



Mystery Shopping
@
Sutton Housing Society



Mystery Shopping @ Sutton Housing Society (SHS)

What is Mystery Shopping?

Mystery shopping is a method used to check the quality of services SHS provides to its tenants. SHS tenant volunteers are briefed to approach SHS with a question or issues; they then keep a detailed record on a specific form of how they are treated, how their enquiry was dealt with and how they felt SHS complied with their own Standards.

Mystery shopping is a way of finding out about the actual tenant experience and the outcome is objective and measurable. It is particularly effective at investigating how staff interact with tenants and how they make tenants feel.

An example of mystery shopping would be a tenant telephoning/emailing SHS to request a particular piece of information e.g. about a rent account balance, how to apply for a transfer; is SHS responsible for a particular repair etc. The mystery shopper then monitors how long it takes for the call/email to be answered, how they were greeted, how professionally and how quickly their request was dealt with. The mystery shopper notes down what took place.

Ideally the same process would be conducted by several mystery shoppers over an agreed period of time. The results are then collated to form an overall picture of how the matters were handled by SHS staff.

For Mystery Shopping to work

- The forms used to record the interactions must be properly designed, so that useful information is captured and is comparable
- Staff must not be aware, during the interaction, that they are dealing with a mystery shopper
- Enough mystery shops need to be carried out using similar scenarios and over a (defined) limited period of time, for them to reveal patterns or trends
- If fictional scenarios are used, they must be able to be resolved in a single interaction
- The information collected by a mystery shopping programme must be properly collated and analysed, and the findings acted upon
- Mystery shopping should be approached by organisations as a way of continuously improving services to tenants.

What services can be Mystery Shopped and how?

Most areas of the housing service can be included in mystery shopping. This would be allocations and lettings, transfers, repairs, rent and arrears and general tenancy management.

Elements of the service that are often tested through mystery shopping include:

- Speed of response to phone calls
- Politeness and courtesy of staff
- Accuracy and usefulness of information given (by phone, in e-mail/letter or in person)
- Responses to specific types of enquiry
- Cleanliness of communal areas inside blocks
- Care and maintenance of external grounds.

There are 4 main ways that tenant mystery shoppers usually test services:

1. By phone to the main office number or direct to a specific staff member
2. By e-mail or letter
3. By visiting the office
4. By inspecting internal and external communal areas.

Examples of the types of Mystery shopping Scenarios

- Enquiry about office opening hours
- Asking how to make a complaint on behalf of a friend
- Asking how to report a neighbour nuisance
- Request a repair that is not SHS' responsibility
- Enquiry about how to apply for a transfer
- How to obtain adaptations for a family member living in SHS accommodation.

Recording Outcomes form Mystery Shopping

A specially designed Mystery Shopping form is used by the mystery shopper to record information about the service they are testing. These forms are needed to ensure mystery shoppers look out for specific issues/test things which SHS and/or tenants consider particularly important (e.g. aspects of the service for which there are specific standards).

The forms ensure the information collected by different mystery shoppers is comparable. For example, a form used for recording what happens during a phone call might ask:

- How quickly the call was answered
- Whether the staff member gave their name
- How the caller was greeted
- Whether the member of staff was politer and courteous
- Whether the caller was put on hold and, if so, for how long
- How the caller's request or enquiry was dealt with
- How the call was ended.

When a mystery shopper is dealing with staff on the phone or in person, they will not be able to complete the form during the interaction itself. It's important that the

mystery shopper reads the form in advance and is aware of what to look out for. They should then complete the form immediately after the interaction while it is still fresh in their memory.

Besides capturing what happened, SHS would like its mystery shoppers to put forward ideas about improvements to the service and what could be done in a better and/or more efficient way.

What happens after the Mystery Shopping Exercise?

The Operations Director is responsible for the mystery shopping programme and will collate all of the mystery shopping forms, following an exercise and discuss these, as necessary, with the individual mystery shoppers.

Once the information is collated, a report will be presented to the Senior Management Team detailing the outcomes of the mystery shopping exercise, together with any recommendations for change and/or improvements. The results will be shared with the staff in general terms to assist with their understanding, training and to address any improvements needed.

A report will also be prepared and discussed at the Housing Operations Committee, a sub-committee of the management board, for their overview and direction as required.

If you are interested in becoming a Mystery Shopper.....

Please contact the Operations Director, Glynis Gatenby, on 020 8642 1500 to discuss becoming involved with improving services at SHS; it would be much appreciated. Glynis will arrange to meet with you to discuss your involvement in more detail.