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Housing Service

# Customer Service Standards

<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	Executive Manager – Housing Service
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## Core Values

### Housing Service staff will:

- Be friendly, polite, helpful and professional at all times.
- Give honest information in response to your situation
- Respond promptly and sensitively to your reasonable requests.
- Provide named contacts to help you with your enquiry.
- Treat everyone fairly, professionally and with respect.
- Provide services that are accessible to all.
- Provide translations, interpreters or signers where English is not your first language.
- Work to promote equality and eliminate discrimination.

## Service Standards

Flowing from our core values are a range of service standards that we hope to achieve to ensure that we provide a responsive and quality service to our customers:

### Our offices:

- We will open our office to the public from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm Monday to Friday, except on Public Holidays.
- We will publicise any changes to these opening hours.
- We will provide an out of hours telephone contact number for emergency repairs and for emergency homelessness.
- We will provide a freephone telephone number.
- We will ensure that our offices contain up to date information about our service and services from relevant partner agencies.
- We will provide public access computers for any individual who wishes to access Housing information.

### If you attend our offices:

- We will see you within 5 minutes of your appointment time.
- If you do not have an appointment we will provide you with advice and information and make a suitable appointment time available for you.
- We will offer you an interview room if you require it to ensure confidentiality.

### If you telephone us:

- We will answer your call promptly.
- If your call cannot be answered it will divert to our administration team who will be able to take a message.
- If requested, we will provide the name of the staff member taking your call.
- We will provide you with a named contact for your enquiry.

- We will respond to telephone messages on the day of receipt whenever possible.
- We will try our best to respond at the first point of contact.

#### **If you write to us, by letter or by e-mail:**

- We will acknowledge your letter or e-mail within 3 days of receipt.
- If we cannot respond fully within 10 working days we will either send you a holding letter or telephone you to explain why.
- We will write to you in plain English and will try to explain any technical terms as clearly as practicable.
- If your letter is a formal complaint, this will be dealt with through our Complaints Policy.

#### **If you need to make an appointment to see us:**

- We will offer you a home or office appointment
- We will make an appointment at a time to suit you within the available appointment days in your area.
- We will notify you as soon as possible if we cannot keep the appointment.
- We will arrange for interpreter, translator or signer if you need this service, provided you advise us at the time of making the appointment that you require this service.
- We will provide you with an office appointment time within 5 days
- We will provide you with a home appointment time within 28 days (area team working appointments in some areas are only available monthly)

#### **If we visit your home:**

- We will be on time, if we are delayed we will call you to let you know when we will arrive.
- We will show suitable identification.
- We will respect your home and all reasonable customs.
- We will leave a card to let you know that we have been, if you are not at home.

#### **If you order a repair:**

- We will send a written confirmation of your repair order and give you an anticipated completion date.
- We will send you a Customer Satisfaction Survey.
- We will carry out repairs to the definitions and timescales published in the Tenants Handbook and on our webpage.

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## How Customers Can Play Their Part

These service standards are designed to give our customers the highest possible quality of service within the resources we have available and within the reasonable expectations of our customers. There will be times when we cannot meet the standards, for example staff sickness or other absences.

It is reasonable to expect that customers also play a part in helping to achieve these standards. If customers are unreasonable, aggressive, abusive, offensive or use foul language towards Housing Service staff then we cannot deliver these standards.

### To help us to achieve these standards customers can assist by:

- Taking care of their property
- Paying rent regularly and on time
- Promptly reporting any repair items
- Phoning to cancel appointments if no longer suitable or required
- Behaving responsibly towards neighbours, visitors and others
- Being honest when completing forms and surveys
- Complying with the terms of tenancy agreements.

### We can be contacted:

By phone	01595 744360
By freephone	0800 212 829
By fax	01595 744395
By letter	Shetland Islands Council Development Services Housing 8 North Ness Business Park LERWICK Shetland ZE1 0LZ
By e-mail	<a href="mailto:housing@shetland.gov.uk">housing@shetland.gov.uk</a>
On the web	<a href="http://www.shetland.gov.uk/housing">www.shetland.gov.uk/housing</a>

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## **Appendix A - Actions if Situations arise that are out with the prescribed standards**

This details the SIC Housing Service response and actions if situations arise that are outwith our prescribed standards.

### **If we consider a customer's action or behaviour to be unacceptable, we will take the following actions:**

#### **Defining Unacceptable Actions by Customers**

We recognise that individuals may act out of character in times of trouble or distress. People may have a range of personal circumstances, including issues of health and disability, which may affect their behaviour. For example, the customer may have a range of complex needs and may be experiencing upsetting or distressing circumstances.

We do not view behaviour as unacceptable just because a customer is forceful or determined. However, the actions of customers who are aggressive, unreasonably demanding or persistent can result in unreasonable demands on our office or unacceptable behaviour towards Housing Service staff.

It is these actions that we consider unacceptable and aim to manage under this Policy. We have grouped these actions under three broad headings:

#### **Aggressive or Abusive Behaviour**

Violence is not restricted to acts of aggression that may result in physical harm. It also includes behaviour or language (whether oral or written) that may cause staff to feel afraid, threatened or abused.

Examples of behaviours grouped under this heading include threats, physical violence, personal verbal abuse, derogatory remarks and rudeness. We also consider that inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated allegations can be abusive behaviour.

We expect our staff to be treated courteously and with respect at all times. Violence or abuse towards staff is unacceptable. Housing Service staff understand the difference between aggression and anger. The anger felt by many customers involves the subject matter of their concerns. However, it is not acceptable when anger escalates into aggression directed towards Housing Service staff.

## Unreasonable Demands

A minority of customers make what we consider unreasonable demands on our office through the amount of information they seek, the nature and scale of service they expect or the number of approaches they make. What amounts to unreasonable demands will always depend on the circumstances surrounding the behaviour and the seriousness of the issues raised by the customer.

Examples of actions grouped under this heading include demanding responses within an unreasonable time-scale, insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular member of staff, continual phone calls or letters, repeatedly changing the substance of the matter or raising unrelated concerns.

We consider these demands as unacceptable and unreasonable if they start to impact substantially on the work of an individual or the office, such as taking up an excessive amount of staff time to the disadvantage of other customers or functions. We will advise the customer when the threshold has been crossed.

## Unreasonable Persistence

We recognise that some customers will not or cannot accept that the Housing Service is unable to assist them further or provide a level of service other than that provided already. Customers may persist in disagreeing with the action or decision taken in relation to their concern or contact the office persistently about the same issue.

Examples of actions grouped under this heading include persistent refusal to accept a decision made in relation to a concern, persistent refusal to accept explanations relating to what this office can or cannot do and continuing to pursue a matter without presenting any new information. The way in which these customers approach our office may be entirely reasonable, but it is their persistent behaviour in continuing to do so that is not.

We consider the actions of persistent service users to be unacceptable when they take up what the Housing Service regards as being a disproportionate amount of time and resources.

## Managing Unacceptable Actions by Customers

There are relatively few customers whose actions we consider unacceptable. How we aim to manage these actions depends on their nature and extent. If it adversely affects our ability to do our work and provide a service to others, we may need to restrict customer contact with our office or double up staff when in contact with the customer in order to manage the unacceptable action.

We may restrict contact in person, by telephone, fax, letter or electronically or by any combination of these. We try to maintain at least one form of contact. We may decide that the customer should not be visited at home, and should only be seen in person, by prearranged appointment in the office. We may decide that the customer should only be seen, whether at home or in the office, by two members of staff.

In extreme situations, we tell the customer in writing that their name is on a 'no personal contact' list. This means that they must restrict contact with our office to either written communication or through a third party e.g. a Solicitor, or Voluntary Sector advisory/advocacy service.

The threat or use of physical violence, verbal abuse or harassment towards Housing or other Shetland Islands Council staff is likely to result in the ending of all direct contact with the complainer. Incidents may be reported to the police. This will always be the case if physical violence is used or threatened.

We do not deal with correspondence (letter, fax or electronic) that is abusive to staff. When this happens we tell the customer that we consider their language offensive, unnecessary and unhelpful. We ask them to stop using such language and state that we will not respond to their correspondence if they do not stop. We may require future contact to be through a third party.

Housing Service staff will end telephone calls if the caller is considered aggressive, abusive or offensive. The staff member taking the call has the right to make this decision, tell the caller that the behaviour is unacceptable and end the call if the behaviour does not stop.

Where a customer repeatedly phones, visits the office, sends irrelevant documents or raises the same issues, makes allegations that lack substantive evidence, we may decide to:

- Only take telephone calls for the customer at set times on set days or put an arrangement in place for only one member of staff to deal with calls or correspondence from the customer in the future.
- Require the customer to make an appointment to see a named member of staff before visiting the office or that the customer contacts the office in writing only.
- Return the documents to the customer, or in extreme cases, advise the customer that further irrelevant documents will be destroyed.
- Take other action that we consider appropriate. We will, however, always tell the customer what action we are taking and why.

Where a customer continues to correspond on a wide range of issues, and this action is considered excessive, then the customer is told that only a certain number of issues will be considered in a given period and asked to limit or focus their requests accordingly.

Customer action may be considered unreasonably persistent if all internal review mechanisms have been exhausted and the customer continues to dispute the Housing Service decision relating to their concern. The customer will be told that further appeals on the matter should be referred through the Council's Complaints Procedure, and then to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. In addition, that no future phone calls will be accepted or interviews granted concerning this matter.



Any future contact by the customer on this issue must be in writing. Future correspondence is read and filed, but only acknowledged or responded to if the customer provides significant new information relating to the matter.

We recognise that we may need to make reasonable adjustments to the aforementioned process where disability may be affecting the behaviour of the customer and these adjustments need to be balanced against the duty of care the Housing Service owes its staff.

## **Deciding to Restrict Customer Contact**

Housing Service staff that directly experience aggressive or abusive behaviour from a customer have the authority to deal immediately with that behaviour in a manner they consider appropriate to the situation and in line with this Policy.

With the exception of such immediate decisions taken at the time of an incident, decisions to restrict contact with the Housing Service are only taken after careful consideration of the situation by a member of the Housing Management Team.

Wherever possible, we give a customer the opportunity to modify their behaviour or action before a decision is taken. Customers are told in writing why a decision has been made to restrict future contact, the restricted contact arrangements and, if relevant, the length of time that these restrictions will be in place.

If the customer is, or may be in contact with other Services within the Shetland Islands Council, details of the incident and action taken will be shared with the relevant Head of that Service.

We may decide to restrict customer contact on the basis of information received from another Council Service about an incidence of unacceptable behaviour by a shared customer.