

# South Western Housing Society Ltd

## Customer Care Policy

### 1. Statement of Intent

The Society is committed to ensuring that it demonstrates high standards of customer care. It considers this to be:

- ensuring that people who pay for the services provided by the Society through their rents or leasehold service charges, as well as those who have other interests in the Society, receive an efficient and satisfactory service
- involving the customer, listening to and considering their views with regard to the provision of services and decisions being made
- understanding customers and meeting their needs wherever possible
- treating customers with respect and courtesy
- providing clear and concise information and explanations to customers
- being accessible to customers.

The Society views its customers as being individuals, groups of people or organisations who pay for, receive services from and hold expectations of the Society as a service provider.

Customers are defined as being:

- tenants
- leaseholders
- transfer applicants
- applicants for housing
- agencies with whom the Society works, including local authorities
- organisations and their clients to whom a service is provided
- partner agencies

## 2. Policy

### 2.1. Staff

Staff will:

- be prompt, polite and helpful
- have access to information and be willing to listen
- carry official identity cards outside the office
- aim to respond effectively and sensitively to the feelings and needs of customers

### 2.2 Offices

Offices will:

- have opening hours clearly displayed
- be clean, warm and friendly
- have up to date advice and information in appropriate accessible formats
- provide where possible a one-stop direct service approach
- be accessible to people with disabilities

### 2.3 Personal Callers

People visiting 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 given appointments with named officers upon request
- not be kept waiting for long periods without being attended to. Callers must not be kept waiting for more than 10 minutes without adequate explanation.

### 2.4 Appointments

- appointments with specific officers will be made upon request (subject to officers availability)
- all appointments will be made for a mutually convenient time and date

- if, for reasons such as disability, illness, frailty or accessibility, customers are unable to attend the Society's offices and they would like to speak personally with a staff member, an appointment will be offered for a home visit
- if, in the event of unforeseen circumstances, a wait for an appointment is unavoidable, the person waiting will be offered refreshments and an apology given
- if, due to unforeseen circumstances such as staff illness, an appointment cannot be kept, the customer will be notified as soon as possible
- a call card stating who called, at what time and how to contact them will be left if a visit is made and access cannot be obtained. Officers should ensure that they have waited a reasonable time to gain access.

## 2.5 Interviews and Meetings with Customers

- all staff will aim to be well prepared for meetings or interviews with customers and have relevant information/records at hand
- a suitable room will be made available for all interviews and meetings with customers
- notes will be taken and records kept of all meetings held. A written account of the issues raised, recommendations, action to be taken and any timescales agreed at any such meeting will be made available if requested
- officers will provide any help within their power to customers, this 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 there are language difficulties, a translation, interpreting or signing service will be used to enable customers to express their views or needs accurately and fully
- any information provided by customers will be kept in the strictest confidence, unless otherwise requested.

### **3. Confidentiality**

All interviews, correspondence and personal information will be treated in strictest confidence, and in accordance with legislation such as the Data Protection Act 1998 and subsequent legislation.

### **4. Communications**

#### **4.1 Telephone Calls**

- all calls will be answered within 5 rings
- callers will be greeted by the name and section of the officer answering
- in the event of the officer being unavailable, there are two options, these are:
  - to divert the call to another officer who may be able to help
  - to take a message and pass it on to the relevant officer for them to contact the customer
- if any enquiries cannot be dealt with straight away, a contact number will be taken and the customer called back when the information required has been found (within 24 hours) or at a mutually convenient time. If the customer does not have a telephone, he or she will be contacted in writing within five working days
- in the event of customers calling from long distance, a public pay phone, or a neighbours telephone, staff will always offer to ring back if this is possible.

#### **4.2 Out of Hours Service**

- in the event of offices being closed an answer phone service will be in operation. Answer phone messages will be clear, concise and up to date
- incoming messages will be taken from the answer phone daily, first thing in the morning. Messages received will be prioritised (by way of urgency), acknowledged and responded to within one working day

- special arrangements will be made for emergencies that occur outside the office hours of 9.00 am – 5.00 pm Monday – Friday (to include weekends and public holidays). Information on any such arrangements and further contact numbers will be left on the answer phone system
- the answer phone service will not be used in office hours except in unforeseen circumstances or where all staff are attending a staff meeting. In these cases, the message must state why the answer phone is on and for what period.

#### 4.3 Letters and Emails

- all correspondence from customers to the Society or its agents will receive an acknowledgement or reply within five working days
- if for any reason a reply is likely to take longer (for example; to gain greater information), the customer will be informed of this and a reason given
- letters/emails will be clear and informative and written in 'plain English'
- where appropriate, correspondence from the Society or its agents will be translated into different languages or provided in different formats
- replies will be sent on headed notepaper and signed and sent in the name of the writer
- requests for forms and general information will be dealt with within three working days of the request

#### 4.4 Repair Information

All tenants who report a repair will be advised of the following:

- confirmation either by phone or letter that the order has been placed
- the target time for the repair to be completed
- the name of the contractor completing the work

- who to contact in the event of the repair not being completed.

#### 4.5 Standards of Service Delivery

The standards contained within this policy will be identified in the tenant's handbook and where necessary tenants newsletters.

#### 4.6 Redress

If a customer feels that the standards set out in this policy and the associated documents have not been met, they should complain using the Society's complaints procedures.

#### 4.7 Staff

All staff will be made aware of the contents of this policy and trained in its implementation.

#### 4.8 People with special requirements

The Society will ensure that where required information will be provided to people in accessible formats such as large print or Braille. In addition should any customer require translation facilities these shall be arranged in the advance of any interview.

#### 4.9 Responsibility

The Chief Executive shall be responsible for the implementation of this policy.

#### 4.10 Review

The policy shall be reviewed once every two years, or sooner if new legislation/good practice emerges.