

Mid Devon District Council

HOUSING SERVICES

OUR SERVICE STANDARDS

**‘What our Service Standards
are and what you can expect
from us’**

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Our aim

Our aim is:

To give homes in areas that people feel proud to live in.

1. We will be open, honest and fair in all we do
2. We will listen to your views and treat you as individuals making sure that we meet your needs
3. We will work with you and other agencies to support local areas
4. We will work with you to improve our service
5. We will achieve greater value for money

Our aim is to set a number of Service Standards that explain to you (our tenants) the service you can expect from us.

You can expect the highest standards of service from us. These Service Standards were written and agreed by our Service Standards Review Group. This is a group of tenants who worked with us to make our service better.

These standards show what you (our tenants) think are the most important topics. By telling you what you can expect from us, you will know when we are failing to meet these standards. If this happens, we want you to tell us about it so that we can put things right and learn from our mistakes.

1. CUSTOMER CARE AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION STANDARD

We will make sure that all members of staff comply with the following standards for all our services:

Customer Care

We will:

1. Comply with our Corporate Customer Care Charter
2. Be approachable
3. Be friendly and polite when we speak to you
4. Listen and communicate well so we meet your needs
5. Wear the right health and safety items
6. Deal with your requests, questions and concerns within agreed timescales
7. Make sure that staff and contractors show proof of identity when you visit our offices or when we arrange a home visit
8. Make sure we fully understand your question and take action as needed
9. Respect your privacy, maintain confidentiality and make sure that your details are kept in line with the Data Protection Act 1998
10. Suggest other agencies who offer advice

Telephone

We will:

1. Answer the telephone within 20 seconds (6rings)
2. Greet you in a polite way and give our name and service area
3. Use clear, helpful language
4. Re-direct your call as needed and tell you who you are being put through to and the service area they work in
5. Divert our telephones when we are away from our desks so that you can speak to someone when you call. If this is not possible, we will divert your call to an answerphone where you can leave a message

Written correspondence

We will:

1. Respond fully to all correspondence (letters and faxes) within ten working days and emails within five working days. If there is a delay, we will make contact with you to explain why
2. Make sure that correspondence is in 'plain language' or in a format that suits your needs, should we be aware of this
3. Be accurate, especially when using or referring to names
4. Include a named person, telephone number and email address in all our correspondence
5. Make sure we explain how to contact us if you need correspondence in a different format or language

Home visits

We will:

1. Arrive at your home within the agreed appointment timeslot. If we are delayed we will telephone you to let you know
2. Give you advance warning if we have to cancel an appointment and offer you a new date and time
3. Not enter your home unless you or another responsible adult is present
4. Not smoke or drink alcohol in your home
5. Respect your religious and cultural beliefs and practices (where known). We will arrange appointments around festivals of religion, faith or belief whenever possible
6. Not use offensive language (including avoiding the inappropriate use of names which are held to be sacred, should this cause you offence)

Office appointments

We will:

1. Make sure that if you have an appointment, you will be seen within ten minutes of the appointment time. If there is a delay, we will make contact with you to explain why
2. Make every effort for another officer to see you if the officer you came to see is absent
3. Make every effort to see you when an appointment has not been made
4. Tell you straight away if an appointment has to be cancelled and offer you a new one
5. Give a safe, clean and tidy, comfortable, smoke-free environment in our offices
6. Offer private meeting rooms where available
7. Have a range of information leaflets

Online services

We will:

1. Make sure you have the option of making online payments to your rent account(s)
2. Update our website when new information is available; making sure this is easy to understand
3. Keep information up-to-date

2. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY STANDARD

We will give equal access to our services. We value the different groups of tenants that we serve. We aim to make sure that we treat you as individuals and do the best we can to meet your needs.

You can expect fair treatment regardless of your age, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or faith.

The Equality and Diversity Service Standard shows our commitment to making sure you get equal access to services.

We will:

1. Make sure our services are accessible for everyone
2. Make sure our policies, procedures and practices do not cause a person to be treated unfairly
3. Arrange for you to get information in a way you prefer such as large print, audio, Braille, sign language or translation and interpretation if English is not your first language
4. Write to you in plain English or in a way that meets your needs
5. Make our offices accessible for everybody
6. Give the same standard of service wherever you live or whoever you are

3. TENANT INVOLVEMENT STANDARD

Tenant involvement is as important to us, as it is to you. We would like you to have to have your say on how the services you get are planned and paid for. This will help us make our services better and make sure that you get the best value for your money.

We will:

1. Offer a range of ways for you to get involved
2. Ask you to become involved in the decisions we make about your home, area and our Housing Service
3. Involve you when changing our policies and the Tenancy Agreement
4. Give training, support and advice to help you get involved
5. Offer help towards the cost of meetings (such as venue hire, transport and childcare)
6. Give feedback from consultation and tell you about service improvements
7. Regularly review tenant involvement to make sure it is working well and takes into account your feedback

4. MANAGING YOUR HOME AND TENANCY STANDARD

We will make sure that you can enjoy living in your home and try to make your areas a safe place to live. We take all forms of anti-social behaviour seriously.

We understand that money problems sometimes occur; you can seek help from us and we will do our best to work with you to solve them.

Anti-social behaviour

We will:

1. Acknowledge all complaints of anti-social behaviour within one working day
2. Respond to reports of harassment, threats or actual violence within one working day
3. Respond to other complaints of anti-social behaviour within ten working days
4. Remove obscene or racist graffiti within 24 hours of this being reported to us.
5. Assign a Housing Officer to look into your complaint
6. Offer a range of support services to give help and advice
7. Discuss the situation with you and tell you what we can and cannot do and agree an action plan
8. Contact and work with other agencies that may be able to help
9. Work closely with you and tell you about progress made with your case
10. Look into all reports of anti-social behaviour quickly and use a range of methods to try to resolve your complaint
11. Take legal action for serious acts of anti-social behaviour
12. Take legal action, when needed, against any person who continues to cause anti-social behaviour
13. Support and protect, where possible, witnesses and victims of anti-social behaviour
14. Repair any damage caused to your home where you have been a victim of anti-social behaviour and carry out any security measures to minimise security risks within one working day where there has been an act of violence
15. Deal with all physical damage to Council property from racial harassment within 24 hours

Rent and money advice

We will:

1. Assign a Housing Officer to give housing advice and support
2. At the start of your tenancy, give you details of your rent and any service charges you may have to pay, when to pay and how to pay
3. Offer a range of payment methods
4. Offer you money and debt advice if you fall behind with your rent
5. Agree a repayment plan with you if you fall behind with your rent
6. Suggest other agencies who offer advice
7. Help you complete Housing Benefit forms
8. Take legal action, when needed, against any person who continues to fall behind with their rent
9. Keep you informed of any court action
10. Continue to recover any former arrears when a tenancy comes to an end
11. Tell you in advance about changes to rent or other charges
12. Send you a rent statement every three months

Tenancy management

We will:

1. Assign a Housing Officer to give advice and support
2. Explain to you at sign-up, the terms of the Tenancy Agreement (which explains your rights and responsibilities as a tenant) and how we deal with breaches
3. Give all new tenants information about their tenancy
4. Visit all new tenants within six weeks of the start of their tenancy
5. Help you with mutual exchange applications and decide within 42 days
6. Give you a decision within ten working days for requests to succeed, assign or change your tenancy; if there is a delay we will tell you and explain why
7. Offer advice and support if you ask for permission to carry out changes to your home
8. If necessary, refer you to Planning and Building Services to check if Planning Permission or Building Regulations are needed for any changes to your home
9. Maintain garage and garage ground rent plot waiting lists and let garages and plots in line with our Garage Management Policy

5. REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE STANDARD

We will give an efficient and high quality day-to-day repairs and maintenance service.

Maintaining your home

We will:

1. Make an appointment with you to carry out work when you report a repair and will give you a job number for reference
2. Complete repairs within the following timescales:
 - Priority 1 – Emergency repairs within 24 hours
 - Priority 2 – Urgent repairs within seven 7 calendar days
 - Priority 3 – Routine repairs within 28 calendar days
3. Where possible, complete your repair at the first visit
4. Give an emergency repair service 24 hours a day, 365 days a year
5. Arrange an inspection if you are unhappy with the repair
6. Leave your home clean and tidy after any repair work
7. Keep noise to a minimum and use dustsheets to look after your carpets and belongings
8. Respect your privacy when carrying out repairs at your home and knock before entering rooms in use
9. Be aware of health and safety, keeping all materials and tools in a safe place and tell you if we need to block doorways, stairs etc
10. Tell you if we need to turn off services before doing so and tell you how long they are likely to be out of use
11. Clear away all our materials and rubbish before leaving your home
12. Tell you if we need to leave during the course of work, the reason why and when we expect to return

Gas and solid fuel servicing

We will:

1. Service all gas and solid fuel systems within 12 months of the last service date
2. Send an appointment letter before the service
3. Use qualified Gas Safe engineers to carry out work to gas appliances
4. Carry out an audit check on 10% of all services and safety checks completed

Aids and adaptations

We will:

1. Assign a Housing Officer to give advice and support
2. Make sure you have access to equipment that will help you with daily tasks
3. Adjust your home with minor adaptations (costing under £250.00) such as fitting hand rails and grab rails if needed
4. Refer you to an Occupational Therapist if you need major adaptations to your home (costing more than £250.00) such as fitting a stair lift
5. Help you find a home that better suits your needs if your home is thought to be inappropriate to change
6. Suggest other agencies who offer advice

Maintenance works

We will:

1. Carry out improvements to make sure your home meets the Decent Homes Standard
2. Regularly test all electrical systems and wiring within your home
3. Regularly test water systems for Legionella
4. Regularly test your solid fuel and gas heating systems
5. Maintain a record of asbestos in your home, regularly assess and record its condition and carry out repairs or replacements as and when needed
6. Give you at least two weeks' notice of work starting, details of the work planned, start and finish times, who to contact and details of the contractor doing the work
7. Learn from feedback and try to use this to improve our service
8. Give you advice and guidance leaflets for new fittings such as heating, wiring, etc

6. ESTATE MANAGEMENT STANDARD

We will provide decent homes within our area that are in clean and safe places to live. We aim to make sure that any issues about the management of our estates are recognised and action taken to resolve them.

We will:

1. Remove offensive graffiti on our estates and garage sites within one working day after being told about it
2. Remove general graffiti on our estates and garage sites within 14 working days after being told about it
3. Investigate reports of abandoned vehicles within 24 hours and take the appropriate action
4. Inspect trees on housing land which are thought to be dangerous or causing a problem and if necessary arrange for removal
5. Carry out neighbourhood walkabouts for each estate; we will check footpaths, untidy gardens, fly tipping, litter and illegally parked vehicles
6. Put a timetable of neighbourhood walkabouts on our website and have this available at meetings with tenants
7. Carry out health and safety and fire risk assessments regularly for all communal areas within our housing stock
8. Remove syringes from our estates within one working day of being told about them
9. Make sure our grounds maintenance team maintain grassed areas, including trees, shrubs and communal areas

7. ALLOCATIONS AND LETTINGS STANDARD

Our Housing Needs section helps those who need social housing to access Devon Home Choice, the Council's housing register. The section allocates Mid Devon's housing stock in line with the Devon Home Choice Policy and Local Lettings Policy.

Options, rights and assistance

We aim to make sure that if you are asking us for housing and advice, you are told your options and rights. The Council does not have a duty to give everyone social housing, but we will help you, either directly or with the aid of one of our partner agencies, to find your own housing if you are not eligible or are already adequately housed.

We will:

1. Give help and advice on ways of solving housing issues, or direct you to someone else who can help
2. Suggest other agencies who offer help and advice
3. Give help and advice if there are difficulties between you and your landlord
4. Explain about welfare benefits available
5. Manage your application for housing efficiently

Application and process

We aim to give an excellent housing advice service; this standard outlines the service you can expect when you contact us.

We will:

1. Offer private interviews within three working days; if your housing problem is urgent, we will try and see you on the same day
2. Offer a home visit within five working days if you are not able to come to the office
3. Follow the Devon Home Choice policy and procedure when processing application forms (either on-line or paper form)
4. Acknowledge all application forms within 20 working days of receipt
5. Acknowledge all review requests within seven working days from receipt and respond in writing to the applicant within 56 days from receipt of request
6. Refer to the Council's local lettings policy when allocating our properties
7. Advertise 'void' properties within five working days of being told of the termination date
8. Allocate Council properties within 20 working days of the property becoming void
9. Tell you if you have been successful in your bid for a property within three working days
10. Give you three working days to answer an offer before offering it to the next eligible applicant
11. Give you the chance to look at a property offered to you before you accept/decline it

8. HOME OWNERSHIP AND LEASEHOLD MANAGEMENT STANDARD

We will be the first point of contact for applications and questions about buying a property from us.

We will:

1. Check eligibility and tell you if you have the right to buy within four weeks of receiving your application; if your application is refused, we will let you know the reason for refusal and tell you of your appeal rights
2. Send you the Offer Document (Section 125 Notice), (if you are eligible to buy your property) within eight weeks if your property is a house or within 12 weeks if your property is a flat or maisonette
3. Send you the Offer Notice making sure it has information about the value of your home, the amount of discount you are entitled to and the price you would need to pay to buy your home
4. Give you estimates of service charges and major improvement costs for the first five years of a lease when we sell a flat or maisonette
5. Offer you the chance to ask for a re-determination of value if you do not agree with the valuation of your home; you have three months to ask for this
6. Give you the chance to decide if you wish to carry on with buying your home within 12 weeks of receiving the Offer Document
7. Pass on your acceptance of the right to buy to our Legal Services to start the conveyance process
8. Send you a satisfaction survey after the completion of the sale asking for feedback on the service you received
9. Send service charge bills to leaseholders by October each year
10. Talk to leaseholders on all major repairs to their building that cost more than £250, in line with legislation

9. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT STANDARD

We aim to achieve high standards of service. It is important that you know how well we are doing. Our performance management standards show how we measure our standard of service.

We will:

1. Monitor performance against tenant set targets and give information in our landlord's newsletter, at meetings and on our website
2. Benchmark against other Housing Services
3. Send out satisfaction questionnaires and gather feedback
4. Carry out random inspections of our properties to make sure that repairs and maintenance works have been carried out to a good standard

What We Expect From You

We feel that our relationship with you is a two-way process which involves us all working together.

In return we ask that you:

1. Are polite when speaking to our staff
2. Do not use foul or abusive language
3. Be patient with us at busy times
4. Give us information when we ask for it
5. Attend appointments on time

We thank you for your help and co-operation.

Reviewing our Standards

We will review these standards regularly to make sure they continue to reflect changes in legislation, regulatory guidance, principles of best practice and customer feedback.

The next review is due 2014.

Contact Details

If you have any queries about our service standards or feel that we are not meeting them, please contact us by one of the following:

- Telephone the Council's main switchboard 01884 255255
- Write to Mid Devon District Council
Housing Services
Phoenix House
Phoenix Lane
Tiverton
Devon
EX16 6PP
- Email the Housing Service on htenancy@middevon.gov.uk
- Fax the Housing Service on 01884 234907
- Go online and log a complaint, comment or compliment at www.middevon.gov.uk
- Complete and return the "Have your say" leaflet (available from all our offices)
- Make an enquiry in person at one of our offices:

Phoenix House, Phoenix Lane, Tiverton
9.00am – 5.00pm Monday – Thursday
9.00am – 4.30pm Friday's only

Cullompton Town Hall, High Street, Cullompton
9.00am – 12.00noon Monday & Friday

Crediton Area Office, Market Street, Crediton
9.00am – 5.00pm Monday – Thursday
9.00am – 4.30pm Friday's only

Alternative formats are available and requests will be considered on an individual basis. Please telephone 01884 255255 or email customerfirst@middevon.gov.uk

All details correct at the time of print.