

East Staffordshire

Housing Options

Helping you to avoid homelessness

Customer Service Standards

| INDICATOR | MAXIMUM TIME |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Interviews | |
| Waiting time – with appointment | 5 minutes |
| Waiting time – without appointment | 20 minutes; where this is not possible, we will inform you of the likely waiting time and reasons for delay |
| Waiting time for an appointment | 2 working days (non-urgent cases only) |
| Contact with customers | |
| Replies to letters | 10 working days |
| Initial out of hours response | 60 minutes |
| Ongoing updates | 10 working days |

3.1.1 We recognise that homelessness is a traumatic experience, and our customers will therefore receive the highest level of professional support in dealing with their situation. Our customers are at the heart of the business we operate, and are our first priority. It is our intention to provide the best possible services, when they are required, in a caring and efficient manner. The following sections set out the level of service that customers can expect from us, and will be summarised as a leaflet that will be provided to all customers on their first contact with the service. The full policies, along with the full final service standard will be available on request.

3.1.2 In terms of general issues of customer care, Trent & Dove Housing will:

- Operate a customer-focused service, which puts the customer first. Where we are unable to provide the type of services required by customers, we will advise them of the availability of these services from other agencies and make referrals as appropriate.
- Provide the highest standard of appropriate services, and respond to customers' needs.
- Have staff who are accessible to customers through a direct dial system and use mobile telephones as appropriate. House visits will be undertaken as a matter of routine and front line and support staff will provide an efficient and effective customer service.
- Set, monitor and review service standards in consultation with customers, and publish details of the service standards and make these available to customers.

- Give customers a formal commitment to deliver quality services through providing a service guarantee and having effective complaints procedures and compensation arrangements.
- Have a customer care code that sets out service standards, and sets standards for the conduct and behaviour required of staff and contractors in dealing with customers.
- Specify compliance with the customer care code in service agreements, for example, with other agencies and in conditions of engagement for contractors.
- Have a formal system for seeking and monitoring customers' views of services, such as satisfaction surveys and customer comment, compliments and complaints cards.
- Provide services that are accountable to customers and consider their views in reviewing and developing services.
- Report customers' views to the Board, customer groups, staff and contractors.
- Record and monitor the ethnicity, gender and disability of customers to assess whether they are treated fairly in accordance with the Equality & Diversity policy.

3.2 In terms of the way customers experience our services, we will operate in accordance with our customer care code, and make the following commitments:

3.2.1 Courtesy and consideration

- We will be welcoming, polite, courteous and helpful.
- We will listen in order to understand and respond to needs.
- We will respect rights to privacy, confidentiality and safety.

3.2.2 Access

- We will make sure signs are easy to follow, directional and where appropriate, in picture format.
- Our opening times will be clearly displayed and adhered to.
- We will strive to make our services as accessible as possible.

3.2.3 Efficiency

- We will ensure that the most appropriate staff member is dealing with the enquiry.
- We will aim to keep appointments and advise customers if they have to be cancelled.
- We will aim to arrive 5 minutes before a home visit appointment time.
- We will provide an efficient and reliable service.

3.2.4 Communication

- We will use clear language and not jargon.

- We will introduce ourselves face to face and on the telephone.
- We will strive to make services as easy to use as possible.

3.2.5 We will monitor all aspects of our Customer Care Policy with customer involvement, provide performance information, and act upon results. We will provide an annual report and continuously strive to improve our standards.

3.2.6 The customer will be provided with clear and accessible information on all aspects of service and improvements for which the responsibility will be at Director level.

3.2.7 We also recognise that our customers will have very different needs, aspirations and requirements. Some people, due to personal circumstances, may also be disadvantaged and have difficulties in communicating and experience varying levels of understanding.

3.2.8 Our customers are also representative of many cultures and religions, speaking numerous languages. Through a series of actions and policies we are developing a greater understanding of all our customers from which we will tailor specific customer care to individual requirements.

3.2.9 There is a clear duty upon us all to ensure that these standards are met and we share that responsibility between our own staff and all other organisations we work with who provide housing services. We will ensure all our staff receive annual training so they can respond appropriately and professionally at all times.

3.3 Comments, Compliments and Complaints

3.3.1 Most of our customers want to be positive about the good services they receive, praise staff for their efforts and provide constructive criticism when improvements are required. When mistakes arise, customers require speedy rectifications with the minimum of inconvenience. Our aim is to achieve this. We find formal complaints arise only when this approach has failed and customers' problems have remained unresolved for some time.

- **Comments** – many customers will have comments to make about the operational procedures of the company. These are not complaints. However, it is still important for us to listen and evaluate these comments, revising policies as appropriate.
- **Compliments** – these are when a customer has something complimentary to say about the service provided by us. It is important for us to hear these compliments so that we can continue to improve on the good practice.
- **Complaints** – If we have not carried out a procedure properly, been rude or inconsiderate to a customer, then the customer must be given a right to complain.

Full details of the process are set out later in this document.

3.4 Staff

3.4.1 We will ensure that staff are sufficiently trained in customer care practices to be able to implement its code of practice to an agreed high standard.

3.4.2 The customer care code requires the following behaviour of all staff:

- Be tidily dressed and wear any designated uniform.
- Wear name badges during working periods.
- Carry and display proof of identity.
- Introduce themselves to customers.
- Give their name to customers when requested.
- Treat customers with courtesy and respect.
- Identify the problem and look for positive solutions.
- Take responsibility for the problem.
- Treat the homes of customers with respect.
- Be friendly, welcoming and helpful.
- Deal with customers promptly.
- Show patience, understanding and sensitivity in dealing with customers' problems.
- Adopt a non-judgemental approach to customers.
- Behave in a proper and professional manner at all times.
- Comply with our Equality and Diversity policy.

3.4.3 We will ensure that reception staff have appropriate training in our services and in issues such as customer care, equal opportunities, and dealing with violent and difficult situations.

3.5 Offices

3.5.1 We will provide our services from offices that are conveniently located in Burton upon Trent and Uttoxeter town centres. These are currently located at Trinity Square, Horninglow Street, Burton upon Trent, and Bradley Street Uttoxeter.

3.5.2 Outside of normal working hours, an emergency service exists for emergency repairs requests and homelessness services, via the main switchboard number - 01283 528528.

3.5.3 We will ensure that external and internal location signs on or inside its offices, housing stock, and other premises are:

- Descriptive.
- Prominently displayed to provide accurate information.
- Up-to-date.
- Well maintained.
- Accessible to those visually impaired as appropriate

3.5.4 We will publicise the opening times of offices and notify customers in advance of any forthcoming changes through notices displayed at offices and articles in the tenant magazine 'Streetwise'.

3.5.5 We will ensure that offices are:

- Friendly.
- Welcoming.
- Comfortable.
- Clean.
- Tidy.
- Safe and secure

3.6 Receptions and Interview areas

3.6.1 Reception and interviewing areas will have:

- Easy access for prams, pushchairs, wheelchairs and people with mobility disabilities.
- Private interview rooms with telephones.
- Comfortable and adequate seating.
- Facilities for children, such as play areas, toys etc.
- Reading material.

3.6.2 We will monitor the conditions in reception areas, interview rooms and toilet facilities for tidiness and cleanliness.

3.6.3 We will ensure that information notices in public areas of offices are relevant, up-to-date, clean, and tidy.

3.6.4 We will ensure that displays and supplies of customer leaflets in public areas are relevant, up-to-date, adequately stocked, well presented, neat and tidy.

3.6.5 We will require staff not to eat, drink or smoke in the public areas of offices, such as reception.

3.7 Appointments

3.7.1 We will arrange appointments with customers for office interviews and home visits at mutually convenient times. In addition we will:

- Make home visits out of office hours, where necessary in the performance of its business and service requirements.
- Keep appointments made with customers and where this is not possible, notify them in advance with reasons.
- Have a simple and fair queuing system for customers waiting to see an officer without an appointment.
- Offer the opportunity of same sex interviews in any sensitive issues such as instances of domestic violence or cultural reasons.
- Ensure that customers without an appointment do not have to wait longer than 20 minutes to be seen, and where this is not possible, inform customers of the likely waiting time and reasons for delay.
- Leave a calling card when a home visit is made and the customer is not at home.

3.8 Confidentiality

3.8.1 We have a confidentiality policy which:

- Ensures that access to confidential information about customers is strictly limited on a 'need to know' basis.
- Covers information such as medical details, rent arrears, domestic violence, child abuse, criminal behaviour, etc.
- Covers matters such as the security of filing systems, the passing of information between sections and between agencies, and the disclosure of information to customers.
- Ensures that confidential information is only given to staff and agencies where there is an essential need to know and require them to observe confidentiality principles.
- Has security arrangements to prevent unauthorised access to customers' records held on paper or computer files.
- Informs customers of the confidentiality policy at the first point of contact and seeks their consent to pass on information internally and to other agencies on a need to know basis.
- Ensures that interviews and conversations with customers about personal, confidential, or contentious issues are carried out in private.
- Allows customers to inspect information about them held in the Company's records, free of charge, and in accordance with their legal rights.

3.9 Dealing with telephone calls

3.9.1 We will provide a prompt and efficient response to customers' telephone calls by:

- Staff members stating their name as part of the introduction to callers.
- Dealing with customers' telephone requests immediately wherever possible, otherwise telephoning them back on the same day, or at a time which is mutually convenient.
- Providing customers with details of telephone numbers for each service area and for named staff.
- Providing a telephone line for customers to report emergencies out of office hours.
- Ensuring that the telephone system is technically capable of coping with the volume of calls received.
- Ensuring that switchboard operators and telephone receptionists have adequate training and information about the housing staff and services to enable them to route calls promptly and correctly.
- Providing guidelines for all staff and training, where necessary, on using the telephone system and on how to conduct telephone conversations with customers.
- Having arrangements to deal with telephone calls when staff are unavailable.
- Having arrangements to monitor the performance of telephone services, for example, by checking response times, making test calls to check the adequacy of responses given, and seeking customer feedback.

3.10 Written Communication

3.10.1 We will ensure that written communication to customers is:

- Clear.
- Concise.
- Simple to understand.
- Inviting to read.
- Written to avoid jargon, and not patronising, sexist or racist.

3.10.2 We will produce information suited to the specific needs of different groups of customers, for example, older people.

3.10.3 We will ensure that written communication to customers has a clear, attractive design and format, and follow principles of good design practice such as:

- Appropriate use of headings and sub-headings.
- Readable typeface and print size (with large print versions for people with visual impairment).
- Line lengths and column widths set at an easy to read size.
- Uncluttered layout.
- Logical structure.
- Attractive and relevant illustrations.
- Statistics, tables and graphs presented in an easy to read format.
- Good quality paper and other materials.
- Appropriate and attractive use of colour.
- Easy to handle format suitable for the message and the audience.

3.10.4 We will ensure that forms:

- Follow the design principles listed above.
- Have instructions for completion.
- Are easy for customers to understand and complete.
- Have sufficient space for them to write in their reply.

3.10.5 We will, upon request, provide written communications in relevant community languages, where appropriate; have clear criteria for deciding which customer literature should be provided in translation; have arrangements to translate literature into community languages, which ensures that the translation is carried out by an appropriate expert, and grammatically correct.

3.10.6 If requested, we will:

- Arrange for the Language Line service to be provided. This is a telephone linked service with an interpreter where a 3 way conversation takes place. This is provided to persons whose first language is not English.
- Provide audiotapes for customers with reading difficulties.
- Provide information in large print, Braille or on audiotape for customers who have visual impairments.
- Make appropriate arrangements for communicating with customers who have special needs, such as learning difficulties.

- Arrange for signers or interpreters, as appropriate, to be present at interviews with customers who have hearing difficulties.
- Produce newsletters periodically as required and agreed with the Customer Panel.
- Produce newsletters and leaflets about proposals to change policies and practices, as appropriate.

3.11 Customer Correspondence

3.11.1 We will record details and dates of incoming and outgoing mail.

3.11.2 We will reply to correspondence from customers politely and promptly within target response times.

3.11.3 We will ensure that all correspondence and written communications to customers are sent in the name of the officer dealing with the matter.

3.11.4 We will address correspondence to the customer by name, wherever possible.

3.11.5 We will send out forms and literature requested by customers promptly within target response times.

3.11.6 We will provide customers with written confirmation of any verbal information given to them and of action taken, as appropriate.