

### **Draft Service Standards June 2005**

The Housing Services Department developed a set of service standards in 2003 as a response to the Housing Inspectorate's re-inspection of the repairs and maintenance service.

The Housing Department has worked in partnership with customer representatives and has decided that these service standards should be reviewed and redeveloped to ensure that they fully reflect changes in what tenants want and expect from the housing services department.

The service standards will be continuously monitored by customers and staff. The achievement of the service standards will be reported regularly in Wear Valley Housing Matters and the Council's annual Best Value Performance Plan.

### **Wear Valley District Council's Housing Vision (draft)**

*"To lead the way towards the very best housing of choice for everyone and contributing to a clean healthy and safe environment that enables communities to learn and grow"*

To achieve the vision the Housing Department has made a commitment to delivering the very best quality in housing services. This commitment is set out in the service standards, which effectively guide excellent service delivery. The council's strategic housing objectives are to:

- Achieve an optimum balance and choice of housing
- Improve community safety and reduce fear of crime
- Deliver a greener, cleaner and healthier environment
- Develop people and communities who can work together and are able to contribute to making real and lasting change

### **Customer Care Statement**

Wear Valley District Council is fully committed to equality of opportunity for all people with positive and fair treatment for all communities regardless of age, colour, ethnic or national origin, nationality, race, religious belief, gender, marital status, sexuality, responsibility for dependants, disability, trade union or political activity and any other disadvantaged group.

We will:

- Provide a friendly and efficient service.
- Provide a service that recognises diversity and meets the different needs of all our customers.
- Provide an open, honest and transparent service.
- Actively involve customers and key local stakeholders in service planning, review, design and delivery.
- Provide opportunities for customers to comment on service changes, developments and improvements and we will demonstrate real improvements as a result.
- Ensure that we provide customers with enough time to read and understand information and we will make ourselves available to answer any questions that customers may have.
- Develop and maintain an action plan in partnership with customers to monitor the delivery and performance of these service standards.
- Take action where problems arise.

### **Language and alternative availability of booklet**

This booklet is about Wear Valley District Council's Housing Service Standards. If you require a copy of this booklet in your language, large print or Braille, please contact our Marketing and Communications Manager on 01388 761958.

### **Accessing our services**

Our call centre is open: Monday to Thursday from 8.30am – 5.00pm  
Friday from 8.30am – 4.30pm

Please contact the Call Centre if:

- You want to report a repair
- You want to check the progress of a repair you have reported
- You want to change an appointment

If you have an emergency for example you have no electricity or a pipe has burst in your home and the Call Centre is closed, you can contact our on call Maintenance Officer. This officer is available 24 hours a day on the following emergency number: 07785 517565.

Please remember that as part of your tenancy agreement you have agreed to be responsible for some repairs. These repairs include:

- Sink plugs and chains
- Internal redecoration
- Light bulbs and tubes
- Sweeping chimneys
- Electrical equipment not owned by the Council – including washers, kettles, TVs and aerials, satellite equipment and cabling
- Fencing including boundary and party fencing

## **Housing reception offices**

### **Main office**

Wear Valley District Council  
Civic Centre  
Crook  
County Durham  
DL15 9ES

Tel: 01388 765 555  
Fax: 01388 766 660

Opening hours: Monday – Thursday 8.30am – 5.30pm  
Friday 8.30am – 4.30pm

Cash office opening hours: Monday – Thursday 9.00am – 4.30pm  
Friday 9.00am – 4.00pm

### **Neighbourhood office**

Woodhouse Close Neighbourhood Office  
64a Proudfoot Drive  
Woodhouse Close  
Bishop Auckland  
County Durham  
DL14 6QT

Tel: 01388 604 568  
Fax: 01388 608479

Opening hours: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday 9.00am – 4.30pm  
Wednesday 12.00pm – 4.30pm  
Friday 8.30am – 4.30pm

Cash office opening hours: 9.00am – 4.00pm

### **Using our reception areas**

- We will ensure that our reception areas are accessible to all.
- We will ensure that all our reception areas are clearly signed.
- We will ensure that our staff wear badges that clearly display their name.
- We will provide easily accessible leaflets and information and we will make it clear that all information is available in different formats, including Braille, audiotape large print and in other languages upon request. A signer can also be arranged for hearing impaired customers upon request.
- We will ensure that reception areas are kept clean and tidy.
- If our offices are closed we will:
  - Give advance warning of the closure by displaying information notices in our reception areas up to one week in advance.
  - Make sure you are aware of when the office will reopen.
  - Provide information about appropriate emergency services and alternative contact details for staff.
- We will ensure that our staff are trained in customer care skills and provide you with a caring, courteous and efficient service.
- We will ensure that the contact details of the appropriate staff, including full name, telephone number and e-mail address are available to all customers.

### **Making appointments and interviewing customers**

- We will try to ensure that if you have an appointment this appointment is kept and we will apologise if we are delayed.
- If we must cancel your appointment we will let you know as soon as we can. We will explain to you why we are cancelling the appointment and we will arrange another appointment with you.
- We will try wherever we can, to offer a choice of appointment times and to meet any needs you may have, that you tell us about.
- We will aim to be on time for appointments and interviews, or we will apologise if we are delayed.
- If we need to visit you, we will provide you with a choice of appointment times.

- If you do not have an appointment our reception areas will operate on a first come first served basis.
- We will ensure that your privacy is respected by providing a private interview room when appropriate, or requested by you.
- We will make sure that you know you can bring someone to an interview with you if this would be helpful.
- We will confirm any agreed action in writing or in an alternative format on request.

### **Writing to you and speaking with you**

- We will answer all letters and requests for information within 5 working days, or if we cannot answer your enquiry within that time, we will contact you to acknowledge your enquiry and explain the delay in giving you a full answer.
- We will write to you in “Plain English”.
- We will ensure that the full address, telephone number and e-mail address of the officer dealing with your enquiry are clear on any correspondence sent to you.
- We will respond to messages left by e-mail within one working day, either answering your enquiry in full, or if we cannot answer your enquiry in full within that time, we will reply to your e-mail acknowledging receipt of your e-mail and informing you of when we will be able to answer your enquiry in full.
- Staff will put an “out of office” message on e-mail addresses which will include the date of the officer’s return to the office and details of other officers to contact in case of an emergency.
- We will answer the telephone within 20 seconds.
- When we answer the telephone we will inform you of our name and what section we work in.
- If we are unable to take your call we may direct you to an answering machine or a voicemail facility, which will take a message and will provide you with details of when the officer you are trying to contact may be available to take your call and the details of other officers you can contact in case of an emergency.
- We will respond to any messages left on answering machines or voicemail within one working day of the officer returning to work.

- We will provide a range of ways to contact us to report repairs and maintenance issues, including a text messaging service and a freephone number.

### **Undertaking works on your home (repairs, maintenance and major works)**

- We will provide an emergency service 24 hours a day 365 days a year.
- We will carry out 93.5% of emergency repairs within 24 hours. We will advise you on whether your repair is an emergency when you report it.
- We will arrange an appointment with you for non emergency repairs where we need access to your home. We will keep at least 95% of these appointments.
- People undertaking work on your home on behalf of the Council will:
  - Be clean and tidy in appearance and polite and courteous in their behaviour.
  - Provide you with proof of identity before entering your home.
  - Explain to you why they are in your home and what work they will be doing.
  - Keep your home safe and secure at all times.
  - Ensure that at the end of each day you will have working gas, water, electrical, heating and cooking services or an alternative.
  - Provide customers with a “satisfaction card” upon completion of the repair, which can be posted to us free of charge to monitor quality and satisfaction.
- We will inspect at least 10% of all works after they have been carried out to ensure quality is maintained.
- We will carry out regular surveys of customers who have had a repair undertaken on their home to monitor the quality of our services.
- Our contractors will provide customers, who do not have English as their first language, with a card explaining who they are and why they are there in a range of different languages. An interpreter can then be arranged.
- We will provide customers with the opportunity to request a female member of staff to be present throughout any contractor works.
- If we propose to carry out major works to your home you can expect us and our partners to:

- Invite you to an open day near to your home if appropriate.
- Provide the details of a named liaison officer who you can contact with any questions, concerns or special requirements you may have.
- Give you 7 days notice before starting work on your home.
- Ensure you are kept warm and comfortable throughout the duration of the works.
- Carry out all works safely and efficiently while you remain in occupation.
- Provide you with day time and out of hours telephone numbers.
- Pay you an allowance towards the cost of redecoration on specific major works such as central heating replacement and kitchen and bathroom replacement.
- Leave your home clean and tidy.
- If we replace a major component in your home, such as a kitchen or a bathroom we will give tenants a choice in the style of replacement where possible.
- You have the right to refuse to let our staff or contractors into your home if you are not comfortable with their behaviour (except emergencies).

### **Anti social behaviour and how it effects you**

Wear Valley District Council will respond to reports of racial harassment and anti social behaviour quickly and effectively.

- We will respond to all complaints of racial harassment and anti social behaviour within 24 hours of your initial complaint.
- We will begin an investigation within 5 working days of receiving your complaint.
- We will inform you of what we have found and the action we have taken within 10 working days.
- We will work in partnership with the police and the council's Anti Social Behaviour Panel to tackle anti social behaviour and fear of anti social behaviour.

If you report behaviour that is not considered to be in breach of the tenancy or leasehold agreement by the Council and for which the Council has no legal powers on which to act we will:

- Write to you within seven working days of receiving your complaint and inform you that there is no action that we can take and provide you with advice on further action you may wish to take.

### **Property services and you**

- We will take precautions to make sure that our properties are safe and secure whilst they are empty.
- We will ensure that all health and safety repairs are carried out to the property before they are let.
- We will undertake “estate inspections” on a quarterly basis inspecting each street and developing an action plan in partnership with customers, councillors and other key local stakeholders should an issue arise.
- We will input your completed housing application form onto the register within 5 days of receiving it.
- We will explain how your points have been worked out and give general advice on how long it may take before an offer of accommodation can be made, when we write to you acknowledging your application to be included on our housing register.

### **What to do if you're not happy?**

Wear Valley District Council's Housing Department is committed to providing the very best quality of housing services to our customers, however we accept that sometimes this may not happen. We hope that you will tell us when mistakes have been made or you have not received the quality of service you expected, so we can improve. You may want to do this by making a complaint.

If you would like to make a complaint you can write to us at:

Complaints  
Housing Services Department  
Civic Centre  
Crook  
County Durham DL15 7ES

You can telephone us on: 01388 765555 or you can e-mail us at: [complaints@wearvalley.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@wearvalley.gov.uk)

Complaint forms are available at our reception areas. You can complete the form and give it to a member of staff, post it to the Civic Centre or you can ask a member of staff help you to complete the form.