

# **HALTON HOUSING TRUST**

## **CUSTOMER CARE POLICY**

*Date due for Review :*

### **Introduction**

Halton Housing Trust (the Trust) is committed to providing a high quality housing service in a professional, efficient and effective way. The Trust's Customer Care Policy defines its approach to customer care and lays down minimum standards for it. The Trust appreciates that this policy will apply to all of its dealings with customers and encompasses a number of service areas including :-

- information and communication;
- tenant participation and consultation;
- accessibility;
- confidentiality;
- repairs and maintenance;
- empty property management;
- rehousing;
- Best Value and continuous improvement.

In the context of this policy, customers can include tenants, lease-holders, licensees, applicants for housing, Halton Borough Council, external agencies, partners and any other persons or organisations wishing to access the Trust's services.

In implementing this policy the Trust will have due regard to the Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code, in particular Section 3.5.

### **Customer Care Values**

The Trust believes that its Customer Care Policy should be based on the following values :-

- treating customers with courtesy, honesty and respect;
- treating customers fairly on the basis of need and not discriminating against anyone on the basis of age, sex, religion, disability or sexual orientation;
- working in partnership with customers to provide the services they need;

- involving customers in decisions and giving them enough information to make informed choices;
- making sure that customers feel able to complain about the standard of service they receive and are not victimised because they complain.

### **Policy Statement**

The Trust aims to provide the best possible standards of service to its customers.

The Trust views the following to be the main requirements of a successful customer-focused service :-

- ensuring that customer focus is maintained throughout all levels of the Trust's activities and is integrated into training plans;
- ensuring that any service user – whether a rent or service charge payer to the Trust, as well as those who have other interests in the organisation – receives an efficient and satisfactory service;
- involving the customer, listening to and considering their views regarding the provision of services generally and decisions being made;
- understanding customers and meeting their needs whenever possible;
- providing clear and concise information and explanations to customers;
- being accessible to customers.

### **Implementation**

The Trust will look to meet the above requirements in the following ways :-

#### **Employees**

The Trust will expect all employees to :-

- be prompt, polite, friendly and helpful;
- have access to information and be willing to listen, giving their full attention to the customer;
- aim to respond effectively and sensitively to the feelings and needs of the customer.
- carry official identity cards with photographs at all times and in addition staff will wear name badges;

#### **Offices**

All Trust offices will :-

- have opening hours clearly displayed;
- be clean, tidy, warm and friendly;
- have up to date advice, information and posters that are clear and easy to understand;
- provide a 'One Stop' direct service approach to customers on all aspects of the Trust's work;
- be accessible to people with disabilities.

### Visitors

Anyone visiting Trust offices will :-

- be acknowledged on arrival and greeted by an identified member of staff;
- be given private interviews upon request (subject to staff availability);
- be seen within 5 minutes if they have an appointment;
- in any event not be kept waiting for longer than 5 minutes without being attended to;
- be offered help to fill in forms if they need it.

### Appointments and Home Visits

Appointments will be offered within the following framework :-

- appointments with specific officers will be made upon request;
- all appointments will be made for a mutually convenient time and date;
- if due to unforeseen circumstances a wait for an appointment is unavoidable or an appointment cannot be kept, the customer will be notified as soon as possible and an apology will be given;
- if for reasons such as disability or illness customers are unable to attend the Trust's offices or they would prefer to be visited at home, an appointment for a home visit will be offered;
- if a visit is made and access cannot be obtained, a calling card stating who called and at what time and how to contact them will be left.

### Interviews and Meetings

At interviews and meetings with customers :-

- all staff will aim to be well prepared for meetings or interviews with customers and have relevant information and/or records at hand;
- a suitable room will be made available for all interviews and meetings with customers, ensuring that any discussions of a sensitive nature cannot be overheard;
- notes will be taken and records kept of all meetings held with a written account of the issues raised, recommendations, action to be taken and any timescales;
- officers will provide any help within their power to customers which may include offering to contact other agencies and providing information to them on options for further assistance which may be available elsewhere;
- 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 more fully.

### Written correspondence

Written correspondence to and from the Trust will meet the following standards :-

- all letters and e-mails from customers will be answered within 6 working days of receiving them. If for any reason a reply is likely to take longer the customer will be informed and a reason given;
- all correspondence from the Trust will be clear and easy to understand using plain language and avoiding jargon;
- where appropriate, correspondence from the Trust will be translated into different languages;
- replies will be signed and sent in the name of the writer;
- any requests for forms or general information will be dealt with within 3 working days of the request being received. (Where any request is covered by the Freedom of Information Act, this will be dealt with within the statutory 20 day period.)

### Telephones

Telephone callers :-

- will be answered as quickly as possible and we will do our best to answer any call within 4 rings;
- will be greeted by the name and section of the officer answering;
- in the event of the requested officer being unavailable, will either
  - be diverted to another officer who may be able to help with the enquiry, or
  - the customer's details will be taken and passed on to the relevant member of staff for them to contact the customer as soon as they are available;
- will be called back if it is likely that there will be some delay in processing the call, especially if they are calling from a public payphone or a neighbour's phone;
- if the enquiry cannot be dealt with straight away and the customer does not have a telephone, they will be contacted in writing within 5 working days.

### Confidentiality

- All interviews, correspondence and personal information provided by customers will be treated in strictest confidence and in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, the Freedom of Information Act 2002 and any other relevant legislation.

### Service Standards

The Trust will have clear standards of service delivery for all areas of its service. These will be contained in leaflets and the Tenants' Handbook.

### Redress

If a customer feels that the standards set out in this policy and associated documents have not been met, they can complain using the Trust's Complaints Policy and Procedure. Details will be available at all Trust offices

and will also be contained in the Tenants' Handbook. Help to complete forms will be provided to any tenant who requests it.

If the Trust's own complaints procedure has been followed and the customer is still dissatisfied customers may also complain to the Independent Housing Ombudsman. Details of this service will also be contained in the Tenants' Handbook and in leaflets provided at Trust offices.

### **Responsibility**

The Deputy Chief Executive will be responsible for implementing this Customer Care policy. This will include making sure that all Trust employees are aware of the contents of this policy and have been trained in its implementation.

### **Consultation**

Consultation will take place annually with the Halton Housing Community Voice, tenants and residents' groups and tenants generally to assess the effectiveness of this policy. Any consultation will be carried out in accordance with the Trust's Tenant and Resident Involvement Policy.

### **Monitoring and Review**

The Trust welcomes any feedback it receives on its service delivery. It is used in identifying the Trust's strengths and weaknesses, and can help in making improvements to its services. The Trust will therefore carry out surveys with customers from time to time to see how well they think the Trust is performing in various key areas of service. These surveys may be through telephone interviews or postal questionnaires.

The Trust's Board of Management and Halton Housing Community Voice will monitor the effectiveness and implementation of this Policy.

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure that it takes account of customers' views.

### **Associated Documents**

Complaints Policy and Procedure  
Tenant and Resident Involvement Policy  
Equality and Diversity Policy  
Tenants Handbook