

MORAY HOUSING PARTNERSHIP CUSTOMER CARE POLICY

Date Agreed:

Under Review

AIMS

Moray Housing Partnership aims to provide and manage good quality affordable housing to help meet housing needs within Moray. The Partnership aims to put its tenants/customers first and to be friendly, welcoming, helpful and polite. After dealing with Moray Housing Partnership, each customer should feel that staff have been professional, knowledgeable and interested in their issues. This policy sets out the minimum standards of service that customers can expect from staff at MHP.

2. OBJECTIVES

The key objectives of the Customer Care Policy are:

- 2.1 To provide the highest standard of service possible within the resources available.
- 2.2 To have courteous and well-trained staff who provide an effective customer service.
- 2.3 To provide a code of conduct for staff and contractors.
- 2.4 To guarantee fast and direct assistance by an appropriate member of staff during office hours.
- 2.5 To connect telephone callers in a single attempt to the person capable of providing assistance whenever possible and to call back clients whenever necessary.
- 2.6 To respect customers' rights to privacy and confidentiality.

- 2.7 To be consistent with other MHP policies, for example policies on complaints, repairs reporting, data protection, estate management, antisocial behaviour and equality & diversity.

3. DEFINITIONS

Customer: All possible clients of Moray Housing Partnership, whether a tenant or customer.

Operator: Any person answering an external call directly.

4. KEY POINTS OF POLICY

4.1 Opening and Reception

Opening hours are
9am to 5pm Monday to Thursday
9am – 1pm Friday

The Association believes that first impressions should be positive and upon entering the offices the following are provided:

- level access at ground floor level.
- a welcoming environment that is clean and tidy.
- reception and private interviewing rooms.
- play facilities for children.

- leaflets detailing the services provided by Moray Housing Partnership as well as other services provided by other agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, relationship breakdown.
- adequate seating.
- newspapers and magazines in reception.
- reception staff (including temporary cover) who are clearly identifiable by the use of an ID badge.

- an appointments system.
- staff who are friendly, patient, helpful and presentable and who are able to deal with queries competently.
- water machine.
- access to toilets provided on request.
- panic buttons are in operation in reception and the interviewing rooms.
- a secure letterbox is available on the ground floor for customer to deliver mail and cheques for payment of rent outwith office hours.

4.2 Telephone Accessibility

Operator or First Response

During office opening hours, when a call is received via the main number (01343) 543210 the call is answered by the Receptionist within 4 rings and the following greeting style used.

“Good Morning/Good Afternoon Moray Housing Partnership, <NAME> speaking, how can I help you?”

At lunchtime (1-2pm), at 5pm on weekdays, during staff training periods and during weekends, when the offices are closed, the telephones are diverted to the Answer Machine.

All messages left on the Answer Machine are checked and should be forwarded immediately to the relevant member of staff via an e-mail message.

Direct Dials Calls or Transferred Calls

The following greeting style will be used when taking a call from a customer/tenant:

“Good Morning/Good Afternoon Moray Housing Partnership, <NAME> speaking, how can I help you?”

Calls need to be successful and we aim to deal with the caller’s enquiry in full. Taking a message or transferring the call is the last resort. If a caller needs to be called back, details of the officer, their designation, department and direct line number will be provided, and we will ensure that they are called back within 24 hours. Transferring calls will be kept to a minimum, and staff will explain to the caller what they are doing. Details of who the caller is and what the call is about will be passed on to the other member of staff.

Transferred calls will be answered by the fourth ring with the following greeting style:

Good Morning/Good Afternoon Moray Housing Partnership, <NAME> speaking, how can I help you?

Staff must ensure that, when they are absent from their desk for a long period of time or absent from the office, their phones are either diverted to the main switchboard or their phones are diverted to another relevant member of staff.

During opening hours calls will be answered within 4 rings (about 15 seconds), both at the switchboard and at individual extensions. Once aware of the issue, staff will offer to ring the client back straight away to avoid cost to the customer/tenant.

Sufficient notes of a conversation will be taken, so that any other officer dealing with the case can see the key points raised by the customer, and any agreed actions or outcomes.

At the end of any call, the staff member will:

- confirm all the issues that have been raised.
- summarise what has been agreed.

When it is necessary to take a message for a colleague, the person taking the message will let the caller know when the colleague will be next back in the office.

Each message will include the following:

- name of the caller.
- address of the caller.
- contact numbers – home and mobile.
- nature of query.
- date and time of call.
- information already provided.

When staff return to the office, messages will be returned during the course of the day, or following the caller's wishes if different.

If the customer is unavailable when staff try to return a call, they will:

- leave a message with an adult, or on an answering machine
- keep trying for 2 days
- if it is known that the caller works/available in the evening only, the officer will call outside office hours.
- if no contact has been made after 2 days, send a letter explaining that they have attempted to return the call, and asking the customer to get back in touch. A standard letter is at Appendix I.

4.3 Interviews in the Office

The waiting time for Visitors to MHP with an appointment is a maximum of five minutes beyond the appointed time. If a tenant/customer comes to the office without an appointment, a member of staff from the relevant team will see them if necessary. The

tenant/customer will be seen within 10 minutes and also advised of the expected waiting time. If the member of staff cannot deal with the customer's query, they will check if another member of staff could resolve the query. Every effort will be made to resolve the query. If the query remains unresolved, an appointment will be made either for the tenant/customer to come back another day or for a member of staff to visit them at home. This appointment will be made immediately.

Tenants/Customers with confidential or sensitive issues, or at their request, will be seen in the private interview room. These interviews will not be conducted in the reception area. The only exception to this may be where the customer has threatened violence. If the interview room is busy, the customer will be advised of the expected waiting time. The member of staff will give their name and job designation, take the customer's name and address, be courteous and efficient and will summarise the interview and give a plan of action so the customer knows what is happening.

If the issue cannot be resolved, the tenant/customer should be provided with a complaint form and accompanying complaints procedure.

4.4 Dealing with Rude or Aggressive Customers

Violence is 'any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work'. Therefore a violent individual is 'any person who is abusing, threatening or assaulting in circumstances relating to the workplace'.

Verbal abuse and threats are the most common types of incident. Physical attacks are comparatively rare.

The telephone

Staff will not accept rude, threatening or abusive language from customers. Staff may terminate a call in such circumstances. They will first warn the tenant/customer that this will happen. Staff will never respond to such calls by being rude or abusive themselves, as this may constitute gross misconduct. If a call has been terminated, a file note will be made and a copy e-mailed to the relevant Line Manager/Director. The Line Manager will

ring the customer within 24 hours or will write within 48 hours if there is no telephone number to confirm:

- the reasons why the conversation was terminated.
- that it is not appropriate to deal with staff in this way.
- they will be happy to deal with the customer's query provided they are not rude, threatening or abusive.

Staff will continue to provide a service to such customers, and cannot refuse to deal with any customer. However if the customer continues to be rude or aggressive, the line manager will advise staff on appropriate responses.

Should the same customer ring back before the line manager has contacted them, the officer will deal with the call if the customer has stopped being rude or abusive. If the customer continues to be rude, the call will be terminated, again after warning the customer that this will happen.

Callers to the Office

Staff should be able to expect that callers to the office will be reasonably polite and courteous. If a customer has a history of rude or threatening behaviour, two members of staff will see the customer. Should a customer become rude, threatening or aggressive, the interview will be terminated and the customer advised. Assistance will be sought from the line manager, or Director. The customer may be asked to leave and if necessary the Police called. A file note will be written up including:

- an account of what happened.
- details of the victim(s), the assailant(s) and any witnesses.
- the outcome.
- working time lost to both the individual(s) affected and to the organisation as a whole.
- details of the location of the incident.

The file note will be placed on the customer's file. Should the panic alarms be activated (in reception or in the interview room), all staff members will follow the panic alarm procedures. Any customer who has obviously been drinking will not be interviewed and will be given another appointment.

Persistent rude, threatening or violent behaviour from a customer

Where a customer is deemed to have repeated rude or threatening behaviour over a period of 3 months, the following action will be taken:

The Officer will produce a report for the Director to summarise the individual file notes that exist and include an account of what happened, the number of incidents that took place and the outcome. The report will end with recommendation for further action. The Director may decide to implement any combination of the following options:

- mark a tenant's file (both on server and tenant file) as a violent subject.
- issue a ban on the tenant from visiting the office or calling the office.
- ban all visits to the customer's home.
- ban sole officer visits to the customer's home.
- commence legal proceedings.
- seek an injunction against the tenant.

Once a decision is made, the customer will be informed in writing within 48 hours including the reasons for the decision. The customer will continue to receive services that MHP is legally bound to provide. All relevant staff will be informed of the decision and provided with guidance on how to abide by the decision. Any further incidents of rude, threatening behaviour will be reported to the Director.

4.5 Signing in and out keys

While in MHP's possession, all keys must be kept in a secure cabinet while not in use by staff or contractors. A key log is kept in reception.

Receptionist will be responsible for the signing in and out of keys. All staff members must give receptionist keys personally to sign in and may not sign out keys without receptionist present.

- Receptionist must record any delivery of keys into the key receipt book.
- Housing Team should be advised by email when keys are received in office. Details to be recorded are date, number of keys and who keys were received from. Receptionist should also sign to say keys have been received.
- If more than one key has been received from former tenant, separate keys and label before placing in key cabinet.
- If at end of tenancy, the number of keys returned to Moray Housing Partnership is less than the number issued, the locks should be changed to ensure future security of the property.
- Key cabinet should remain locked at all times. Keys for the cabinet will be kept with receptionist with a spare in the safe.
- Housing Officers, Clerk of Works and Repairs Assistant should inform receptionist of any lock changes so this can also be recorded. Old keys for that property should then be discarded.
- All keys should be handed to the new tenant on the day of signing and a note in the file should be made. If any keys are still signed out to contractors an arrangement should be made to deliver keys to tenant as soon as possible.

Follow the above process for signing keys out.

Receptionist should do a spot check on the key cabinet every month to ensure no keys are held that should be with tenants.

4.6 Home Visits

There are important Staff Safety issues to be considered when visiting people in their homes.

- staff will not enter tenant's homes, without the express permission of the tenant or without giving notice, except in maintenance emergencies, or medical emergencies.
- staff will not enter homes where only minors are present.
- if a member of staff feels at risk at any time he/she must contact the Police and/or the Director or Corporate & Housing Information Officer at MHP offices to seek assistance.
- if a customer is not available then a calling card will be left asking them to contact the relevant officer.

Home visits are inappropriate where:

- the query can easily be dealt with by telephone.
- the customer has threatened or used violence in the past - staff will not visit the customer alone, or arrange for the customer to come into the office.
- the customer would prefer to come to the office.

Visits will be carried out within 7 working days of the requests, unless the matter is urgent – e.g. harassment – in which case the visit will be carried out within 48 hours, or sooner if possible.

Punctuality and reliability are important to MHP. Care will be taken when booking home visits to ensure it is possible to reach every appointment on time.

If a visiting officer is delayed or running late, they will attempt to contact the customer directly, or call the office to forward a message on to the customer. The customer will be

given the option of waiting (unless it is so late that the officer will not be able to make the visit at all), or making another appointment convenient to them.

All staff carry ID cards. The ID cards will be shown to the customer before entering their home. The reasons for the visit will be clearly stated at the beginning of the visit. The customer's home will be treated with respect, in particular staff will be:

- asked before using any facilities.
- not smoke.
- not take calls via mobile telephone, unless connected to the home visit.

Some customers may prefer that visitors do not enter their home. Unless the specific reason for the visit is to inspect the property, and the customer has been notified of this in advance, officers will respect this wish and not insist on being allowed in. Appointments at the office will be made to discuss private and confidential or very sensitive matters.

The expectations about the way in which staff will conduct themselves during a home visit are:

- being polite.
- listening and not interrupting.
- treating the query and customer as important.
- dealing with the query as fully as possible.
- taking cultural diversity into account – e.g. some customers may request that shoes are removed before entering their home.

At the end of the visit the member of staff will:

- confirm that all issues have been dealt with.
- summarise what has been agreed, or the position if agreement cannot be reached.

- confirm time-scales for work or responses.

Visiting officers will ensure they are prepared with the appropriate paperwork, forms etc. they are likely to need during the visit. In exceptional circumstances unannounced visits may be made (for example if investigating subletting or if concerned about the wellbeing of a customer who staff have been unable to contact or for Health and Safety reasons).

4.7 Correspondence

- incoming mail will be opened by either the Director or the Corporate & Housing Information Officer, logged in the mail book, and distributed to staff on the morning of receipt.
- letters will be acknowledged within 3 working days of receipt if a full response/reply is not going to be possible within 5 working days.
- all correspondence will be word processed to a minimum font size of 12 point, in Times New Roman.
- letters will be concise and positive, and free from errors.
- information leaflets and forms will be sent out quickly.
- letters will contain all necessary information and answer the original query.
- appropriate vocabulary and style will be used in letters to ensure clarity and the use of jargon or obscure words will be avoided.
- letters will explain what action has been taken or why no action can be taken.
- officers will give their name and job title, telephone number and email addresses. Some letters may need to be approved by the Director where appropriate.
- the use of e-mail or fax is encouraged providing they are sent in accordance with The Moray Council IT Policy and where the message is to be sent to a business contact. For other customers of the Partnership however, messages will normally be sent by letter unless the customer has contacted the Partnership by fax or e-mail. In these cases the same medium can be used for the Partnerships reply.
- all correspondence, including copies of e-mails, will be placed on the customer's file or other relevant file within 10 working days.

4.8 Holidays

When staff are taking leave they will:

- arrange with Reception to have their telephone diverted to the main switchboard.
- Advise The Moray Council Helpdesk of annual leave and activate the use the 'Out of Office Assistant' on the e-mail system advising of their return date and an alternative person to contact.
- notify the Receptionist via e-mail with details of any forthcoming leave.

If a member of staff is likely to be away for more than 2 days, their Line Manager will:

- make arrangements to check e-mail for any urgent items.
- arrange for correspondence to be checked and dealt with as appropriate.
- arrange for any telephone messages to be dealt with as appropriate.

4.9 Sickness

If a member of staff reports in sick, their Line Manager will check the Office Diary or Outlook Calendar for any appointments and arrange for their customers to be contacted before midday on the first day of the sickness. It may be possible to postpone appointments or it may be necessary for the appointment to be covered by a colleague. Outlook calendars will be kept up-to-date and detailed along with the Office Diary on the secure server.

4.10 Language Issues

Some customers do not understand English. It is part of our customer care policy to do all we can to ensure we can communicate effectively with all our customers.

If we are aware a customer cannot read English, but can read a different language, staff will arrange for correspondence to be translated and sent out in the relevant language. We will seek to provide information in various other formats such as Braille, information on

tape and use of sign language interpreters to meet the communication needs of our customers.

4.11 Confidentiality

Customers have a right to expect that contact with them and any information received will be treated as confidential. Officers will maintain high standards of confidentiality at all times and will:

- not discuss one customer with another.
- not leave files, correspondence etc, lying around on view or overnight in the car.
- leave desks clear of files or correspondence each evening
- not gossip about customers' issues.
- only seek relevant information from or about customers.
- comply with relevant legislation.
- lock filing cabinets/cupboards at the end of each day.
- Keep any files taken home in a secure place.

When seeking personal/sensitive information from customers, the customer will be informed of the reason why the data is being collected, e.g. monitoring purposes. The customer will also be advised that the information will not be used for other purposes. It may be necessary to divulge confidential information from time to time, when attempting to trace former customers for example, or under the terms of an Information Sharing Protocol. All requests for personal information from customers or other parties (including statutory authorities) will be in writing and in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Any requests received will be discussed with the Director before any response is provided.

5. MONITORING

5.1 The Corporate & Housing Information Officer is responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the policy.

- 5.2 Surveys and mystery shopping will be arranged regularly to ensure that the Partnership is following this policy.

6. STAFF TRAINING

- 6.1 Staff will be trained in the implementation of the policy. There will be thorough induction training for new staff and regular updates for all staff to ensure that customers are put first.

7. REVIEW

- 7.1 The Customer Care Policy will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Partnership's staff and committee. The review will ensure that the policy takes into account changes in statutory guidance and developing good practice.