

Customer Care Policy (2)

AS WITH ALL OF THE ASSOCIATION'S POLICIES and PROCEDURES, THIS GUIDE, IN FULL AND IN PART, CAN BE MADE AVAILABLE IN SUMMARY, ON TAPE, IN BRAILLE, AND IN TRANSLATION INTO MOST OTHER LANGUAGES –

**PLEASE ASK A MEMBER OF STAFF IF YOU WOULD LIKE
A VERSION IN A DIFFERENT FORMAT**

Approved By	Committee of Management at the meeting on 3 rd September 2003
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Mission Statement of Whiteinch & Scotstoun Housing Association (WSHA) states that the organisation aims to “provide and maintain the highest quality rented housing and environment” adding that “we aim to support this with quality services and associated activities”.
- 1.2 The purpose of this Policy is to state how we would intend to support this statement in the way that we deal with all customers, external and internal.
- 1.3 The Scottish Social Housing Charter expects that “Social landlords perform all aspects of their housing services so that every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised [and] is treated fairly and with respect.” This Policy aims to be consistent with these principles.

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 appropriately to these wishes
 - to set standards in relation to customer care and address any shortcomings identified through satisfaction surveys or complaints
 - to provide relevant, accurate and accessible information
 - to be open, honest and truthful at all times
 - to ensure equality in the relationship between the Association and its customers at all times
 - to treat our internal customers as we would treat our external customers
- 2.2 The Association operates a Code of Conduct for Staff Members and this Policy should be read in conjunction with this. The principles contained within this Policy reflect the expectations of the Code of Conduct.

Appendix 2 to this Policy contains a list of the actions expected by all staff (and agents acting on behalf of the Association) expected to reflect these principles in practice.
- 2.3 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. Unfortunately, such behaviour is not always returned and this Policy should be read in conjunction with the Policy on Unacceptable Behaviour

3. Scope of Policy – Who Are Our Customers?

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

- our tenants, sharing owners and factored owners
- applicants for housing
- members of the public, or their representatives, seeking information and advice
- suppliers and contractors
- partners and colleague organisations, such as Whiteinch Community Association, other Registered Social Landlords, etc, etc
- other agencies, such as the Council, Citizens Advice Bureau, solicitors, etc, etc
- Committee and staff of the Association

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 enquiries to the office
- how customers (or their representatives) feel we treat them when making written or email enquiries to the office
- how customers (or their representatives) feel we treat them when visiting them in their own home.

4. Calling or Visiting the Office and Home Visiting

4.1 The Association always has to balance its Office opening times between those most suitable to tenants and other main customers and the time available within the working week for staff to be able to exercise their duties

on behalf of those customers. With this in mind, opening hours will always be set in consultation with the organisation's main customers and will be publicised in newsletters and the Office itself.

- 4.2 Staff will endeavour to answer any telephone call within five rings whether an external call to the main desk or directly to a staff member's extension or an internal call from another member of staff. The staff member answering the telephone will always identify himself or herself, clearly giving their name.
- 4.2 The office has a friendly and customer-focused atmosphere. There is adequate and comfortable seating available in the reception area for those who need to wait for a short while and a range of information about the Association and other relevant subjects is also on display. Books and toys are available for tenants with young children, while a television monitor can display relevant information or news and major sporting and cultural events.

In addition, as the Office is located in the Whiteinch Centre, visitors can avail themselves of the facilities on offer. This includes the café, which people can use should they be early for an appointment or, perhaps having called without one, can spend some time waiting there should a staff member be able to see them later.

The Office is also compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act and has wide enough access for wheelchairs, persons with walking aids and anyone with a pram or pushchair. The reception desk has a low level, suitable for most people and a hearing loop can be employed for those who require it.

- 4.3 The following procedure applies where a customer calls into or telephones the Office without a prior appointment:
- If the person they require to see/speak to is available, they will be dealt with straight away or, if the officer is dealing with another customer, the likely waiting time will be advised should they wish to wait.
- OR**
- If the person they require to see/speak to is not available, they will be advised when they will be able to see or speak to them or, if available, another member of staff will offer to help.

Whatever the circumstances, customers will not be left without

- (i) their enquiry being resolved or
- (ii) being offered an appointed time and date by which they can be

seen or advised that a member of staff will contact them.

- 4.4 The Association also offers home visits where customers require this on the basis of disability or medical condition, and where the issue merits a visit (e.g. a home visit would not be organised to take details of a routine repair, but may be appropriate to discuss a neighbourhood nuisance issue). In such cases efforts will be made to arrange visits within five working days.
- 4.5 Staff will make all reasonable efforts to keep appointments that are made – in the unlikely event that this is not possible, the customer will be contacted in advance of the meeting, given the reason why it cannot be kept, and offered another suitable time.

5. Responding to Letters and emails

- 5.1 All letters and emails received will be either acknowledged or answered in writing within ten working days. 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 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 or email 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 laws.
- 5.4 Complaints will be dealt with on the basis of the timescales laid down in the Association's Complaints Handling Procedure (currently within five working days for a Stage 1 Complaint and within twenty working days for a Stage 2 Complaint).

6. Keeping Customers Informed

- 6.1 The Association is of the view that customers need to be kept informed of its activities and developments that affect them. While some of these are statutory, requiring consultation (e.g. the annual proposed rent increase) others relate to the practices of the organisation and how these might affect customers.

- 6.2 On specific issues affecting them, customers will be written to directly (e.g. those involved in a works programme, such as replacement of controlled entry systems). Where mobile telephone numbers are available, text messaging may also be used for direct contact. More generally, the main means of communication will be regular newsletters (identified as being the preferred means of communication by a comprehensive Tenant Satisfaction Survey conducted in 2005 and a continuous survey carried out between 2009 and 2012).
- 6.3 Other means of communication will involve newsletters for factored owners, as required, notices and leaflets available within the Office and notices in other public venues.

7. Measuring and Maintaining Levels of Customer Care

- 7.1 The Association will continually review and always be open to alternative possible methodologies for measuring the success of its customer care principles.
- 7.2 Although the Association sets targets in respect of Customer Care, it is not considered a worthwhile use of resources to continuously measure these. What the organisation will do, however, is to continually gauge performance against general satisfaction and then investigate where dissatisfaction is identified as relating to Customer Care issues (e.g. the number of rings a caller has to wait for until a telephone is answered, which can be verified on the Association's system). Similarly, where Customer Care issues are raised through the Complaints Handling Procedure these will be fully considered with regard to performance.

8. Equality Opportunities Testing

- 8.1 In accordance with the Association's Equality & Diversity Policy, this Policy has been consciously considered to judge whether there is any likelihood that its presentation or operation could in any way lead, no matter how inadvertently, to discrimination. The conclusion of this exercise is that it is believed that the Policy should operate in a non-discriminatory way.

9. Policy Review

- 9.1 This policy will be reviewed in five years' time, or sooner if legislative, regulatory or best practice changes require this.

APPENDIX 1

Target Area	Task Targets	Measure
Answer telephone	5 rings (where practicable)	Satisfied that telephone is answered quickly.
Waiting time to be seen in Office	5 – 10 minutes	Satisfied with waiting time
Housing application form	10 working days	Fully processed through system
Written enquiries (letters or emails)	10 working days	Full response or holding response advising of target timescale
Newsletters	At least 4 per year	Satisfaction with being kept informed about association activities
Initial action when customer dissatisfied with treatment by staff or agent	5 working days (Stage 1) or 20 working days (Stage 2)	Satisfaction with how the service is delivered
Adherence to behavioural code by staff, Committee and contractors/agents	Always and in full	Satisfaction with how the service is delivered
Adherence to Code of Conduct by Contractors	Always and in full	Satisfaction with how the service is delivered

APPENDIX 2

All of the Association's staff, Committee and consultants/agents will adhere to the following behavioural 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
- 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
- Treat your internal customer as you would your external customer