

# Policy

Title: **Customer Code of Conduct**

Date of Issue: March 2011

Issue Number: 1.0

Date of next review: March 2014

Author: Mike McCue

Service Area applies to: All Service Areas

Approved By: Lead Member for Housing Services

Electronic Storage: ShareIt / Published Documents

Translations available on request by phoning 0151 510 5000 or via email at [info@haltonhousing.org](mailto:info@haltonhousing.org)

यदि आपनि एई तथा अना आसार पोखे छान, अहले नरा कले 0151 510 5000 नखले फोन करुन।

यह सूचना यदि आपको किसी अन्य भाषा में चाहिये तो कृपया नंबर 0151 510 5000 पर फोन करें।

یہ معلومات اگر آپ کو کسی دیگر زبان میں چاہیے تو براۓ مہربانی نمبر 0151 510 5000 پر فون کریں۔

如果你需要其他語文版本的本資訊，請致電 0151 510 5000

Jeśli chcieliby Państwo otrzymać powyższe informacje w innym języku prosimy zadzwonić pod numer 0151 510 5000

This document is also available in Braille, large print and on tape



**Halton**  
Housing Trust  
Delivering quality and excellence for all

# **CONTENTS PAGE**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Aims / Objectives</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Scope</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Policy Statement</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Service Standards</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Performance Measures / Monitoring</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Consultation Arrangements</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Benchmark Analysis</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Regulatory and/or Legal Compliance</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs) Affected</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Diversity Considerations</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Links to Strategies, Procedures and Associated Documents</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Business Impact</b>	<b>9</b>

## **Introduction**

The Trust appreciates that occasionally employees will have to deal with difficult customers. It is stressed in the Trust's Customer Care Policy that in such circumstances, employees are expected to maintain high standards of professionalism and fairness. Rudeness to customers is not acceptable in any circumstances.

This Customer Code of Conduct policy looks to compliment this expectation by setting out a clear outline of the standards of behaviour that the Trust expects of its customers. It also looks to spell out the type of behaviour that will not be tolerated.

The code looks to cover both day to day contact of an 'informal' nature, as well as any meetings which customers attend with employees which are usually more structured and formal.

## **Aims / Objectives**

The main aim of the code is to set out clear standards of behaviour that Trust employees may expect to receive in any dealings with customers. It also looks to set out options for employees in dealing with situations where customer's behaviour has become or is deemed to be no longer acceptable.

It has also been produced so that customers themselves can see and be aware of what types of behaviour will not be tolerated by the Trust.

## **Scope**

This code looks to cover all dealings and interactions between Trust employees and customers on an informal or formal basis and therefore can potentially apply to all Trust employees.

## **Policy Statement**

For the purposes of this policy a 'customer' is defined in the same way as in the Trust's Customer Care policy; i.e. it can include tenants, leaseholders, licensees, prospective customers such as applicants for housing, external agencies, partners and any other persons or organisations wishing to access the Trust's services.

The standards of behaviour that the Trust expects to receive from its customers in various forms of contact with them are set out below.

### ***General Conduct***

Customers must expressly not:

- Personally criticise any individual, whether they are another customer, resident or Trust employee
- Use foul, abusive or offensive language
- Engage in any form of racial, sexual or other form of harassment

### ***Confidentiality***

Any person(s) not included on the tenancy/application will be required to provide written authority from the customer in order to be able to discuss the details of that customer's tenancy / application. This includes any partner, spouse, relative or agency where not named on the tenancy/application. In the first instance telephone authorisation by the customer will be accepted but this must be followed up with written authority as soon as possible afterwards.

Any information provided to us regarding customers personal or financial circumstances will be dealt with in the strictest confidence. All data held in respect of customers will be recorded and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

### ***Day-to-day Contact***

This can include contact which is face-to-face, in writing, over the telephone or via email and website. Customers shall answer all correspondence received from the Trust, where appropriate and respond to any contact made or messages left by Trust employees when requested to do so.

Customers will:

- Show respect and courtesy to employees at all times.
- Treat staff as you would like to be treated.
- In assisting the Trust to address issues raised, shall provide as much information as possible so that a timely response or decision can be made.

### ***Conduct at Meetings***

All customers present at Trust meetings should observe the following accepted practices while taking part in a meeting:

- Being courteous to each other, supporting and assisting other customers and employees in seeking the best possible solution to the problems being discussed
- Allowing each other the opportunity to speak and comment
- Respecting each others opinions or views
- Being reasonable and honest

- Following the agenda, and helping to reach effective decisions
- Following the guidance of the Chair in the conduct of the meeting
- Only one person speaking at a time and no cross talking
- Ensuring that they are prepared for the meeting by reading all the relevant papers and bringing them to the meeting
- Speakers going through the Chair and keeping to the subject being discussed

#### *Confidentiality (at meetings)*

People should respect all individual customers' confidentiality, whether present or not, and refrain from mentioning specific individual cases which may cause embarrassment or identification of an individual. Any information or items shared with the Trust that is of a confidential nature must not be disclosed to anyone, apart from those present at the meeting, and only in order to allow the business of the meeting to take place.

#### *Discrimination*

No customers will discriminate on any grounds against any other person(s) or group(s) at the meeting. Discriminatory language will not be used during discussions. All those who attend meetings have the right to be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their race, colour, age, religious or political beliefs, disability or illness, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, class, learning difficulty, appearance or employment status.

#### *Political affiliation*

Customers may be affiliated to / or be a member of political groups but they must not represent such groups while attending Trust meetings.

#### ***Breach of the Code of Conduct***

Where customers breach the Code the Trust can and will take the following actions, dependant on the severity of the behaviour:

- Advise the customer verbally that the Code has been breached
- Verbally request a change in behaviour
- Terminate the telephone conversation, interview or meeting
- Confirm in writing that the customer's behaviour is in breach of the Code and may result in further action being taken
- Note the incident on the Trust's computer system

- Insert a warning flag on the customer's records within the Trust's computer system.

***N.B.*** *The use of this particular sanction will be dependant on the breach of the code meeting the criteria set out in the Trust's Use of Warning Markers Policy.*

- Require that the customer will only be able to deal with and contact a nominated member or members of staff within the Trust.
- Advise the customer that the Trust will only accept future contact from the customer via correspondence only
- Refuse to carry out any further interview or visit
- Take appropriate legal action against the customer where required.

This list of possible sanctions given above is not exhaustive and each case will be dealt with on its merits with an appropriate measure or range of measures being decided upon in each case. For example, if the breach of the code is because the behaviour of the customer is deemed to be vexatious or unusually persistent in nature, the Trust will reserve the right to take action against them in line the guidelines contained within the Trust's Enquiries, Complaints and Compliments Procedure for dealing with such cases.

### ***Review***

It will never be the Trust's intention to impose any sanctions/actions under this policy upon any individual for an indefinite period. The main reason for taking any action from the Trust's point of view will be to ensure that members of staff are not subject to inappropriate behaviour while at the same time trying to maintain customers' access to services.

In each case therefore any notification to a customer regarding actions to be taken against them because of a breach of the code will inform them of either

- the length of time the action will remain in place; or
- when a review will take place to reconsider whether the action is still appropriate.

### ***Right of Appeal***

If a customer receives notification from the Trust that action is to be taken against them because of a breach of the Code, and they believe that the decision taken is either unfair and/or disproportionate, they will be able to submit an appeal.

Any appeal must be submitted within 10 working days of receipt of the notification; and should clearly state the reason(s) why the customer believes the decision is unfair and/or disproportionate.

The appeal will be considered by the Executive Director of Customer Services or the Director of Housing Services in their absence, and a decision regarding the appeal will normally be sent back to the appellant within 10 working days.

Alternatively, where the customer feels that this policy has not been applied properly in their case, they will have the option to register their dissatisfaction via the Trust's formal Enquiries, Complaints and Compliments Policy.

## **Responsibility**

The Executive Director of Customer Services has overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy.

All managers have a day to day responsibility for making sure that the employees they manage have a working knowledge of the code and in what circumstances the sanctions mentioned in it may be applied.

## **Service Standards**

Service standards do apply to any appeals against actions taken under this policy:

- A customer has 10 working days from receipt of the Trust's notification of actions to be taken against them because of a breach of the Customer Code of Conduct in which to submit an appeal
- The result of the appeal will normally be given to the customer within 10 working days of receipt of the appeal request.

## **Performance Measures / Monitoring**

It is not felt necessary to measure or monitor performance against this code. Any breaches will always be dealt with on an individual basis.

## **Consultation arrangements**

This policy will be considered by the Trust's Customer Forum at its May 2011 meeting and any appropriate amendments will be carried out taking their views and comments into account.

## **Benchmark Analysis**

It is not felt necessary to carry out any benchmarking activity in relation to this policy.

## **Regulatory and/or Legal Compliance**

One of the 'required outcomes' in the Housing Regulator's Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard states that:

*"Registered providers shall:*

- *provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of their tenants in the delivery of all standards....."*

The Trust feels that by providing its customers with this code of conduct, this contributes to the Trust meeting this regulatory requirement.

## **Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs) affected**

With the announcement that the Audit Commission's housing inspection framework is to cease with effect from April 2011, a full assessment against each of the KLOEs has not been undertaken. However any outcomes from this policy will feed into the Trust's ongoing update of its self assessment documents as well as the input to our Service Improvement Framework.

The key areas covered by this policy include:

- Access and Customer Care
- Diversity
- Customer Involvement

## **Diversity Considerations**

An Equality Impact Assessment was carried out on this policy in May 2011. This concluded that :

- The policy was not directly or indirectly discriminatory
- The policy is not intended to increase equality of opportunity by permitting or requiring positive action or action to redress disadvantages.

## **Links to Strategies, Procedures and Associated Documents**

Customer Care Strategy & Policy  
Diversity Strategy and Policy  
Data Protection Policy & Procedure  
Use of Warning Markers Policy & Procedure

## **Business Impact**

Customer involvement plays a key role in the Trust’s business planning process, and by implication this will include customer care to ensure that any involvement is handled in the most appropriate manner.

In the Trust’s current Corporate Plan (2009 – 12), four themes were identified which formed the basis against which resources were to be allocated. It states in the plan that these themes will be reflected as forming the basis for the budget and business planning process.

All corporate priorities listed under the first of these themes, “Customer Culture”, show the importance of customer involvement and an appropriate customer care approach that will make such involvement meaningful.

These priorities are:

- Understanding our customers (current and future) and tailoring services to meet their individual needs and aspiration.
- Working with our people to embed a clear customer culture across all aspects of our work.
- Delivering services against a clear set of service standards.
- Enhancing the role for customers at all levels, to shape and determine the services they receive.

Successful implementation of this policy will contribute to the Trust’s achievement of these priorities and will ensure that the best possible and efficient service is provided for its customers.