



CUSTOMER CARE POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Redland Housing Association is committed to providing high quality and effective services to its customers. The Association is committed to involving residents in the development of policies and procedures and in decisions about how services are delivered.
- 1.2 The Association aims to understand customers' needs and to provide services that meet those needs. Through our communication with customers, the information about the services we provide and our policies for consultation and involvement, we have developed mechanisms for two-way discussion on services and how they should be provided.
- 1.3 The Association provides training for all staff in customer care and all new staff are given a copy of this policy as part of the induction process.

2. DETAIL

2.1 Staff

Staff will be polite and helpful. Staff will be willing to listen to customers and will have access to relevant information enabling them to respond to customer enquiries. Staff will respond effectively and sensitively to the needs of the customer. Staff will provide accurate information and advice and will keep customers updated on any matter which takes some time to resolve.

Staff will treat members of the public professionally and courteously at all times and will not enter into heated discussions or arguments with members of the public. In any case of extended dispute staff will seek assistance from their line manager.

When making home visits all staff will carry official identity cards and show them to customers on request.

2.2 Contractors

Contractors employed by the Association represent the organisation and, for many customers, contractors represent a significant form of contact with the Association.

Contractors are required to follow a code of conduct and are given advice on dress code, site behaviour, appointments, security cards and standards of work.



2.3 Offices

The Association's offices will display opening hours clearly and these opening times will also be publicised in our tenants handbook and newsletter. The office is fully accessible to people with disabilities, including access to meeting and interview rooms, toilets etc.

The office will be clean, warm and friendly. Up-to-date information and advice about the Association, its policies and procedures and about other agencies is available at the office. Within the reception area of the office, leaflets are available on a range of relevant subjects, including the Association's complaints procedure.

2.4 Personal Callers

Visitors will be acknowledged on arrival. Visitors to the office will not be kept waiting for long periods; visitors will be greeted within two minutes of arrival and will be seen within 5 minutes if they have an appointment. Visitors without an appointment will receive an answer to their enquiry, or an appointment at a later date, within 10 minutes.

Appointments can be made to see individual officers. This will either be through a home visit or an office interview. Appointments will be arranged within 3 days of the request. Urgent matters will be attended to the same day.

Private interview rooms are available at the Association's office.

2.5 Appointments

All appointments will be made at a mutually convenient time and date. Where a customer through disability or illness is unable to attend an appointment at the Association's office and would like to speak to a member of staff, a home visit will be made.

If, in the event of unforeseen circumstances, a wait for an appointment is unavoidable, the customer will be offered refreshments and an apology made.

If an appointment has to be cancelled by a member of staff due to, for example, illness then the customer will be notified as soon as possible and a new appointment made.

A calling card will be left, giving details of the officer who called, at what time and how to contact them if a home visit is made and no access can be obtained.

2.6 Interviews



All staff will be well prepared for meetings or interviews with customers and have relevant information and/or records to hand. A suitable room will be made available for all interviews and meetings with customers.

Notes of the interview will be taken and a record kept of all meetings. This will include a written account of the issues raised, recommendations, actions to be taken and any time scales agreed. Where there is a need to confirm an interview in writing this will be done within 5 days of the interview. Where minutes of a meeting are to be circulated they will be dispatched within 10 days of the date that the meeting is held.

In instances where language difficulties are a problem, a translation or interpreting service will be used to enable customers to express their views or needs accurately and fully.

2.7 Confidentiality

All interviews, correspondence and personal information will be kept in the strictest confidence, and in accordance with relevant data protection legislation. Staff will follow the Association's confidentiality policy, a copy of which can be made available to customers on request.

Customers are entitled to have access to the Association's information. This covers not only personal information but also more general information about the Association and its activities. The Association has an access to information policy and procedure which can be made available on request.

2.8 Communications

2.8.1 Telephone calls

All calls will be answered as quickly as possible. All calls will be greeted by the name of the officer answering.

Calls will be answered initially by reception staff who will establish the nature of the enquiry and either deal with the enquiry or pass the call to the relevant officer.

If the relevant officer is not available the call will either be diverted to another officer who may be able to help or a message will be taken and passed onto the relevant member of staff who will then contact the customer within 5 hours.

An answer phone service will be in operation providing an alternative for callers who do not wish to hold at busy times. Messages are checked every hour and messages will be responded to within 5 hours if a return call is required or 10 days if a written response is required.



Staff will endeavour not to pass calls onto someone else unless specifically asked to do so; where it is necessary to pass on a call an explanation will be given to the customer.

If any enquiries cannot be dealt with straight away a contact number will be taken and the customer called back when the information required has been found or at a mutually convenient time. If the customer does not have a phone he or she will be contacted in writing within 5 working days.

2.8.2 Out of Hours Service

When the office is closed an answer phone service will be in operation. Answer phone messages will be clear, concise and up-to-date.

Incoming messages will be taken from the answer phone daily, first thing in the morning. Messages which require a return call will be dealt with within 5 hours; where a written response is required this will be sent within 5 days.

Special arrangements are in place for emergencies which occur outside office hours. Information on these arrangements is contained in the answer phone message. Tenants are also given details of how to arrange emergency repairs within the Tenants' Handbook.

2.8.3 Letters

All correspondence from customers to the Association will receive an acknowledgement or reply within 10 days. If for any reason a reply is likely to take longer the customer will be informed and a reason will be given.

Requests for forms or general information will be dealt with within 3 days of the request

Letters will be clear, informative and written in plain English, and will indicate the writers name and who to contact to discuss the matter further.

Where appropriate, correspondence will be translated into different languages or provided on an audio tape.



2.8.4 Other Publicity

The Association will make freely available to customers a tenants handbook, leaflets and other information about policies and procedures, and a newsletter which includes editorial context from residents. These will be easy to read and understand, will provide information about the Associations activities and will be written in plain English, in the case of the tenants handbook and leaflets, to “crystal mark” standard.

Where appropriate, these documents, or summaries of them, will be translated into different languages or provided on an audio tape.

3. **CONSULTATION AND PARTICIPATION**

The Association has in place a clear framework for consultation with and participation of residents. This is set out in our “involving residents” policy and leaflet. These provide opportunities for residents to influence the way in which our services are delivered. We provide a range of mechanisms, including surveys, meetings, written and telephone contact, elected representatives, committees and panels, in order to involve as many customers as possible in a way appropriate to them.

Residents will be involved in all reviews of this and associated policies.

The Association will regularly seek the views of customers on our service delivery and will ask customers about their experiences dealing with the Association. Services provided by the Association will be planned around what we find out from the involvement of residents and we will use what residents tell us to monitor our performance.

A comments and suggestions box will be provided at the Association’s office and a free post “comments and suggestions” card will be distributed to residents from time to time.

4. **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY**

Translations of correspondence, leaflets and other documents (in abbreviated form if appropriate) will be provided on request. Statements on letters and leaflets explain that this service is available.

Letters, leaflets and other documents will also be provided on audio tape upon request.

Translation/interpreting services will be used where language difficulties present a problem in communicating with customers.



The Association regularly reviews levels of satisfaction with our service delivery. We will monitor whether satisfaction levels are equally high for all groups within the community and take action where there is evidence that this is not the case.

5. COMPLAINTS

If a customer feels that the standards set out in this policy and associated documents have not been met they should complain using the Association's complaints' procedure. This is available in plain English from the Association's office and is also in the Tenants' Handbook. The Association's Board regularly review complaints and we seek to learn positive lessons from them.

6. MONITORING AND REVIEW

6.1 Monitoring

The Association regularly monitors levels of satisfaction with our customer service as part of our routine consultation strategy. This includes satisfaction surveys sent to all tenants enabling us to establish and monitor trends of satisfaction with our customer service.

The Association has in place systems to monitor through random checks compliance with the service standards set out in this policy.

6.2 Review

The Board of Management will review this policy at least once every three years in consultation with the Tenant Liaison Committee.

The review process will involve residents in setting goals and standards and will incorporate the findings of our routine satisfaction and monitoring processes.

This policy is effective from: March 2004
The policy is due for review by: March 2007
The responsible officer is: Head of Housing
The responsible Focus Group is: Customer Care