CUSTOMER CARE STANDARDS POLICY

All the Co-operative's Policies and Procedures are available in large print, braille, audio or other languages on request.

Please ask a member of staff if you would like a version in a different format.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST	
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CUSTOMER CARE STANDARDS POLICY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Forgewood Housing Co-operative Ltd is committed to delivering the highest quality of customer care service in all that it does.

This policy sets out our approach to achieving the highest standards of customer service and our drive for continuous improvement.

It sets out the standards so that everyone knows what they can expect from the Co-operative and what to do if we fail to achieve these.

We will take account of the views and opinions of customers when delivering our services and use customer feedback to inform future service provision.

The Co-operative recognise that our customers have a wide range of needs and our approach, wherever possible, is to meet these needs.

2.0 GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF CUSTOMER CARE

The Co-operative is committed to providing an effective, caring and responsive first-class service to our customers.

This policy supports our commitment to putting customers at the centre of our services, listening to their views, resolving issues effectively and continuously strive to improve the overall customer experience.

Our key purpose areas are:

- Ensure all service users are treated as a valued and respected customer
- Be professional, honest and courteous and efficient at all times
- Provide a fair and equal service to all customers
- Ensure that no customers are excluded from any area of service delivery
- Ensure our customers believe they have experienced the highest standard of customer care in their dealings with us
- Provide clear, concise information and assistance from pleasant and well-informed members of staff
- Provide relevant, accurate, up-to-date, accessible information and in a format that is easy to understand
- Communicate with customers in the format best suited to the customer i.e. telephone, email, text etc

- Maintain and continually improve our service to ensure that customers are receiving the highest possible standards of customer care
- Ensure that staff members are clear about the level of service they are expected to provide
- Respect customers rights to privacy and confidentiality
- Seek regular feedback on the range and quality of services we provide

3.0 LEGAL REQUIREMENTS, REGULATORY FRAMEWORK AND GOOD PRACTICE GUIDANCE

The Policy sets out the standards and quality of service the customer can expect to receive from the Co-operative.

It takes account of current legislation and good practice guidance.

Scottish Social Housing Charter

The Scottish Social Housing Charter sets out the standards and outcomes that all social landlords have to achieve in providing their housing services.

This policy has been developed with reference to these standards and outcomes and covers important areas such as our housing service, repairs service, neighbourhood management, how we allocate homes and tenants participation.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 requires that all registered social landlords report to the Scottish Regulator annually on their achievements of the Charter outcomes.

The Charter is designed to help tenants and other customers to understand their landlord's performance, enabling to hold their landlord to account. The Charter is also intended to improve customer service.

Scottish Housing Regulator

This policy recognises and adheres to the Scottish Housing Regulator's Regulatory Framework and complies with the following standards:

Standard 1

"The governing body leads and directs the RSL to achieve good outcomes for its tenants and other service users."

Standard 2

"The RSL is open about and accountable for what it does. It understands and takes account of the needs and priorities of its tenants, service users and stakeholders. And its primary focus is the sustainable achievement of these priorities."

More specifically in relation to the Customer Care Standards Policy, 2.4 states:

"The RSL actively seeks out the needs, priorities, views, concerns and aspirations of tenants, service users and stakeholders. The governing body listens to its tenants and service users and takes account of this information in its strategies, plans and decisions."

4.0 CUSTOMER CARE STANDARDS

Our standards are built around our values and underpin everything we do. They guide our decision making, shape our relationships, and ensure we remain focused on delivering high-quality homes, excellent service, and positive outcomes for our tenants, residents and communities.

- Accountability
- Respect
- Excellence
- Empowerment
- Transparency

Customer care standards are the expected behaviours and performance levels that guide how staff interact with customers.

It applies to all forms of customer contact, including:

- Face to face conversations
- Telephone calls
- Text messages
- Email
- Online services and social media
- Written correspondence
- Home visits
- Complaints and service requests
- Contact in regard to any tenancy related issues i.e. repairs, improvements, rent, tenancy management, housing applications, neighbourhood services etc.

At all times staff will:

Be Professional – Polite, Respectful and courteous

- Listen carefully and establish what the customer needs are
- Put our customers at the heart of all that we do
- Provide high service standards to all our customers
- Treat everyone with courtesy, fairness, dignity and respect

Effective communication – Listen actively, speak clearly, and provide accurate information

- Be honest and tell customers when we have got things wrong and try to make things right
- Ensure that our customers are kept updated with relevant matters
- Provide a prompt response when responding to customer enquiries and requests
- Resolve complaints and issues efficiently, fairly and with minimal inconvenience
- Maintain a friendly, patient, and helpful approach in every interaction
- Show empathy, understanding and concern for customer needs and concerns
- Demonstrate a thorough understanding of the services we provide to assist customers effectively

Reliability – Deliver on promises and follow through on commitments

- Make a positive difference to our tenants and within our community
- Have a positive and open relationship with our customers

Responsiveness – Address customer needs quickly and keep them informed of progress

- Deal with enquiries efficiently and in a professional way
- Ensure the customer does not have to repeatedly explain the same issue
- Keep the customer informed where the matter cannot be resolved within a reasonable timescale

Confidentiality – Protect customers' personal and sensitive information

- Treat all information provided in the strictest confidence

Consistency – Provide the same high level of service to every customer

- Treat all customers fairly, irrespective of their status in regard to their age, disability, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender reassignment, sex and sexual orientation
- Provide information in accessible ways and plain formats
- Make our centres/offices and our services accessible to everyone

Continuous Improvement – Seek customers feedback and use it to improve quality of service

- Listen to customers and encourage views on our services
- Provide information throughout the year to our customers, so that they are aware and informed on our activities and performance. We will do so by publishing information in our newsletters, leaflets, text messaging, emails, social media, website and annual reports
- Encourage suggestions, complaints and compliments to help inform how we deliver excellent customer service
- Continually explore new customer service areas

Telephone Calls - Landline / Mobile

- We will answer calls promptly and professionally
- Identify ourselves to the person calling and if put on hold advise the customer
- Listen carefully and avoid interrupting unnecessarily
- Take ownership of enquiries and avoid transferring customers unnecessarily
- When transferring a call advise the customer of this and who they are being transferred to
- Take clear messages and email the appropriate member of staff immediately
- Where possible return all calls by the end of the day
- Agree appropriate follow-up actions and timescales
- Record relevant information accurately
- If the staff member requested by the customer is unavailable and the matter is urgent, another staff member will attend to the issue
- We will ensure that our answering machine is available when the office is closed and provides details of our out of hours emergency repairs services
- Immediately respond when the office reopens to voicemail messages left when our office is closed

Written Communications by Letter or Email

When providing you with information, we will:

- Send immediate acknowledgement of an email and if full response cannot be given pass on to relevant staff member
- Provide a full response wherever possible rather than requiring customers to contact us repeatedly
- Issue our written communications in a clear and easy to understand format. We will avoid using jargon and explain any technical terms that are required to be used
- We will advise customers of any delays against our target timescales for response and advise of the reason for this and the expected timescale
- All of our correspondence will contain the staff member's name, position and contact number
- We will issue correspondence in alternative formats when required
- We will date stamp and record all correspondence received
- All new tenants and owners will be provided with relevant information and documents (tenancy agreement; written statement of services; handbooks, complaints policy, information leaflets, etc.)

Text Messaging

We will respond immediately to a text message during business hours:

- Acknowledge the customers message promptly
- Use clear, polite and professional language
- Answer the customer's accurately and completely
- Avoid excessive abbreviations, slang or unclear language
- Show empathy when dealing with complaints or concerns
- If resolution will take time, explain what will happen and provide an expected timeframe
- Keep messages concise an easy to understand
- Protect customers' personal information and avoid including sensitive information unnecessarily
- Where an issue cannot be resolved by text, offer or arrange an appropriate alternative communication method

Visiting Our Office

When visiting the office, we will:

- Make sure the reception is adequately staffed
- Provide comfortable and accessible facilities to visiting customers
- Welcome and quickly establish the reason for the visit and who they wish / need to speak to
- Not keep a customer waiting when there is an arranged appointment
- Keep the customer informed if there is a delay in their appointment
- Provide an interview room for discussions with staff
- Display useful and up to date information for our customers in our reception area

If any customers are unable to come to the office, it can be arranged for a member of staff to visit them at home to deal with their enquiry.

Home Visits

- When staff are carrying out home visits, they will have respect to being in a customer's home
- Staff will introduce themselves to customers, explain the reason for their visit and show their identification card
- Treat the customer's home and personal circumstances with respect
- Arrive within the agreed appointment window whenever reasonably possible
- Contact a customer if an appointment needs to be delayed or rearranged
- Maintain professional boundaries and behaviour at all times
- Record agreed actions and follow them up within the appropriate timescales
- Where access to a home visit is not obtained, the visiting staff member will leave a calling card with their name and contact details and reason for the visit. We will not record any sensitive information on calling cards
- Let the customer know what will happen following on from the visit

Customers should be encouraged to tell the Co-operative about any communication needs so that appropriate support can be provided.

5.0 CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

We will consult with customers on issues that affect them as detailed in our Tenant Participation Strategy. We will actively seek and use customer feedback to improve our services.

When we consult or ask for feedback, we will make sure that:

- We will provide all the information customers need to allow them to make an informed response
- Consult with our customers regarding key service user policies
- Use a variety of methods of consultation including focus groups, interested parties/volunteers, website, surveys, texting, phoning, settling in visits and any other suitable way that suits the customer's needs
- Where possible, use the feedback to improve our services and influence our policies
- Use complaints and compliments

Feedback will be reviewed to identify recurring problems, service improvements and opportunities to improve customer satisfaction.

6.0 CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

We will use a variety of methods to monitor and improve customer satisfaction including:

- An independent Tenant Satisfaction Survey every 3 years
- Quarterly Repairs and Maintenance Satisfaction Surveys
- Providing customers with a range of ways to submit comments on the service received from the Co-operative by survey forms, texting, phone calls, emails and website
- Holding Focus Group meetings
- Holding Community events
- Review comments made responding to any issues raised
- Consider comments in the review of Policy and Procedures
- Use the information gained from these surveys to improve our services
- Report the results of surveys, and what we are doing as a result of these to our customers through our newsletter, letters and website
- Report customer satisfaction levels to our Management Committee and residents

7.0 REASONABLE CUSTOMER BEHAVIOUR

We strongly believe that our customers have the right to be heard and understood and we will deal with them in a professional, fair and consistent way.

We will treat customers with respect and in return expect they treat our staff in the same way.

Occasionally customers actions become unacceptable e.g. abusive towards staff, and we have policy to deal with this.

Abusive, threatening or discriminatory behaviour towards staff will not be tolerated. Where such behaviour occurs, staff will follow the Co-operative's Unacceptable Actions Policy in areas where there are unacceptable actions.

8.0 COMPLAINTS

Customers have the right to raise concerns and make complaints.

Staff will:

- Listen to complaints without becoming defensive
- Remain calm and professional
- Acknowledge the customer's concerns
- Apologise when the Co-operative has made a mistake or where an apology is appropriate
- Explain what action will be taken
- Record and escalate complaints in accordance with the Co-operative's Complaints Policy
- Never treat a customer unfairly because they have made a complaint

We recognise that service complaints represent an important source of customer feedback that we will use to improve levels of customer service.

Anyone who is not happy or satisfied with the service that they have received as a result of this policy has a right to complain. The Co-operative's Complaints Policy will provide full details on how to do this. This can be made available on request or download it from our website **www.forgewoodcoop.org.uk**

Where a response or resolution is delayed, customers will be informed of the reason and, where possible, provided with a revised timescale.

9.0 CONFIDENTIALITY & DATA PROTECTION

Privacy & Confidentiality

All customers information will be handled securely and in accordance with applicable data protection and confidentiality requirements.

The Co-operative will ensure all information provided by tenants will only be used for the purpose provided.

The Co-operative will process information and data in accordance with its policies and procedures relating to the General Data Protection Regulations.

Information regarding how data will be used and the basis for processing data is provided in the Co-operative's Fair Processing Notice.

10.0 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

Equality and Fair Treatment

We will provide services fairly and consistently and will seek to prevent discrimination.

Customer care will be delivered in a way that supports equality, diversity and inclusion and making reasonable adjustments where appropriate such as:

- Alternative formats
- Additional time to communicate or understand information
- Interpreting or translation support
- Alternative communication methods
- Support for customers with disabilities or other communication barriers

The Co-operative is committed to promoting an environment of respect, understanding, encouraging diversity and eliminating discrimination by providing equality of opportunity for all.

We will endeavour to ensure a fair and equal service to everyone and that all services are carried out in an undiscriminating manner in line with the Co-operative's Equality and Diversity Policy.

In particular, we will not discriminate on the grounds of age, disability, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender reassignment, sex and sexual orientation.

We will ensure that everyone has equal access to information and services to meet specific need. Upon request we will make available documents in a range of alternative formats/languages.

11.0 POLICY REVIEW

The Co-operative will continually monitor and evaluate its customer service methods and practices and will have a focus on continuous improvement.

We will listen to our residents, other customers and organisations, to inform and shape service delivery and improve customer care and satisfaction.

This Policy will be reviewed on a 5 yearly basis or sooner, in response to reflect changes in legislation, regulation, customer expectations or a change in operational requirements and good practice.