



POLICIES

CUSTOMER CARE POLICY

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Stonewall Housing believes in a strong customer care ethos. Stonewall Housing recognises that meeting the needs of our tenants and clients is central to customer focus and that we must both listen and respond to the wishes of the people we serve.
- 1.2. Stonewall Housing believes that the provision of services which are accessible, reliable, flexible, provide reasonable choice and treat service users with respect is key to providing excellent customer-focused services.
- 1.3. Stonewall Housing believes that developing services in consultation with service users is essential in implementing our strong customer care ethos.
- 1.4. This document identifies the policies, standards and procedures to be followed by Stonewall Housing's staff in the provision of services to tenants and advice service clients.
- 1.5. We aim to:
 - Provide a customer orientated service that is value driven and puts the customer first
 - Provide a high standard of service with our resources
 - Employ staff who are informed and helpful and who can communicate effectively with tenants, advice service clients, and other professionals.
 - Set and monitor service standards and take action to improve services as necessary
 - Be open to our customers' ideas
 - Provide tenants and advice service clients with information about policies and services
 - Provide opportunities for tenants and advice service clients to influence decisions on the type and range of services offered
 - Respect tenants' and advice service clients' right to confidentiality
 - Respond to complaints positively and quickly
 - Put right errors that come to light or are brought to Stonewall Housing's attention
 - Operate in a spirit of fairness and equality of opportunity for all our customers.

2. Contacting Stonewall Housing

- 2.1. The main office is open from 9.30 am to 1.00 pm and 2.00pm to 5.30 pm Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays).
- 2.2. Tenants and clients can telephone the office during working hours to talk to a member of staff.
- 2.3. Tenants or clients who wish to visit the main office to meet with a member of staff should arrange an appointment in advance.
- 2.4. In line with best health and safety practice, tenants, clients and other visitors will not normally be permitted into the main office without a prearranged

appointment. Anyone who does so will be asked to contact the organisation via telephone to arrange an appointment.

- 2.5. Offices in the houses are open at set times each week, and up to date information on opening times will be provided to all tenants.
- 2.6. Advice surgeries are at set times each week, and information about opening times and locations will be made widely available.
- 2.7. Telephone calls will be answered within 6 rings. At times when either the main office or offices in the houses are closed an answerphone will be provided.
- 2.8. The person answering the phone will be helpful and courteous. If the person the caller needs to speak to is unavailable they will be given the option of either leaving a message on voicemail or having a message taken by the person answering the call. We aim to respond to all messages within 24 hours. If the person is not going to be available for longer than 24 hours this will be explained to the caller, and if the matter requires urgent attention the telephone call or message will be passed on to the Line Manager who will decide on the action they wish to be taken.
- 2.9. All correspondence should be sent to the main office. The Administrator will record correspondence upon receipt, and will then pass it on to the appropriate member of staff. All correspondence will be replied to within 10 working days. The response will be in plain English, free of jargon and clearly and professionally presented. The member of staff dealing with the letter will sign the response in their own name and state the title of their post.
- 2.10. Members of staff will check their email account for incoming messages at least four times a day. All emails will be replied to within two working days, unless the recipient is on annual leave. Members of staff who know they will be out of the office for more than two working days will activate 'Out of the Office Auto Reply'. The Administrator will ensure this is activated for members of staff who are on sick leave for more than two working days. Email responses will be in plain English, free of jargon and clearly and professionally presented. The member of staff dealing with the email will sign the response in their own name and state the title of their post.

3. Information

- 3.1. Stonewall Housing will provide the information required to all tenants as set out in The Assured Tenants Charter.
- 3.2. All tenants will be given a Tenant's Handbook when they move into Stonewall Housing property which provides information on a range of housing management and supported housing policies. These will include:
 - Tenancy conditions and tenants rights
 - A copy of the Assured Tenants Charter
 - Supported Housing policy
 - Equal Opportunities policy
 - Repairs and maintenance procedures
 - Rent setting policy and rent collection arrangements
 - Harassment policy

- Consultation and tenant participation policy
- 3.3. Stonewall Housing will make available information on its Supported Housing Policy and Complaints Policy to all applicants.
- 3.4. Stonewall Housing will make available information on the Advice Operational Policy to all enquirers as requested.
- 3.5. Data Protection:
- 3.5.1. The Data Protection Act 1998 gives members of the public a right to see any information about them. Stonewall Housing is committed to this requirement.
- 3.5.2. To ensure compliance with the Data Protection Act Stonewall Housing is registered with the Data Protection Registrar.
- 3.5.3. Stonewall Housing recognises that it must gain consent, preferably written, from those individuals about whom it keeps personal information.
- 3.5.4. Stonewall Housing recognises that tenants, applicants, advice service users and other individuals about whom personal information is held have the right to:
- Have access to the information held about them;
 - To receive recognition for damage suffered if information is inaccurate or information is lost or disclosed without consent;
 - Have incorrect personal information corrected or erased.
- 3.6. Stonewall Housing has procedures for dealing with:
- Requests for access to personal information
 - Requests for personal information from tenants, applicants, advice service users and third parties, and guidelines for giving out information.

4. Confidentiality

- 4.1. Stonewall Housing recognises tenants, applicants and advice service users' rights to have information held about them in a confidential manner. Stonewall Housing accepts fully the responsibility set out in the Data Protection Act and Access to Personal Information Act and undertakes not to divulge information except in circumstances allowed for in the relevant Acts.
- 4.2. Stonewall Housing has a Confidentiality Policy setting out principles and guidelines for dealing with confidential information. This policy is available to all tenants, applicants and advice service users.

5. Complaints

- 5.1. It is recognised that despite Stonewall Housing's standards, there may be occasions when tenants or advice service users are dissatisfied with the service because standards have not been met. Stonewall Housing will use its best endeavours to resolve complaints before complainants feel obliged to take legal action or take the matter to the Ombudsman service.
- 5.2. All complaints will be dealt with under the Complaints Policy. Information on the Complaints Policy will be provided to all tenants and made available to advice service users.

6. Consultation

- 6.1. Stonewall Housing believes developing services in consultation with service-users, stakeholders and external agencies is a key way of implementing its strong customer care ethos. Unless we know what our customers want, we have no alternative than to make assumptions and design services based on a combination of expert knowledge and experience of delivery and guess work about the way our clients will respond. This is not sufficient.
- 6.2. Stonewall Housing will follow these key principles of customer feedback in it's consultation process:
 - 6.2.1. We should listen and respond to customers. We should aim to measure and respond to the satisfaction of our customers, establishing the key components of satisfaction.
 - 6.2.2. Segmenting customers. Stonewall Housing's tenants and advice clients are not an homogeneous group. While many of them may share similar experiences, we need to understand varieties of expectation and experience of different groups or we risk offering inappropriate services.
 - 6.2.3. Seeking to understand the factors which drive satisfaction. Stonewall Housing needs to know the factors which 'make a difference' for people through survey evidence or we risk creating disappointment when we make changes based on inaccurate assumption.
- 6.3. Particular to the housing management and support services:
 - 6.3.1. Stonewall Housing wishes to involve tenants in the management of their homes and will seek tenants views about changes which will directly affect them, and about the services provided. The outcome of their responses will be taken into account when decisions about service changes and developments are taken.
 - 6.3.2. Stonewall Housing's policies and practises relating to tenant involvement are set out in the Tenant Participation Strategy, which will be regularly reviewed and updated.
- 6.4. Particular to the housing advice service
 - 6.4.1. Stonewall Housing will seek to obtain the views of advice service users on the service on a regular basis both through direct contact with service users and feedback from other agencies. The detailed mechanisms will be set out in the Advice Service Feedback Strategy.