

HOUSING OPTIONS WEST MIDLANDS LIMITED

CUSTOMER CARE POLICY

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this Policy is to set out Housing Options West Midlands' commitment to creating and developing a positive approach to customer care. The Policy sets out the standards and quality of service that customers, clients, tenants and suppliers can expect to receive from Housing Options West Midlands Limited (HOWM).

HOWM is committed to providing a service that is customer focussed, professional and responsive to customer feedback. HOWM aims to:

- Treat all of its customers, tenants and suppliers with courtesy, respect and consideration regardless of their personal circumstances;
- Provide a wide range of services and facilities to support the diversity of its customer's needs;
- Ensure staff are friendly and approachable in their customer care and informed and professional in the service they deliver;
- Work in positive partnership with its external stakeholders;
- Adhere to a continuous programme of investment into its staff, buildings, equipment and resources.

HOWM is committed to maintaining and developing its service excellence through a process of ongoing monitoring, evaluation and review, and aims to achieve this by:

- Having policies and procedures in place to deliver effective programs of learning and efficiency of service.
- Analysing its strengths and weaknesses via a Continuous Improvement Forum which maintains a development plan to build on the company's strengths and improve its weaknesses.
- Analysing trends and patterns in the company's compliments and complaints procedures and taking action to improve services offered when specific trends and procedural weaknesses are identified.
- Ensuring the continuous professional development of all staff through regular appraisals and training.
- Monitoring diversity, equality and equality of opportunity in order to widen participation.
- Holding quarterly quality management meetings with the company's senior management team.
- Recognising that the company's policies and procedures are 'living' documents and are therefore subject to continuous change and adaptation to ensure compliance with changing legislation and governmental standards.
- Regularly liaising with other stakeholders and partners to ensure efficiency and transparency in the services being offered.
- Ensuring that any third party engaged to provide services on behalf of the Organisation operates a similar quality approach to the services it provides.
- Benchmarking with like providers, partners, affiliates and members.

2.0 Who are HOWM's Customers?

HOWM has a range of customer types; HOWM's ISO 9001 manual defines a customer as '...an "organisation or person that receives a product" and may include clients, purchasers, partners,

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stakeholders, or any other party having a quality related relationship with you and your Organisation.' "Product" includes services and advice offered as well as physical goods, therefore using the definition of customer as defined by the company's ISO manuals, these include:

- All potential and actual tenants that are placed in HOWM accommodation as a result of the company's contracts;
- All potential and actual users of the range of services that the company provides to other third parties;
- All stakeholders;
- Any individual, agency, partner or organisation seeking information from HOWM;
- All suppliers of services to the company.

3.0 Customer Service Standards

HOWM's Service Standards set out the current level of service clients, customers, tenants, stakeholders and staff can expect in the key areas of housing management that HOWM provides. HOWM's performance against these standards will be reviewed annually, and the results made available upon request.

3.1 Correspondence

When the company receives letters or emails, acknowledgement letters and emails will be sent within 3 working days and a full reply provided within 10 working days. The company will ensure that all correspondence will be clear, concise, easy to understand, written in plain English, free of jargon and that it provides a contact name and telephone number.

Where there is a requirement to respond within a 28 day statutory timescale alterations etc, the company will still aim to respond within 10 working days. If it becomes apparent that this timescale cannot be achieved, a letter will be sent explaining the reason for the delay and indicating when a response can be expected.

The exception to this would be where a Freedom of Information request or Environmental Information Regulations request has been submitted to the company. As HOWM is not a public authority, requests will be submitted to the public authority that the request concerns within two business days of receipt.

When required, the company will make arrangements for correspondence to be sent in relevant community languages, large print, Braille or audiotape.

3.2 Telephone

When receiving a telephone call, employees will:

- Acknowledge callers in a polite and courteous manner;
- Where the required person is not available, a message will be taken which will be responded to within one working day;
- Answer machines will be used when the main office is closed but an emergency call out service is also provided to all clients. Recorded messages will be audible and accurate, and will give the caller an option to leave a message;

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- The message will also advise callers what to do in the case of an emergency.

3.3 Site Visits

When visiting a property, the company will:

- Wherever it is practical, warn the tenant in advance of the intended visit and always knock and wait for a suitable amount of time before entering premises;
- Show an official Housing Options West Midlands Limited Staff Identity Card on arrival and explain purpose of visit if this has not already been communicated;
- Record the details of the visit on an Incident Report if necessary;
- Remain polite and courteous at all times.

4.0. Complaints

Any customer or contractor that feels that HOWM has failed to achieve the standards set out in this Policy should be referred to HOWM's Complaints Policy. A copy of the Complaints Policy may be made available upon request from HOWM's Compliance Manager.

5.0 Training

All HOWM employees receive comprehensive training to cover the content of this Policy and the service provided to all internal and external clients. Such training includes but is not limited to: customer care, equality and diversity, cultural awareness, human rights, environmental awareness, complaints handling and health and safety.

Staff will receive training at least once every six months or as required or when changes to Policy or procedure are made. Induction training for new staff will include an overview of this Policy.

8. Policy Audit and Review

The Policy will be reviewed at least annually in line with the company's ISO certifications, or more frequently if the monitoring and auditing framework identifies processes and/or standards that need to be reviewed and amended. The audit will be conducted by reference and analysis of complaints received and staff monitoring; this will ensure that consistent standards are being delivered.