

# ***FORTH HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED***

## ***CUSTOMER CARE POLICY***

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# **FORTH HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED**

## **CUSTOMER CARE POLICY**

### **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 We are committed to providing a high standard of service to our customers. This policy sets out the ways in which we will provide high standards of customer care.

The Scottish Social Housing Charter (Outcome 1) states the following: 'Social landlords perform all aspects of their housing services so that: • every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services. This outcome describes what social landlords, by complying with equalities legislation, should achieve for all tenants and other customers regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation. It includes landlords' responsibility for finding ways of understanding the rights and needs of different customers and delivering services that recognise and meet these.'

Our service standards explain what you can expect when you use our services. It has been developed in consultation with staff and customers.

### **2.0 Aims and Objectives**

- 2.1 We want our customers to be satisfied every time they contact us or we contact them.

We will:

- 2.2 Treat everyone with respect, understanding and courtesy, fairly and equally.
- 2.3 Deal with enquiries within our response times and provide a variety of communication methods to suit their needs.
- 2.4 Find out what our customers want and will take their views into account in decision making.
- 2.5 Provide relevant accurate and accessible information.

2.6 Set targets in relation to customer care and monitor progress against these targets.

### **3.0 Our Customers**

3.1 We use a broad definition of customer. This includes everyone with whom we deal with and includes:

-  Tenants
-  Owners
-  Applicants
-  Members of the public seeking information and advice
-  Suppliers and contractors
-  Other agencies such as Stirling Council, other Housing Associations and the Police.

Our customers will be directed to the appropriate staff member, by determining the nature of the enquiry.

### **4.0 Visiting Our Office**

4.1 Our office reception area will be comfortable, clean and adequately staffed.

4.2 We will have opening times clearly displayed.

4.3 We will have an interview room available so that customers can discuss personal and confidential matters in private, for pre-arranged appointments.

4.4 Reception and interviewing areas will be accessible to customers with pushchairs/prams, in wheelchairs or with mobility problems. For customers who are unable to access our offices we will make suitable alternative arrangements.

4.5 Where customers have special requirements, we will make any arrangements required, including providing Happy to Translate system, an interpreter, a British Sign Language signer or providing a mini loop system, to assist with interviewing deaf and partially hearing customers.

4.6 Will make sure customers queries are dealt with as quickly as possible to minimise waiting time and disruption. A queuing system will operate for customers visiting the office without an appointment. If staff are unavailable, a return appointment will be made in the diary, at a time that is acceptable to the customer. As well as a diary entry the specific staff member will be e mailed. However, should the query be an emergency, the customer will be seen by a member of staff.

4.7 If there is a pre-arranged appointment with a staff member, staff will meet the customer within 15 minutes of the agreed time.

- 4.8 Staff will keep customers informed if there is an unavoidable delay to their appointment.

If a specific staff member is not available, staff will let the customer know why and when they are available again.

- 4.9 If a customer is unable to come into the office we will arrange for a member of staff to visit them at home to deal with their enquiry.

## **5.0 Home Visits**

We will:

- 5.1 Wherever possible arrange appointments in advance, and at the convenience of customers. Such appointments will normally take place within 5 working days of a request.
- 5.2 Arrive within 15 minutes of a pre-arranged time slot, or telephone to advise of any delay.
- 5.3 Notify the customer in advance with reasons for a cancellation and rearrange the appointment, if staff are unable to keep an appointment.
- 5.4 Make sure that all members of staff carry an identification card with them.
- 5.5 Be sensitive if we are discussing issues such as rent arrears or neighbour disputes, and treat these matters in the strictest confidence.
- 5.6 Always introduce ourselves by showing ID and explain the reason for visiting a customer.
- 5.7 Let the customer know what will happen following on from the visit. We will confirm in writing any agreed actions from the meeting within timescale Department procedures.
- 5.8 Leave a calling card when a home visit is made and the customer is not at home. This will provide details of the staff members name and telephone number, to enable the customer to arrange another visit.
- 5.9 We will support staff who request that customers do not smoke during visits from staff. (This is in line with legislation banning smoking in the workplace).

## **6.0 Telephone Calls**

- 6.1 Telephone calls will be answered as quickly as possible.
- 6.2 Staff will greet callers in a polite and courteous manner, stating the organisations name and the staff member's name. This includes staff's voicemail message which will also have the organisation's and staff member's name.
- 6.3 If the call has to be transferred, staff will pass on the customer's name and details of their enquiry, to avoid customers repeating themselves, to the appropriate staff member by determining the nature of the call.
- 6.4 When a call is diverted to voicemail, the call will be returned within next working day. If on annual leave a message should be left confirming when returning to work.
- 6.5 When messages are taken from a customer, the relevant officer will return the call within next working day.
- 6.7 The answering machine should only be activated when it is out of office hours, or, to allow for staff meetings, public holidays and specific events such as training days.
- 6.8 Customers will be informed of the emergency repair out of office telephone numbers via the website, the quarterly tenants' newsletter, the Tenant Handbook and the reception answering machine.

## **7.0 Letters, E Mails and Website Correspondence**

- 7.1 We will ensure all letters have the name, address, job title of the person sending the letter and their contact details, including direct dial number.
- 7.2 Customers will receive an acknowledgement response to all correspondence within 5 working days, confirming the timescale of the detailed response. (the date of receipt of correspondence is included within the timescale).
- 7.3 Customers will receive a full reply to correspondence within target response times and this will depend upon the nature of the communication. For 'E' mail and website enquiries an initial acknowledgement from the relevant officer will be made within next working day, confirming the timescale of the detailed response. When the target timescales are not possible, an interim letter will be sent out at the end of 5 working days, explaining the cause for delay and indicating the revised timescale.

- 7.4 Clear and accurate explanations will be provided about decisions which have been made.
- 7.5 All correspondence will be sent in the name of the person dealing with the matter.
- 7.6 Information will be provided which is written in plain English and is jargon free.
- 7.7 Translations will be provided upon request and in an appropriate format e.g. another language, audio or large print. Every effort will be made to provide documentation within four weeks, although this may be subject to availability of specialist suppliers.

## **8.0 What We Expect from Our Customers**

- 8.1 We expect customers to treat staff with respect and politeness.
- 8.2 We will not tolerate abusive or threatening behaviour towards staff.
- 8.3 Staff may terminate any conversation or interview with a customer who is behaving in an abusive or threatening manner.
- 8.4 Threats made against staff will be reported to the Police and legal action taken.
- 8.5 In extreme circumstances we may seek to restrict individual's access to our office and/or access to individual staff members. If necessary we will carry out joint visits as per Staff Safety Policy.

## **9.0 Customer Feedback and Complaints**

- 9.1 Customer views are important to us. Therefore, we will seek feedback from customers through our E Group, Tenants View Forum, Focus groups, satisfaction surveys, post allocation visits, general home visits and website. We will use any other suitable mechanism for feedback that suits our customers' needs.
- 9.2 A fully independent Tenants' Satisfaction survey will be commissioned every 3 years, with interim surveys being carried out on a regular basis.
- 9.3 Reports summarising performance will be published on our website, in the quarterly newsletter and Annual Report.

- 9.4 Complaints will be monitored on a quarterly basis based on our Complaints Policy and reported to our Committee through the quarterly Tenant Participation Report. Feedback will be taken into account when reviewing services, policies and procedures.
- 9.5 We will deal with all Complaints in line with the timescales stipulated by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Service Full details of our Complaints Policy, can be found on our website [www.forthha.org.uk](http://www.forthha.org.uk) or obtained from our office.

## **10.0 Information Services**

10.1 We will:

-  Publish all printed information in a print size of 12 and font style of arial. We will make it available in larger print on request.
-  Offer versions in other languages, CD and Braille to meet individuals particular requirements. (audio tape deleted)
-  Regularly update the website.
-  Issue a Tenant Handbook to each tenant when signing up for a new tenancy.

## **11.0 Data Protection**

11.1 We recognise the importance of data protection legislation, including the General Data Protection Regulation, in protecting the rights of individuals in relation to personal information that we may handle, use and disclose about them, whether on computer or in paper format. We will ensure that our practices in the handling, use and disclosure of personal information as part of the processes and procedures outlined in this policy comply fully with data protection legislation. More information is available from our Data Protection Officer.

## **12.0 Equal Opportunities**

12.1 Equality and diversity underpin all our activities and services. When delivering our services, we never discriminate on the basis of sex or marital status, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, language, social origin, or of other personal attributes, including beliefs or opinions such as religious beliefs or political opinions. Full details of our Equalities Policy can be found on our website [www.forthha.org.uk](http://www.forthha.org.uk) or can be obtained from our office.

## **13.0 Review**

- 13.1 This policy will be reviewed at least every 3 years by the Management Committee and staff are responsible for ensuring that it meets legal and good practice requirements.