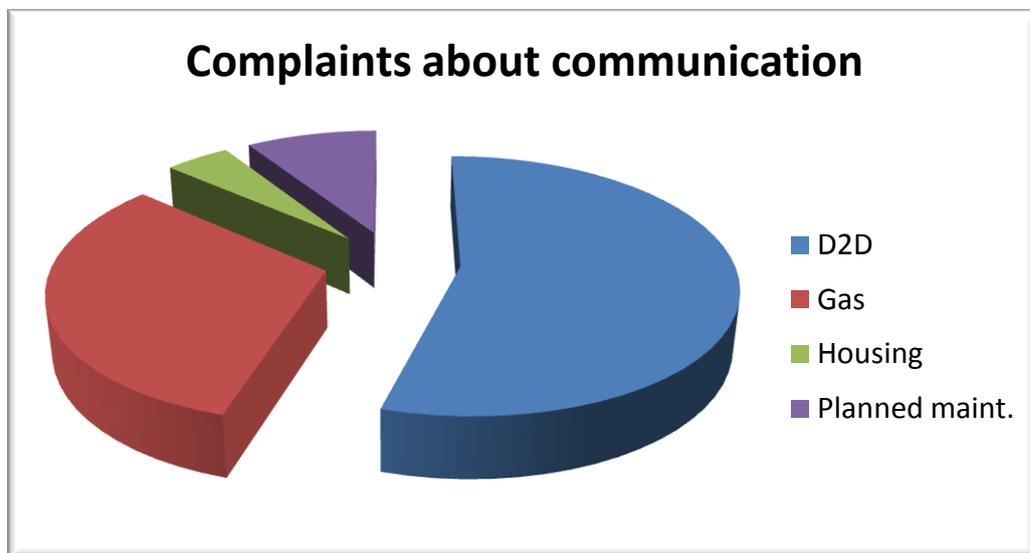
Board and Staff seminars

A seminar was held with Board members to agree the Aims of the Strategy and the key promises. This was then followed up with a seminar with staff and stakeholders to discuss the promises and how they could be delivered (See Section 4 below).

Complaints

One of the most important messages Solon must hear is that from those residents who complain about our service. Complaints provide the most valuable information in terms of where customer service has failed.

50% of the complaints received in 09/10 relate to customer care issues (44 of a total of 88 complaints). The breakdown for each service area is shown below:-



Clearly, if we deal with customer care in our Day to Day and Gas repairs services then this will impact heavily on overall satisfaction with the way we deliver our services in general.

3 What do we know about our residents?

3.1 We have identified some key messages that our residents have given us but in order to make sure that we deliver the right services and provide tailored customer care, we need to understand who our residents are.

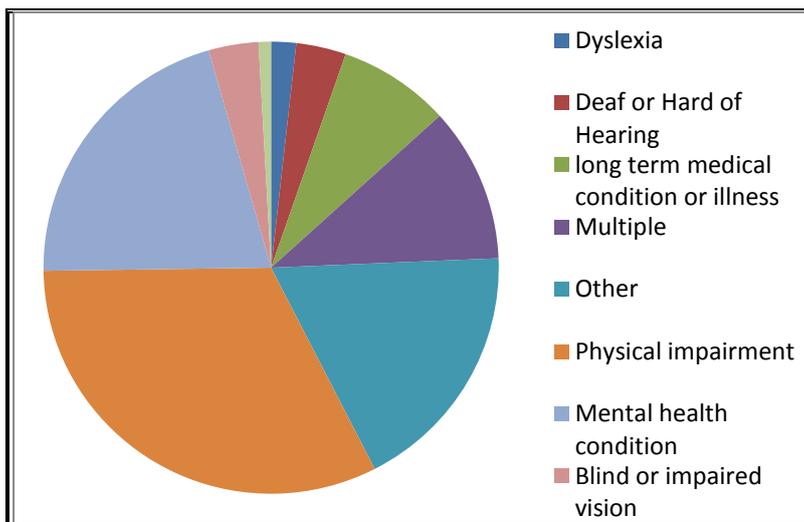
The Tenancy Audit carried out in 2009 and 2010 collected comprehensive information from over 98% of all our residents and we have an ongoing process to collect this from new residents as well as to validate existing information held.

The most important aspect of Customer Service is that all customers, whatever their circumstances, needs or requirements, should receive the

same high standard. This means that we must accommodate their differences and put measures in place to overcome any inequities.

The most obvious issues that may affect how a resident can access a service are disability, both physical and mental/ emotional, and language be it written or spoken. However, religion can also potentially affect how we provide a service.

Detailed information on the resident profiling carried out is attached at Appendix 7.2 but some key facts are presented here. Of our 962 residents, 226 (23.5%) have stated they have some form of disability.



- 7.3% of our residents do not have an English speaker in the household
- 3.8% of our residents are unable to read English
- 58.2% of our residents prefer contact by telephone

Having collected this information we need to use it to inform the way we do things and look at existing mechanisms for delivering our key services to see if they exclude any particular groups.

4 Our promises

4.1 The 8 key promises are:-

- ✓ *We will deliver great customer service in line with our Customer Care Service Standard, other relevant Service Standards, and staff behaviours.*
- ✓ *We will be clear about what we can achieve.*
- ✓ *We will tailor communication and support to meet the needs of our residents, staff, contractors and other stakeholders.*
- ✓ *We will make our services accessible to all.*

- ✓ *We will listen to our customer's feedback and prioritise this to influence improvements. We will tell customers when we have made changes.*
- ✓ *We will complete mystery shopping and other reality checking to make sure we are meeting these objectives.*
- ✓ *We will compare ourselves with high performing organisations to make sure we are delivering the best possible service.*
- ✓ *We will publish all performance information in relation to customer service.*

4.2 *How will we deliver and keep our promises?*

The work needed to deliver each of the promises is summarised below and brought forward into the Action Plan (Appendix 7.1) where responsible staff and targets are provided for each set of actions.

4.2.1 *We will deliver great customer service in line with our Customer Care Service Standard, other relevant Service Standards, and staff behaviours.*

What do we need to do?

- Ensure all staff know what our aims are.
- Develop a Customer Service Standard Toolkit
- Develop a specific in-house training package on Solon's behaviours and Service Standards and include as part of induction process as well as for regular staff updates.
- Solon behaviours to be used as part of recruitment process to compliment essential and desirable criteria

How will we measure we have achieved our promises?

- Monitoring – methods to be agreed but will include mystery shopping
- Resident feedback via forums, complaints, satisfaction returns, STATUS and targeted surveys.
- Measure feedback against the 6 strands of diversity using reports with analysis and agreed actions.

4.2.2 *We will be clear about what we can achieve.*

What do we need to do?

- Manage customer expectations.
- Be clear about what we can and can't do – set clear limits and boundaries and make sure that the residents are aware of these.

- Publish clear information in the Resident Handbook.
- Maintain consistency of service for all tenants.

How will we measure we have achieved our promises?

- Feedback from staff
- Clear guidance and policies in place
- Higher resident satisfaction in key service areas
- Reduced complaints

4.2.3 *We will tailor communication and support to meet the needs of our residents, staff, contractors and other stakeholders.*

What do we need to do?

- Check preferred communication and use it.
- Use the website.
- Further develop register of external support agencies.
- Give diversity information to contractors and discuss any issues.
- Audit contractors to see how they are using the information.
- Maintain up-to-date profiling data.
- Train all staff on profiling information and how it can be used (as part of induction process and ongoing for existing staff)
- Produce regular reports to analyse profiling data and use when reviewing delivery of services

How will we measure we have achieved our promises?

- Customer feedback
- Satisfaction KPIs
- Staff and contractor feedback

4.2.4 *We will make our services accessible to all.*

What do we need to do?

- Ensure our Reception area is DDA compliant
- Promote different ways to access service.
- Further develop the use of translation and interpretation services.
- Know our customers and use the data we have to tailor our services to them i.e. send letters in Braille / offer a home visit.
- Comply with the service standards i.e. Customer Care
- Extend our opening hours and ensure contractors offer extended appointment times

How will we measure we have achieved our promises?

- Customer feedback
- Satisfaction KPIs
- Staff and contractor feedback
- Monitor use of interpretation / translation.
- Monitor performance against the service standards.

4.2.5 *We will listen to our customer's feedback and prioritise this to influence improvements. We will tell customers when we have made changes.*

What do we need to do?

- Record comments and feedback (including both formal and informal).
- Record both positive and negative feedback so we change things that are wrong and value/ retain things that are right.
- Continue to use the Suggestion Box.
- Regularly review complaints and agree learning outcomes which feed into improvement work and service reviews.
- Continue to publish and further develop, 'You said, we did' in the Newsletter and website.

How will we measure we have achieved our promises?

- Customer feedback
- Satisfaction KPIs (particularly with Complaints handling)
- Newsletter and website content

4.2.6 *We will complete mystery shopping and other reality checking to make sure we are meeting these objectives.*

What do we need to do?

- Recruit residents and train them.
- Research implications of "reward" for residents.
- Promote mystery shopping and target different residents.
- Record and report information that is fed back and use it to improve services.
- Research best practice and compare our performance.
- Use other Housing Associations to reality check our services.
- Analyse key satisfaction returns against specific objectives

How will we measure we have achieved our promises?

- By reviewing the mystery shopping returns and taking appropriate actions.
- Reports on outcomes published internally and externally

4.2.7 *We will compare ourselves with high performing organisations to make sure we are delivering the best possible service.*

What do we need to do?

- Find out what other organisations are doing.
- Benchmark information.
- Use best practice as part of every policy/ service review
- Encourage staff and residents to visit high performing associations where appropriate

How will we measure we have achieved our promises?

- Keep evidence of using best practice information.
- Benchmark data.

- Self assessment against the Customer Care KLOE and external validation

4.2.8 *We will publish all performance information in relation to customer service*

What do we need to do?

- Publish performance information on the website, in the newsletter and to staff.
- Promote at meetings – staff / team
- Send out via Email when relevant to residents

How will we measure we have achieved our promises?

- Newsletters / website with regular sections on customer service performance
- Staff feedback on awareness of customer service performance

5 Potential Barriers

- 5.1 *Resources* at Solon are limited in comparison to larger organisations. However, as long as staff work efficiently, there is no reason why we cannot achieve our promises and commitments. Indeed, in a smaller organisation, it should be easier to communicate our message to staff and embed improvement and Customer service throughout the organisation.

Board, Senior and Middle managers need to ensure that staff can prioritise the work that matters most to our customers and recognise when resources need to be increased or reorganised. However, if the actions from this Strategy are successfully implemented then getting things right first time will create efficiencies.

It should be noted that Solon, in acknowledging the need for a real focus on improvement and customer service, created the post of Performance Improvement Manager in March 2009 and although this role is not solely responsible for all improvement work, it provides a drive and commitment to this agenda.

- 5.2 There are, of course, a number of *risks* that may prevent this Strategy being implemented. Staff need to feel supported and need to be empowered to make the kind of decisions that will enhance their ability to deliver a tailored and excellent service.

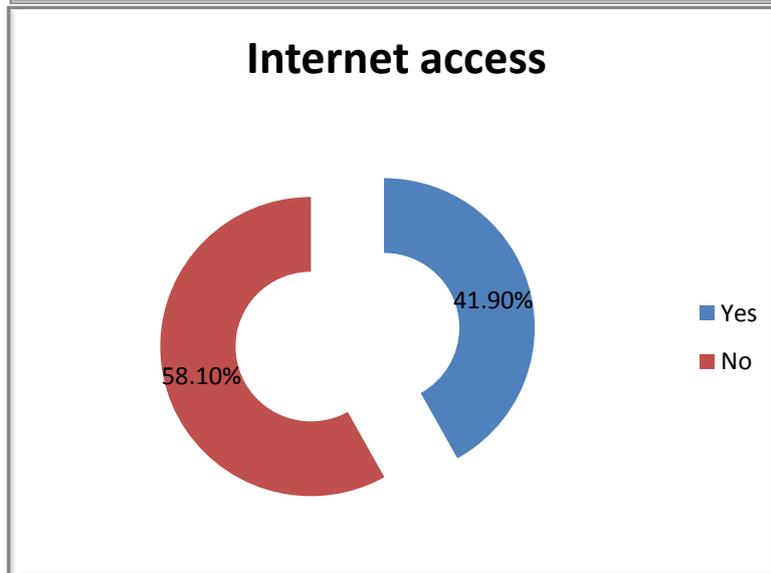
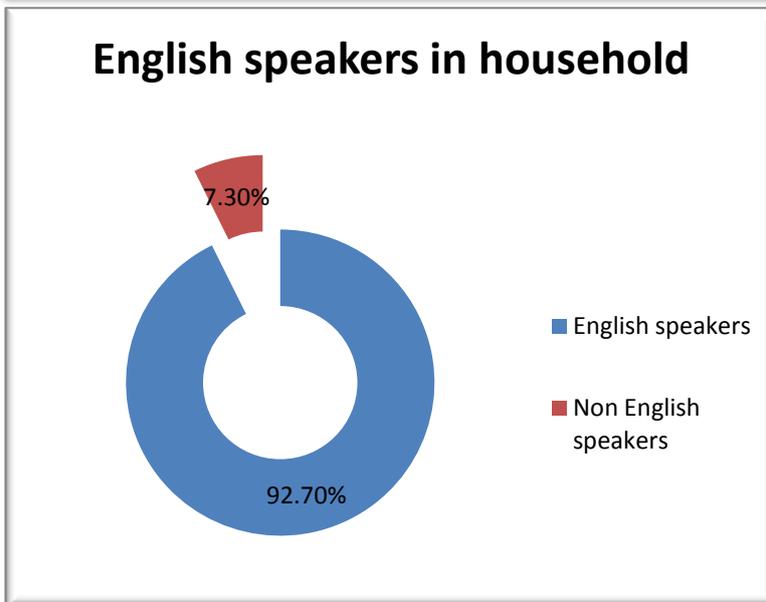
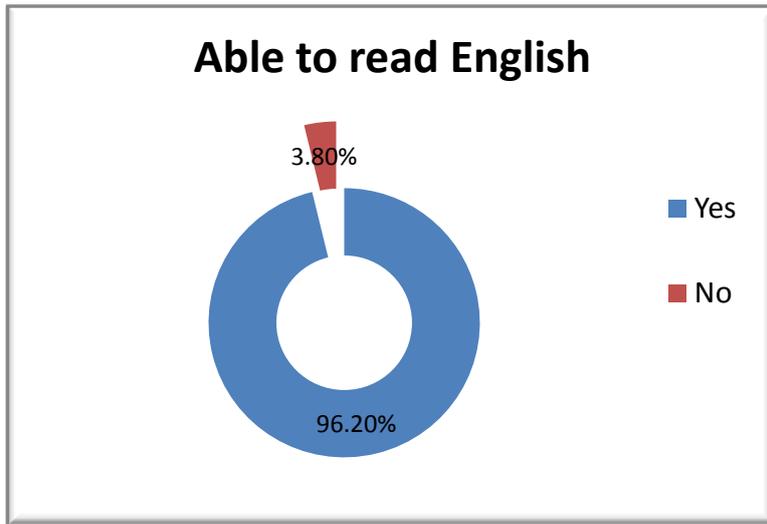
IT remains a key risk in all aspects of Solon's business; the ability to use the profiling information and to analyse how services are taken up is of vital importance, as is providing monitoring information to our customers to let them know how we are performing.

6 Communication

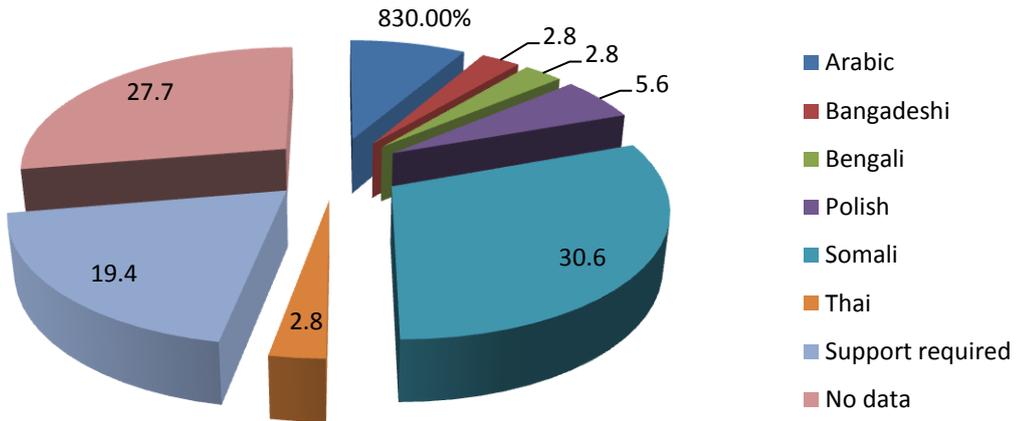
6.1 One of the messages received from residents is that we don't communicate sufficiently with them. This relates to both individual communication regarding specific issues and more generally, about matters affecting all residents.

However, in terms of communicating this strategy and its resultant actions, the details are summarised below:-

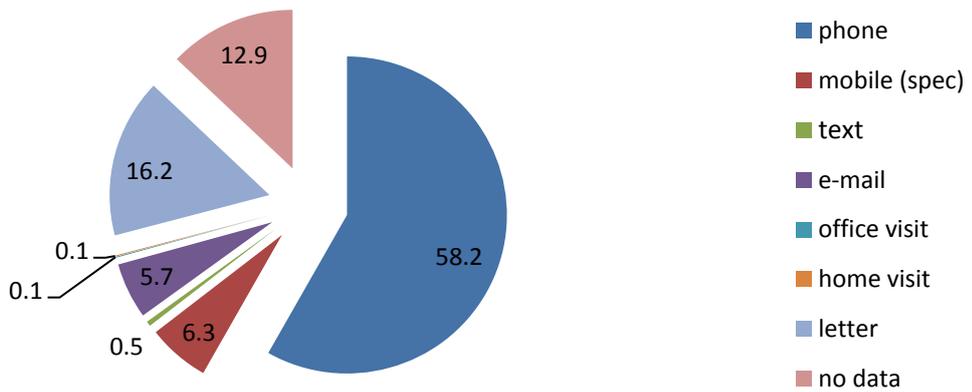
Who	What	Where	How often
Residents	Customer Service and Choice Strategy	Website Residents Forum	Continuous
Residents	Performance against service standards Strategy promises	Newsletter & Website	Quarterly
Board and residents	As above	Customer Services Improvement Committee	At each meeting
Board and residents	Complaints and learning outcomes	Customer Services Improvement Committee	At each meeting
Residents	'You said – we did' including complaints summary	Newsletter & Website	Quarterly
Staff	Performance against service standards and Strategy	Staff meetings 121s Team meetings	Monthly



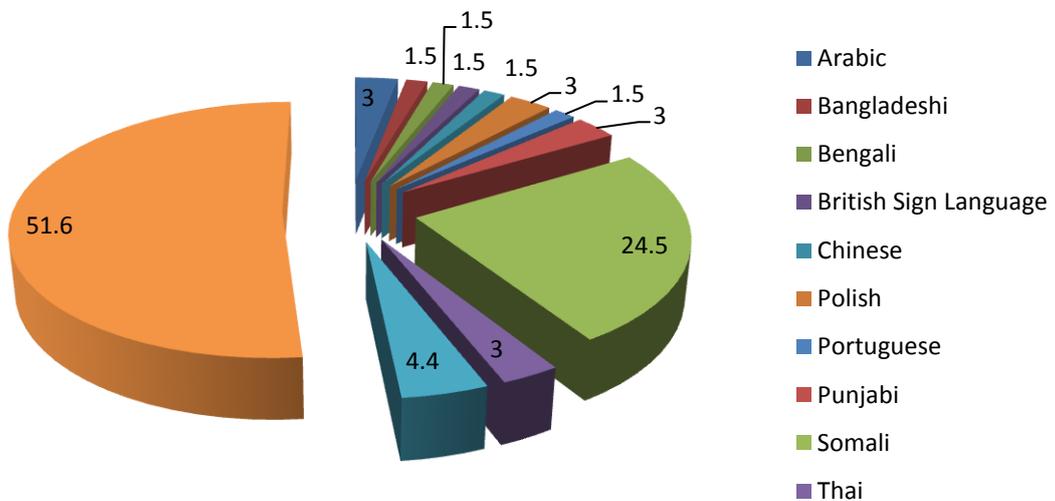
Preferred written language %



Contact preferences %



First language for non English speakers %





Solon Service Standard Customer Care

Solon aims to deliver the highest standards of customer service. This page lists the service that all residents can expect. It also explains what Solon expects residents to do in order to help us meet these standards.

We will:

- Always be polite when responding to your queries
- Publish information about who you should contact for help
- Provide emergency contact details for when the office is closed
- Always try and resolve queries the first time you contact us
- Respond to telephone messages in 1 working day or use our voicemail to tell you when we will be back
- Always call you back when we say we will
- Always give our name when we answer the telephone
- Always leave our name and job title when we leave you a message
- Respond within 5 working days to a letter from you
- Write to you using plain language
- Give our contact details when we send you information
- Give you information in the way that is best for you and in another language if you need it
- Respond within 5 working days to an e-mail message from you
- Send an automatic acknowledgement for e-mails so you know they have reached us
- Make sure the office is easily accessible and welcoming
- See you within 10 minutes of your appointment time
- See you within 30 minutes if you do not have an appointment, or make an appointment for you to come back
- Provide a telephone in the office that you can use
- Always wear name badges
- Respect your right to confidentiality
- Make sure all personal information we hold is kept confidential and let you see the personal information we hold about you

You will:

- Be polite and reasonable when making requests
- Let us know if you are not happy with the service we have given you

If you feel we have not done all of these things, please let us know