



# CUSTOMER CARE POLICY

Approved/last reviewed by Management Committee: 23 March 2016

Date due for review: March 2019

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Management Committee and staff of Hillhead Housing Association 2000 are proud of the positive impact that has been made in the area since 2004. Through large investment we have been able to offer improved housing that much better meets tenants' requirements and which, in many cases, improves their quality of life. Less obvious, but just as important, is the high standard of service we strive to provide to customers at all times.-
- 1.2 This policy therefore confirms our commitment to continue to provide the high standards of customer care which have been a part of the Association's overall approach since the Transfer. As well as confirming this commitment, the policy also outlines some key targets against which we can measure our performance.
- 1.3 The policy aims to be compliant with the outcomes included in the Scottish Housing Charter . The Charter expects housing associations to state clearly what tenants and other customers can expect from Hillhead Housing Association and help them to hold the Association to account. The Charter focuses the effort of the Association on achieving outcomes that matter to our tenants and other customers.
- 1.4 The Association facilitates a Customer Care Working Group which meets monthly. Membership is open to any tenant, owner and applicant who receives or may be a recipient of any number of our services. Awareness of the group and feedback from its meetings are included in the Association's quarterly newsletters.
- 1.5. Welfare Rights Service Users Forum – The Association's Welfare Rights Service hosts a Users Forum which meets quarterly and provides input and ideas into future services and ideas for how the service can be improved.

## **2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF CUSTOMER CARE**

- 2.1 In implementing this policy, the Association observes the following general principles in relation to customer care:
  - To put our customers first by respecting their rights, needs and views
  - To treat our customers with dignity
  - To find out what our customers want and respond to these wishes
  - To set standards in relation to customer care and monitor progress against these standards
  - To provide relevant, accurate and accessible information
  - To be open, honest and truthful while respecting confidentiality and complying with Data Protection legislation

2.2 The Association is also committed to act promptly to rectify matters when made aware of any failure to adhere to this policy, and to advise the customer(s) concerned of the outcomes in this regard.

### **3. SCOPE OF POLICY – WHO ARE OUR CUSTOMERS?**

3.1 The Association uses a very broad definition of customer. This includes everyone with whom we deal, for example:

- Our tenants and owners with whom we have an agreement to provide services
- Applicants for housing
- Members of the public, or their representatives, seeking information and advice
- Suppliers and contractors
- Other agencies, such as East Dunbartonshire Council, the Scottish Housing Regulator, the Citizen's Advice Bureau or solicitors

3.2 The policy covers a broad range of subjects, for example:

- General enquiries about the services we provide
- The behaviour of staff, Committee members and contractors/agents acting on our behalf
- The adequacy of our office facilities
- How customers (or their representatives) feel we treat them during personal visits to the office
- How customers (or their representatives) feel we treat them when making telephone or written enquiries to the office; or when visiting them in their own home

### **4. VISITING THE OFFICE AND HOME VISITING**

4.1 The Association's office will be open at hours which are convenient to a large majority of our customers and to allow the Association to provide the most effective service possible. Our current opening times are publicised in the Tenant's Handbook, in newsletters and outside the office reception. The next Tenant Satisfaction Survey which is due to take place in the winter/spring 2016 will again gather information/views on opening times and any changes suggested will be considered

4.2 The office has a friendly and customer-focused atmosphere. There is ramp access for those in wheelchairs or with push chairs with assisted door opener/closer. We offer adequate and comfortable seating in the reception area for those who need to wait for a short while. A range of information about the Association is also on display. A hearing Loop system is provided. The reception area is covered by CCTV.

4.3 The following procedure applies where a customer calls into or rings the office:

→ If the person they require to see/speak to is available, they will be dealt with straight away (if the officer is dealing with another customer, the likely waiting time will be advised). We offer an appointment system for tenants who wish to meet with their Housing Officer

**OR**

→ If the person they require to see/speak to is not available, they will be advised when they will be able to see them and another member of staff will offer to help.

Common sense will prevail. For example, if the member of staff the customer wishes to see/speak to is absent on leave, then the staff member available at the time will encourage the customer to speak to someone else.

Whatever the circumstances, customers will not be left without (i) their enquiry being resolved or (ii) being advised of a time and date by which the member of staff will get back to them.

4.4 Where coming to the office would present a difficulty, the Association also offers home visits and because we are based in the community, these can generally be arranged within a few days. Where customers live outside of the Kirkintilloch area (for example, an applicant for housing) separate arrangements will be made, but all reasonable efforts will be made to achieve this within one week.

4.5 Staff will make all reasonable efforts to keep appointments that are made – in the unlikely event that this is not possible, we will contact the customer in advance of the meeting, give the reason why it cannot be kept, and offer another suitable time.

## **5. RESPONDING TO LETTERS OR OTHER WRITTEN DOCUMENTATION AND EMAIL / TEXT CORRESPONDENCE**

5.1 All letters, emails and texts received will be either acknowledged or answered in writing/email/text within one week. Where it is only possible to provide an acknowledgement, a target timescale by which a full response is likely to be available will be provided.

5.2 Completed applications for housing will be acknowledged, assessed and pointed within 10 working days, with the applicant being advised of their points total and how this has been calculated.

- 5.3 Where a letter/email/text has been submitted on behalf of a customer, for example from a solicitor, councillor/MP/MSP, friend or family member, the above timescales will apply subject to Data Protection Act 1998 requirements.

## **6. MEASURING LEVELS OF CUSTOMER CARE**

- 6.1 In order to assess our customer care performance and identify areas where we can improve, we have to be able to measure what is being achieved. This is divided into two categories:

- Objective criteria that can be measured in quantities, such as the time it takes to deal with an enquiry/request
- Subjective criteria which are mainly based on opinion, such as a tenant's view on the helpfulness of staff

Appendix 1 includes details of the targets in relation to objective criteria set by the Committee for the next year.

- 6.2 Gathering information on the first category is relatively straightforward. For example, the time it takes to deal with an enquiry/request can be measured by using a log similar to a mail log which records information on all enquiries/requests, including those made by telephone and in person. Performance here can be measured accurately on an ongoing basis.
- 6.3 Subjective criteria are more difficult to assess for two reasons: (i) findings are based on judgements and (ii) the flow of information is more sporadic (for example, a considerable amount will come in following a tenant satisfaction survey, but then only a small amount of feedback might be received as part of the customer feedback system which the Association operates).
- 6.4 All staff, Committee and contractors/agents are required to observe a customer care code (please refer to Appendix 2) and information that is gathered in relation to how well this code (and the overall policy) is observed will be assessed quarterly and reported on annually, with comparisons made against the targets that are set.
- 6.5 It is essential, in terms of monitoring Customer Care issues, that all customers are aware of the standards of service they should expect. Accordingly, Hillhead's Customer Promises should be clearly displayed, and advised to all customers. The Promises are attached at Appendix 3

## **7. WHAT WILL BE DONE WITH THE INFORMATION?**

- 7.1 There are two main reasons for measuring standards of customer care:

- To let all customers know how we are performing
- To identify areas where we may be falling short and taking action to remedy these

7.2 The Association gives all of its customers an absolute undertaking that it will accurately assess all of the information gathered and include key performance details in its quarterly newsletters and/or in its Annual Report to Tenants

## **8. POLICY REVIEW**

8.1 This policy will be reviewed every three years, the next review being due in December 2018, or sooner if legislative, regulatory or best practice changes require this.

**Prepared by :** Elspeth Sharkey  
**Designation :** Housing Manager  
**Date :** 26<sup>th</sup> November 2015

**APPENDIX 1**

<b>Target Area</b>	<b>Task Targets</b>	<b>Within Target Times (annual %)</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Check new housing application, acknowledge receipt and advise of any missing info	3 working days	90%	
Point completed housing application	10 working days	90%	Including letter to applicant advising of points.
Ensure that no one waits any longer than 10 minutes to be seen	10 minutes	95%	Assuming that member of staff is available. Alternative member will be offered.
Improve customer satisfaction with quality of repairs service	Tenants are satisfied/very satisfied with the service	95%	Monitor via returned repair satisfaction slips
Promote basic appointment system for reactive repairs	Tenants offered am/pm on a specific date	95%	Included as standard as part of Reactive Maintenance Service
Achieve high levels of satisfaction with planned and cyclical maintenance	Contract-specific surveys	95%	
Achieve high levels of satisfaction with new homes	Post scheme completion audit	95%	
Find out the proportion of tenants who are happy that the Association takes their views into account	Tenants are satisfied/very satisfied with the Association	95%	Include in 2016 Tenant's Survey
Acknowledge or fully respond to a written enquiry	5 working days (one week)	95%	
Ensure high levels of awareness of the complaints procedure	Tenants are aware of how to make a complaint	90%	Include in 2016 Tenant's Survey
Adherence to behavioural code by staff, Committee and contractors/agents	Codes of Conduct adhered to at all time	100%	

## APPENDIX 2

All of the Association's staff, Committee and consultants/agents will adhere to the following customer care principles at all times when representing the Association.

- Be friendly, courteous and welcoming
- Treat all customers with respect and dignity
- When in a customer's home, respect this fact
- Carry and always show identification when out of the Association's office on business
- Always wear a name badge (staff)
- Provide your name when in contact with a customer
- Respect confidentiality and privacy
- Deal with requests from customers promptly
- Deal with customers objectively and do not be judgemental or prejudiced
- Observe the Association's equal opportunities policy
- Be sensitive, patient and understanding when dealing with customers
- Be dependable, for example, get back to customers within the agreed timescale
- Never use foul or abusive language or speak to a customer in a raised voice

In return we expect that our visitors, tenants, and other service users will treat our staff with equal respect. The following statement outlines our expectations of visitors, tenants and other services users:-

**“Our staff work very hard to provide you with an efficient and high quality service. They deserve to be treated with respect.**

**We will not tolerate abuse, physical or verbal, of our staff or other service users.**

**Hillhead Housing Association 2000 will take appropriate action against anyone who assaults, threatens or intimidates any of our employees.”**

**CUSTOMER PROMISES**

**YOUR LETTERS**

We will acknowledge your letter or we will reply within 7 days of receipt.

If a full reply is not possible within this timescale, you will be advised of this.

If we are unable to give you what you want, we will do all we can to suggest suitable alternatives.

We will write in a friendly style and in straightforward language.

The writer's name will be clearly shown on the reply.

**PERSONAL CONTACT**

We will be polite and helpful at all times.

Our advice to you will be clear and informative.

We will always be presentable, courteous and friendly.

Our staff will display name badges so that you know at all times whom you are seeing.

We will ensure that you do not have to wait longer than 10 minutes to see a member of staff in our office.

Our interviewers will be prepared where at all possible.

You can arrange to see a more senior member of staff if you are unhappy with the service you have received.

**TELEPHONE CALLS**

When you telephone, the person who takes your call will introduce himself or herself at the start of the conversation.

This person will normally deal with your enquiry. However, he or she may transfer your call to the right person or arrange to call you back.

Where the information to answer your enquiry is not immediately at hand, you will be contacted either by a return call or by letter.

**AT YOUR HOME**

Those staff who visit customers are always happy to give their names and to show their identity card.

Appointments made to visit you at home will be kept at all costs.

Where attending the office would cause difficulties, we are always happy to arrange a home visit if you require one.