



KEY POLICY: **GOVERNANCE**

Last reviewed: September 2005

Date: May 2009

Next Review: May 2012

CUSTOMER CARE POLICY

1.0 Policy Statement

This Policy sets out the minimum standards that customers can expect in any dealings they have with South Lakes Housing. It makes explicit the high standards of customer care that we aim to achieve and provides customers with a benchmark against which they can judge the quality of our services and our treatment of them

2.0 Key Strategic Links

South Lakeland District Council's Vision and Values

- Work in partnership to secure the well-being of those who live, work or visit the area;
- Enable everyone to take part effectively in the activities of the Council;
- Recognise the diversity in the District;
- Seek continuous improvement in everything we do;
- Communicate effectively both internally and externally;
- Value our staff as a good employer;
- Ensure that equality exists throughout the organization;
- Ensure sustainable principles are considered in all our activities.

3.0 Key Policy Links

- South Lakes Housing Vision and Objectives;
- Access to Information;
- Complaints;
- Confidentiality and Data Protection;
- Special Needs;
- Tenant Consultation and Involvement.

4.0 Key Policy Standards

Core Values

South Lakes Housing's Vision and Objectives describe the purpose of the organisation, the kind of business we wish to be, and guide how we go about our business. Our values in relation to customer care are:-

- **Customer Focus:** Our customers always come first. We always behave in a courteous, empathetic and responsive manner;
- **Quality:** Continuous improvement is part of everybody's job. We take pride in exceeding our standards and seek to be recognised for best practice.

Underpinning these minimum standards are the principles that we will adopt in dealing with our customers, which are set out below.

Customer Entitlement

To:

- be treated with courtesy and respect;
- be treated fairly regardless of gender, age, physical ability, ethnicity, religious beliefs and sexuality;
- receive equality of access;
- be taken seriously and their dignity and confidentiality respected;
- be given clear, accurate and truthful information;
- make choices whenever possible;
- be consulted about their needs and how these should be met;
- be listened to, consulted and kept informed on matters affecting them;
- complain and to have complaints properly addressed and redressed as necessary;
- be visited in their home on request;
- expect services offered to be delivered to the stated quality.

Communication Standards

- All information produced will be clear, accurate, up-to-date and in plain English avoiding the use of jargon.
- Information will be communicated in a clear and accessible manner. This will include taped transcripts and translation of documents as required as well as other methods of communication such as large print, Braille etc.
- We will offer an interpreting service to all our customers who have difficulty communicating in English. We will offer a British Sign Language Service.
- Personal information held in respect of individuals will be treated as confidential at all times. Access to their own personal files by tenants or leaseholders will be granted within 10 working days and in accordance with the provisions of and regulations for the time being in force under the Data Protection Act 1998.
- Correspondence, including complaints will be responded to politely, helpfully and in plain English within 10 working days, or if a full reply is not possible an acknowledgement will be sent within 2 working days and a written reply within a further 10 working days.
- We will make sure all letters have a return address, contact name, phone number and email address.
- Emails will be acknowledged or responded to within 2 working days.
- We will continue to publish a tenants and leaseholders newsletter quarterly.

- Telephone calls will be answered politely and helpfully within 5 rings.
- All telephone calls will be answered by employees giving their name and the name of their section/work location.
- All Employees will offer assistance even if the caller needs another service.
- All text messages will be replied to within 2 working days.
- Offices will have an accessible and comfortable reception area with private interview facilities should they be needed.
- Customers with an appointment for a private interview will not have to wait for more than five minutes.
- Customers without an appointment will be seen by any available suitable member of staff within ten minutes.
- Customers will leave our office knowing the action we shall take and be given written confirmation if needed.
- All messages left on an answer phone or with employees will be dealt with on the following working day and answer phones will be available outside of office hours.

Employee Approach

- To give their name to customers at the start of the contact and show identification when making a home visit.
- When calling at a customer's home, to introduce themselves, giving their name and job title and offering their photographic identification card for the customer to confirm their identity. Contractors will also introduce themselves, offer their photographic identity card and confirm the reason for their visit.
- Employees and contractors must await the customer's invitation to enter their home.
- Employees and contractors to arrive at the agreed time and be suitably equipped to deal with any pre-arranged appointments or repair work. In cases of unavoidable delay the customer will be notified.
- To behave courteously and professionally when undertaking a home visit and show respect and regard for the customer's home and possessions.
- When a customer fails to provide access for a pre-arranged visit staff/contractors to leave a calling card confirming their attendance, making an alternative arrangement and providing their contact details.
- Employees will have training to help them develop their skills in dealing effectively with the public. All our staff receive training on equality and diversity issues enabling them to deal with customer's special needs.
- To provide a friendly, polite, helpful and honest service with patience understanding and sensitivity.
- To demonstrate and use their knowledge of service standards to meet customers' requirements and, where appropriate, tell the customer the action planned to meet their request and keep the customer informed of progress.

- If the customer's request falls outside the services provided tell them and, if appropriate, refer the enquiry to someone who can help.
- To provide a fair and equal standard of service to all customers consistent with their needs. South Lakes Housing recognises that its services need to be sensitive to the varying needs of a diverse range of customers. Some customers will have special needs and services will need to be adapted accordingly, as detailed in the separate Special Needs Policy.
- Not to accept offensive or threatening behaviour from customers or use it themselves and avoid difficult situations by maintaining standards of courtesy and helpfulness to diffuse any customer aggression and conflict to try to turn difficult situations into positive ones.

5.0 **Key Targets and Performance Indicators**

- Tenant and customer satisfaction
- Comparative benchmarking performance indicators including complaints and tenant satisfaction performance indicators
- The achievement of the specified key Policy Standards
- Performance and rate of use of South Lakes Housing's Complaints policies and procedures

6.0 **Equality and Diversity**

South Lakes Housing recognises that there is a broad range of visible and non-visible differences that characterise its tenants. Some of these qualities include race, religion, culture, nationality, ethnic background, colour, disability, sex, sexual orientation, age, literacy and income level. By understanding and respecting this diversity it is able to set a policy which ensures that all tenants are able to access services provided by South Lakes Housing in an equitable manner.

South Lakes Housing is committed to providing information and services equally and without discrimination so that they meet the needs of all sections of the community. These include our tenants, leaseholders and those living nearby or seeking access to or information on housing services in the South Lakeland area. In carrying out all housing management policies, South Lakes Housing's Equality and Diversity Policy will be adhered to.

7.0 **Monitoring, Review and Consultation Process**

The Board and the Chief Executive will monitor to ensure that the standards set out are being achieved including regular reports summarizing the complaints system for a given period.

The Board will involve Tenants Committee in monitoring and reviewing performance. Regular reports will be given to Tenants Committee and they will be consulted about areas for improving performance and will be involved in agreeing new or amended performance standards and targets.

Training will be provided to enable employees to develop the appropriate customer care skills and will also form part of induction training for new staff.

From time to time South Lakes Housing will canvass the opinion of tenants and applicants through a variety of techniques to gauge the levels of satisfaction with its services.

Feedback from customer complaints and comments will be actively used to review and improve policies, procedures and services.

8.0 **Service Development and Review Proposals**

Review Priority: Medium

Last Review Sept 2005