



**Our vision is
"to deliver excellent Housing Services"**

Access and Customer Care Strategy

2008-2010

Newark and Sherwood Homes Limited



Version6
Revised Jan 08
Revised By Fin McElhinney

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Our Strategy

This strategy sets out the standard of care and service, which our customers, who include, tenants, leaseholders and residents, can expect from Newark and Sherwood Homes. The service standards included have been developed and agreed in conjunction with customers.

Newark and Sherwood Homes is committed to ensuring that excellent customer care is an integral part of everything we do and our services are tailored to meet the needs of our customers based on profile data.

This strategy and the Service Standards contained within will ensure that all sections of our diverse community, including those with special needs, are not excluded from any area of service delivery.

Whenever customers have contact with Newark and Sherwood Homes they will receive excellent standards of customer care.

To achieve this we will:

- Have service standards that meet the differing needs of customers
- Have standards for our key services Estate Management, Housing Choice, Income Management, Supported Housing, Tenancy Enforcement, Day To Day Repairs, Planned Maintenance Schemes and Resident Involvement
- Have a lettable standard for properties
- Have standards for answering letters, text messages, emails and telephone calls.
- Operate a complaints policy with a right of appeal
- Operate a customer suggestion scheme
- Document and monitor data from customer satisfaction

1. Excellent Customer Care

Newark and Sherwood Homes is committed to ensuring the best standards of service delivery based on customer involvement, partnership, value for money, innovation and continuous improvement.

We recognise that excellent customer service must be an integral part of everything we do to ensure delivery of high quality services. Newark and Sherwood Homes is committed to continually improving standards of customer service and the quality of customer care. Continuous improvement is often based

on issues raised by our customers and demonstrates that we are delivering responsive and customer focused services.

When drafting new policies, procedures and service standards, Newark and Sherwood Homes will work with customers to ensure the highest level of service possible will be provided taking into consideration equality and diversity issues in accordance with all current legislation, and its own diversity strategy. This will be done via a variety of means to ensure that the needs of all customers are addressed and that no group within our communities become socially excluded as a result of changes to frontline service delivery.

2. Executive Responsibility

- The progress of the Access and Customer Care Strategy is over seen by the Executive Leadership Team and is made up of the Chief Executive, the Customer Services Director and the Business Services Director.
- The delivery of the strategy is the responsibility of the Access and Customer Care Continuous Improvement Group (CIG)
- Quarterly updates on the progress against the strategy are provided to the board.

Responsibility within the Executive Leadership Team for the delivery of the strategy falls to:

- Business Services Director (employment and governance)
- Customer Services Director (service delivery)

Two directors of the board have been appointed lead and deputy lead for Access and Customer Care.

3. Governance

We aim to ensure that our governance structures are appropriate and meet the needs of a very significant social housing business, and that directors of the board bring with them a wide range of experience and expertise.

We will:

- work to ensure that membership of Newark and Sherwood Homes Board, broadly reflect the communities where we work.
- be transparent in the recruitment of directors of the board

- ensure that those involved in governance are well informed about access and customer care issues

4. Service Standards

The service standards outlined in this strategy highlight the minimum standard of service delivery that Newark and Sherwood Homes would expect. They are service specific, relevant and measurable. Performance is reported to both customers and the board and outcomes are used to drive further service improvement.

The key objectives of the standards are to ensure accuracy, consistency, efficiency and cost effectiveness in our approach to the presentation and delivery of customer services:

- The standard is simple, user friendly and measurable.
- The standard clearly states the desired behaviour of employees in dealing with customers.
- Performance targets are set and reviewed regularly in line with consultation feedback.

Purpose of Standards

Newark and Sherwood Homes vision is “to deliver excellent Housing Services”. Integral to this is setting standards for the achievement of excellent customer care to ensure that:

- Our Service Standards reflect our vision, core values and customer promise (appendix a), which the company has always used to provide a service that is efficient, fair and responsive to all our tenants and members of the community.
- All Newark and Sherwood Homes staff have a responsibility to ensure that the services provided to our customers meet the highest possible standards at all times, and to recognise that some customers may, on occasions, require special or more sensitive services.
- Resources are not wasted on poor delivery of customer care

Standards - Our Key Aims

- Answer 90% of telephone calls within 5 rings.
- Provide information about services in different languages, Braille and Audio.
- Work closely with Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations, Neighbourhood Improvement Panels, District Improvement Panels, Tenant and Resident Associations and Monitoring Groups.
- Address any special needs with sensitivity and diplomacy.
- Ensure all buildings are accessible for disabled customers.

5. Service Standard for Customer Care

All front line services provided by Newark and Sherwood Homes will operate in line with the following:

Face-to-Face Contact:

- Wear an ID card at all times and ensure it is shown to the customer.
- Staff will greet customers in a polite and courteous manner giving their name, and give their full attention to the customer being professional at all times.
- Staff will aim, wherever possible, to resolve the customers enquiry at the first point of contact.
- Staff will ensure that where a customer is unable to communicate in English, employees will use the translation service.
- Staff will ensure that where a customer has hearing difficulties, employees will use a signer to ensure full communication is possible. Alternatively, they will ensure access to a room with a hearing loop system installed.
- If necessary offer the customer a private interview room.

Waiting Times

- Customers should not be expected to wait longer than a maximum of 5 minutes in any Newark and Sherwood Homes reception before their enquiry is dealt with. If waiting times are likely to exceed this target, the customer must be informed at the first point of contact and advised what the likely waiting time will be.
- If the query cannot be resolved immediately customers will be advised that the appropriate member of staff will be informed and they will attend the reception within 10 minutes.

Telephone Calls

- All telephone calls will be answered within 10 rings.
- Employees will greet callers in a polite tone and courteous manner, stating their name, section that they work in and will answer the phone "Good morning/Good afternoon".
- Employees will be helpful and aim, wherever possible, to resolve the customer's enquiry at the first point of contact without the need to transfer the caller.

- Employees will give their full attention to the customer for the duration of the call and remain professional at all times.
- If calls have to be transferred, employees will identify themselves and provide brief details of the call being transferred avoiding the need to transfer a caller for a second time.
- Employees will offer to take messages for unavailable colleagues and pass details to the appropriate person with call back arrangements within a specified time, or make alternative arrangements where appropriate.
- Newark and Sherwood Homes telephones will not be left unattended during core hours 8.30am–5.15pm (Monday- Thursday) and 8.30am-4.45pm (Friday)
- In cases where a customer has a hearing impairment, access to a minicom system will be made available.

Emails

- Newark and Sherwood Homes will encourage customers to contact us using emails and will provide:
 - Email addresses on all communications.
 - Email addresses for key offices on the website.
- Emails can be received 24 hours a day and will be acknowledged and a full response made within 10 working days.
- Staff will ensure that out of office messages are used and these provide alternative contact details for urgent email enquiries.

Texts

- Provide text messaging contact numbers and information for tenants on how to access services by text.
- Provide a response to all service requests received in the form of a text message.
- Contact customers via text message if requested by the customer.
- Text messages can be received 24 hours a day and will be responded to the same day if in office hours or the next working day.

Answer Phones and Voicemail

- Within Newark and Sherwood Homes answer phones/voice mails will only be used to ensure that telephone calls do not go unanswered. At other times calls will be answered in accordance with service standards.
- Answer phones/Voicemails will only be used for short periods or specific purposes during opening hours e.g. lunch breaks, employee meetings or short training sessions.

- Recorded messages from Newark and Sherwood Homes answer phones will be audible, accurate, and appropriate and provide an alternative contact number or details.
- Answer phone/voicemail will give the caller an option to leave a message whenever practicable.
- Messages will be responded to within 24 hours or the next working day if the message is left over a weekend or Bank Holiday.

Written Correspondence

- All Newark and Sherwood Homes written correspondence, including that received by fax and E-mail, will be responded to within 5 working days.
- The presentation and content of any written correspondence will be clear, easy to understand and jargon free, accurate and include a reference, contact name, direct dial telephone number and email address.
- In cases where a customer has sight impairment an appropriate written response should be provided e.g. a Braille translation or large print.
- In cases where a customer has a language difficulty an appropriate translation should be offered and where necessary provided.
- In cases where a customer has a learning difficulty appropriate advice may need to be provided to aid written communication.

Home Visits

Newark and Sherwood Homes recognise that when visiting our customer's home we should treat it with respect and recognise their privacy.

We will always:

- Attempt to make appointments in writing or by telephone.
- Try and visit out of normal office hours when there are special circumstances.
- Explain the purpose and nature of the visit.
- Carry out home visits within 5 working days of request.
- If there was no appointment made ask if it is convenient to the customer to carry out the home visit.
- Try to keep appointments but if in exceptional circumstances we have to cancel an appointment we will inform the customer as soon as it is known that it has to be cancelled to ensure the minimum of inconvenience to the customer, but in any event prior to the arranged appointment time.

- Allow enough time for customers (i.e. elderly or disabled) to come to the door.
- Show our identity card when calling at your home.
- Ensure appointments are made ensuring cultural sensitivity e.g. if only a woman is at home.

6. Complaints

Newark and Sherwood Homes understands that from time to time things do go wrong and that only if customers complain can we put things right and ensure it does not happen again. We also recognise that complaints are a valuable tool, which we can use to improve our services. In light of this we will ensure that:

- Employees will aim to resolve all concerns raised by the customer immediately and informally before the matter becomes the subject of a formal complaint. However the customer must not be deterred from making a formal complaint if they so wish.
- Employees are aware of the complaint's procedure and understand its operation.
- Details of how to complain will be prominently displayed at all offices.
- Customers will have an acknowledgement to their complaint within 3 working days and a full written reply within 10 working days.
- We will monitor and analyse complaints and the performance information will be reported to customers and to the board.

In addition to the above service standard for customer care all our front-line services have measurable service standards, which have been devised in conjunction with customers.

We will provide detailed service standards on the following:

- Customer Care
- Estate Management
- Housing Choice
- Income collection and other charges
- Supported Housing
- Anti Social Behaviour
- Resident Involvement
- Planned Maintenance
- Day to Day Repairs

This list is not exclusive and we will add others to this. All our service standards are displayed in our offices are produced in plain English and will be available in other formats on request.

They will be monitored monthly and reviewed each year by staff and customers or sooner if needed.

7. Employee Training and Development

Newark and Sherwood Homes will ensure that all employees are trained to a standard that enables them to satisfy customer expectation.

8. Help and Information

Newark and Sherwood Homes aims to provide help and information about our services that is clear and easy to use. All information for the public will be written in plain English, jargon free, to the point and be reviewed annually (via the easy reading panel).

All published information will be accessible to customers with specific needs i.e. larger print, on tape, Braille and in different languages.

We subscribe to translation services to assist us in communicating with customers who do not speak English as a first language.

Full details are available on the Internet at www.nshomes.co.uk

9. Public Meetings

Customers are encouraged to attend any public meeting. These include:

- Neighbourhood Improvement Panels and District Improvement Panels
- Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations
- Tenant & Residents Association Meetings
- Newark and Sherwood Homes Board Meetings
- Ad-hoc Meetings

10. Publications

Information is provided to our customers via a variety of means:

- Newsletter – Home from Homes
- Resident Involvement Strategy and Tenants Compact

- Details of Board/Committee Meetings
- Tenants Handbook

11. Suggestions

We encourage customers and employees to make suggestions to improve the service.

- We will provide access to customer suggestions via community centre suggestion boxes and via the website.
- Newark and Sherwood Homes will inform customers what action has been taken as a result of any suggestions made via our newsletter.

Customers can make suggestions to improve our service by any means appropriate to them.

12. Customer Involvement

Newark and Sherwood Homes has mechanisms in place to enable proactive tenant and resident consultation i.e. Neighbourhood Improvement Panels and District Improvement Panels, Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations, Tenant & Resident Associations.

We will work to ensure that membership of service user groups, broadly reflect the communities where we work using our tenant profile.

The company will record all instances of consultation and report on the outcomes.

Newark and Sherwood Homes will provide evidence of how it has consulted tenants and residents on customer satisfaction levels. This information will be readily available.

13. Customer Satisfaction

We will have mechanisms in place to enable customer satisfaction to be measured.

Newark and Sherwood Homes will survey for customer feedback in a number of ways i.e. STATUS survey which will be done three yearly, annual surveys which are undertaken independently from the company and specific surveys undertaken throughout the year.

Evidence of customer satisfaction will be recorded together with details on how the results have been used for influencing future provision and improvement.

14. Employee Name Badges

- Employees will wear printed name badges.
- Carry identification and show it identify themselves.
- Employees will always introduce themselves when meeting customers.

15. Reception and Buildings

All Newark and Sherwood Homes buildings will have ramped or level access. It is in the reception area that customers often get their first impression of the housing service and all reception areas will:

- Be attended during opening hours.
- Will be welcoming, clean and tidy at all times and provide adequate seating.
- Display clear and accurate opening times and details of emergency and out of hours contact.
- Provide information on services and advice leaflets.
- Provide performance and access to complaints information.
- Notice boards will provide relevant and current advice and information on Newark and Sherwood Homes services.
- Provide details of private interview rooms.
- Be fitted with hearing loops.
- Provide free access to the internal telephone network.
- Provide details of services available.

16. Signage

All Newark and Sherwood Homes service points will provide clear directional signage.

17. Availability and Access

All Newark and Sherwood Homes customers will be provided with clear information about the services Newark and Sherwood Homes provide in a "user friendly" format wherever possible via:

- Local Offices
- Tenants Handbook
- Internet
- Community Centres
- Reception at Kelham Hall

This information will include:

- Office addresses and opening times
- Facilities available
- Access details
- Out of Hours contact details
- Performance Information
- Latest tenant newsletters
- How customers can access further information e.g. website

Appointments allow for the most efficient use of resources and customers will be encouraged to always make appointments. When customers with appointments call, staff will:

- be prepared for the interview
- have booked a suitable room etc
- not leave the customer waiting without information

If customers call without appointments, staff will make every effort to resolve the customer's enquiry. However, many employees work outside the office so immediate interviews are not always possible. If the employee is unavailable we will offer the customer:

- Access to other employees providing cover.
- An appointment to suit the customer, either at their home or in the office.

18. Employee Conduct, Awareness and Safety

Staff will adopt a positive attitude towards members of the public.

Staff will treat members of the public professionally and courteously at all times.

If the query cannot be resolved immediately customers will be advised that the appropriate officer will be informed.

Newark and Sherwood Homes will ensure that procedures are in place to safeguard employees from both verbal and physical attack in accordance with the organisation's Equal Opportunities Policy.

Staff will not enter into heated discussions or arguments with members of the public or each other. Any reported incidents will be investigated and dealt with under the relevant procedure.

19. Customer Information Provision- Access to information

- All data will be entered on systems in a consistent and accurate manner.
- All stored information where the public has a right of access will be made available in accordance with the Data Protection Act and Freedom of Information Act 2005.
- Newark and Sherwood Homes may share information within Newark and Sherwood District Council and/or public agencies with which we have specific data sharing arrangements. Personal information will be kept confidential at all times.
- All information provided will be clearly identified as official Newark and Sherwood Homes communication using the corporate identity and logo and should include details of author, date of issue or publication and any reference number.
- All information will be made available in electronic formats and where appropriate accessible via the website.
- All information will carry details about the formats in which it is available (straplines).

20. Continuous Improvement

Newark and Sherwood Homes has an embedded improvement planning process and also uses external quality awards.

Newark and Sherwood Homes will use the principles of external awards of Chartermark, Investors in People and ISO 9002 in order to improve the levels of service delivery. For further information about these awards please contact Business Services on 01636 687888.

External Awards:

- Chartermark
- Investors in People
- ISO 9002
- CORGI Registration

21. Performance

To achieve Newark and Sherwood Homes vision "to deliver excellent housing services" a performance management framework using the balanced scorecard allows us to monitor and evaluate our performance.

Monitoring will be completed on a monthly basis in accordance with the balanced scorecard process. Where performance falls below target, action items are agreed within the requirements of the company's performance management framework.

22. Audit Commission Performance Indicators

We will ensure that systems are in place to monitor service performance against individual Audit Commission performance indicators.

All Managers are aware that Key Performance Indicators will be subject to external and internal audit and all service areas will be able to demonstrate that record keeping is transparent and robust.

23. Associated policies

This strategy should be read in conjunction with a range of equality and diversity related policies including:

- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Diversity Policy
- Customer Insight Strategy
- Literacy policy
- Governance Guide

- Harassment Policy
- Domestic Violence Policy
- Anti Social Behaviour Policy
- Resident Involvement Strategy

24. Implementation

The strategy will be implemented from 2008-2010 and implementation will be monitored via the performance management framework.

Customer Promise



Our vision: To deliver excellent housing services

This promise has been designed to provide a service that is efficient and responsive to all our tenants, leaseholders and members of the community with equality.

All our staff have a responsibility to ensure that the services provided to our customers meet the highest possible standards at all times, and to recognise that some customers may, on occasions, require special or more sensitive services.

YOU CAN EXPECT:

- ✓ **All** staff to carry identification.
- ✓ **To** be treated politely and courteously.
- ✓ **All** reception areas to be clean and comfortable with a variety of leaflets available on our services.
- ✓ **That** we will seek your views through surveys and by inviting you to public meetings

WE WILL:

- ✓ **Answer** the telephone by identifying ourselves and seek to give a contact name.
- ✓ **Have** access to staff with 'signing' skills for applicants with hearing difficulties and operate a minicom service on 01636 655960.
- ✓ **Have** access to interpreters if English is not your first language.
- ✓ **Answer** 90% of phone calls within 10 rings.
- ✓ **Respond** to all letters within 5 working days.
- ✓ **When available**, use interview rooms if you wish to discuss your situation in private.
- ✓ **Respond** to comments and complaints within the targets set out in our 'Complaints Matter' and 'Housing Matters' scheme.
- ✓ **Provide** you with clear, written and timely information about your rights and responsibilities.
- ✓ **Operate** a 24-hour emergency service accessible via our main telephone number on 01636 687888, Social Services or the Police.
- ✓ **Operate** a 24-hour 'Careline' service for elderly or vulnerable residents.
- ✓ **Provide** specialist housing advice at Kelham Hall (01636 687888) or our local offices at Hawtonville (01636 655503) and Ollerton (01623 860740), or via the Council's office at Newark Town Hall.

If you wish to make any comment about the Customer Promise or our housing service, whether it is a complaint, compliment, comment or suggestion for improvement, please ask a member of staff for a 'Complaints Matter' or 'Housing Matters' form. Copies can also be obtained from Newark & Sherwood District Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations on 01636 684343. *Please remember*, our staff also have the right to be treated with respect whilst dealing with your enquiries.

If you would like this document in another language or format, or if you require the services of an interpreter, please contact us.

જો તમને આ દસ્તાવેજ બીજા ભાષા અથવા રચનામાં જોઈતો હોય, અથવા જો તમને ઇન્ટરપ્રિટરની સેવાઓ જોઈતી હોય તો, કૃપા કરી અમારો સંપર્ક સાધો.

(Gujarati)

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(Mandarin)

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(Portuguese)



Awarded for excellence



Minicom



Signing



Language Line



Audio Version



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(Polish)

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(Portuguese)



Signing



The Big Word
Translation Services



Audio Tape

V.8