



**Homes For Northumberland**

**Housing Service Standards**

**2015**

**Introduction**

Homes for Northumberland is Northumberland County Council’s Housing Management and Maintenance department.

These Service Standards have been developed in consultation with our tenants and leaseholders and set out what you can expect from us and what you can do if they feel these standards have not been met.

By publishing our standards, we aim to make it clear to you when we fall short on service delivery. If this happens, we want you to tell us about it so that we can put things right and learn from our mistakes.

**Customer Service**

**Contacting us**

We will ensure that you can contact us through a range of flexible and convenient channels including face to face visit, telephone, post, email, social media and via our website.

Whichever method you prefer, our staff will always:

* + - be friendly and professional when dealing with your enquiry
* wear a name badge or have appropriate identification when dealing with your enquiry

If you visit one of NCC’s Customer Information Centre’s we will:

* provide assistance and advice in completing application forms
* provide you with a sign-language service if you need it (upon advance request)
* provide an interpretation service if your first language is not English (upon advance request)
* provide information in different languages or in different formats such as large type, Braille, CD or audio tape (upon advance request)
* arrange for you to speak to a member of staff of the same sex as you (upon advance request and depending on staff availability)
* open each Customer Information Centre from 9 am – 5 pm Monday to Friday excluding Bank Holidays (Alnwick Office closes at 4.30 pm)
* aim to see you within 5 minutes of your arrival

If we visit you at home we will:

* leave a calling card if you are out when we visit
* arrange for you to be visited by a member of staff of the same sex as you (upon advance request and depending on staff availability)

If you ring our Customer Contact Centre we will:

* answer your telephone calls within 20 seconds (after the automated message)
* aim to give a full answer to your telephone enquiries without the need to be transferred to anyone else
* provide direct telephone cover between 8 am – 6 pm Monday to Thursday (excluding Bank Holidays) and 8 am – 5 pm Friday
* provide an out of hours service for emergency calls

If you write to us we will:

* acknowledge your letter within 3 working days
* aim to provide a full reply to all written queries within 15 working days

If a response will take longer, we will inform you of this and respond within a mutually agreed timescale

**Customer Feedback**

We want to hear from you if you have any suggestions, compliments or complaints about how we are doing things.

If making a complaint about the way we provide a particular service we will:

* acknowledge a written complaint within 3 working days
* aim to fully resolve the complaint within 15 working days. If a resolution will take longer, we will inform you of this and respond within a mutually agreed timescale
* offer you the opportunity to appeal against a decision via the Complaints Panel
* ask for feedback from you on how we managed your complaint and how we might improve our service
* publish annual information about the number, nature and the resulting service improvements made in response to customer feedback

**Customer Information**

We treat all information you give us in the strictest confidence.

To ensure this we will:

* follow the Data Protection Act 1998 so you can be confident that your information is being processed fairly and lawfully
* provide training on customer confidentiality and Data Protection to every member of staff
* never share personal information about you to a 3rd party unless you have provided written consent for us to do so
* provide you with copies of the information we hold about you within 40 days of receiving a written request from you (charges may apply)

**Your home**

**Major improvements**

We have established a planned major improvement programme running over many years to ensure that standards are maintained in the future.

We will:

* publicise our plans for all planned major improvements to homes each year
* hold an annual exhibition to show you our plans for improving homes in your area
* write to tell you about any improvement work we are planning for your home at least 3 months in advance, where practical
* give you 5 working days notice prior to starting any planned improvements by either writing to you, phoning you or visiting you at home
* wear foot covers, protect your property and possessions with dust sheets where required
* endeavour to make sure that you will be able to use your gas, electricity and water services at the end of each day
* leave your home clean and tidy at the end of each day
* always try to complete the work as agreed. However, if we have to delay the work (for example, because of weather conditions), we will tell you by writing to you, phoning you or visiting you at home
* show you how to use any new fittings and fixtures
* install high-efficiency condensing boilers where possible
* fit user-friendly heating controls to help customers
* provide cavity wall insulation and 250mm loft insulation, where possible
* use ‘safer by design’ replacement external doors and windows, for security and energy efficiency
* offer a choice of unit doors, handles, worktops, taps, vinyl floor tiles and ceramic wall tiles as part of any kitchen replacement project
* offer a choice of bath panels, toilet seat, taps and ceramic wall tiles as part of a bathroom replacement project
* ask for feedback from you on how the work went

**Repairs and maintenance**

We offer a 24/7 emergency repairs service to all our tenants.

We will:

* attend emergency repairs within 24 hours
* attend routine repairs within 30 days
* offer you an appointment, unless your repair is an emergency, either in the morning, afternoon or evening (evenings Monday – Thursday 5 – 7 pm only)
* confirm your appointment time in writing, where practical, telling you what repair has been ordered and how long it will take to do
* text you the night before your appointment (providing we have your current mobile number) to remind you that we will be visiting
* aim to complete all repairs in one visit
* leave your home clean and tidy after the repair is completed
* explain what work has been done, tell you about any problems we have encountered and what we will do about them
* provide you with information on how to use any new fixtures and fittings
* offer a Handyperson service to help you with minor jobs around your home (charges may apply)
* ask for feedback from you on how the work went

**Gas and solid fuel safety**

We know that your safety in your home is important.

We will:

* safety check your gas fire, gas boiler, smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarm, where installed, on an annual basis
* service your coal fires, where installed, twice a year
* confirm your appointment time in writing, where practical, telling you what service has been ordered and how long it will take to do
* leave your home clean and tidy after the safety check is completed
* explain what work has been done, tell you about any problems we have encountered and what we will do about them
* provide you with information on how to use any new fixtures and fittings
* provide you with a copy of the safety certificate for gas and solid fuel checks

**Aids and adaptations**

We know that some tenants require aids and adaptations to their homes in order to help them live safely.

We will:

* publish our timescales for doing aids and adaptations
* visit you in your home 5 working days’ before work is due to begin to discuss the aids and adaptations to be provided
* endeavour to make sure that you will be able to use your gas, electricity and water services at the end of each day
* leave your home clean and tidy after the aid or adaptation is completed
* provide you with information on how to use any new fixtures and fittings
* try to complete the work as agreed. However, if we have to delay the work, we will tell you by writing to you, phoning you or visiting you at home.

**Your Tenancy**

**Moving in**

All tenants need to know about their obligations under a NCC tenancy.

We will:

* give you a tenancy agreement and explain your rights and responsibilities as a tenant and the Council’s responsibilities as a landlord
* inform you of any repairs we still need to do and how long they will take to complete
* inform you of how much your rent and service charge is and how you can pay
* provide you with details of your Housing Officer – your first point of contact for all housing matters
* carry out a welcome visit within two weeks and tell you about the facilities and services we provide
* visit you two times during the first twelve months (if you are on an introductory tenancy)
* give you support to manage your tenancy and help you to contact a specialist agency if you need extra support
* provide support with furniture and decoration where required

**Moving out**

If you want to end your tenancy you must let us know in writing at least 28 days before the date you want your tenancy to end.

We will:

* visit your home within the 28 day notice period to give you advice about
* handing in your keys
* paying any outstanding rent
* paying any outstanding charges including rechargeable repairs
* how to get compensation if you have improved the condition of the property

**Paying rent**

It is important that everyone pays their rent regularly and on time as this is our main source of income.

We will:

* offer you a range of flexible ways to pay your rent including:
  + direct debit straight from your bank account
  + standing order straight from your bank account
  + by phone using your credit or debit card
  + via our website [www.hfn.uk.com](http://www.hfn.uk.com)
  + in person using cash, cheque or debit / credit card at any of our Customer Information Centres
  + at any UK post office using a Paypoint swipe card
* send you a rent statement by post every 3 months
* notify you in writing of any increase in your rent and service charges, within 4 working weeks of the increase
* contact you within 1 working week of falling behind with your rent
* offer a Money Advice service should you require help with budgeting,

benefits or paying your rent

**Anti-social behavior**

Every person has the right to live in the way that they want, as long as it doesn’t affect other people’s quality of life.

To help you do this we will:

* contact you within 1 working day of receiving a report relating to harassment, hate crime, intimidation, physical assault, domestic violence or threats of violence
* contact you within 3 working days of receiving a report relating to damage to property, youth disorder, vehicle disorder and bullying
* contact you within 5 working days or receiving a report relating to any other types of anti-social behaviour
* agree a mutually convenient timescale to update you on how your case is progressing,
* aim to proactively resolve disputes at an early stage
* ask for feedback from you on how we managed your case and how we might improve our service

**Tenant Involvement**

**Getting involved**

We want to ensure everyone has the opportunity to get involved in how we deliver our services.

To help you do this we will:

* provide a flexible range of ways to get involved including
* attending face to face meetings,
* becoming a HfN mystery shopper,
* joining a service improvement group,
* becoming a member of our Scrutiny and Complaints Panel
* attending one of our regular Estate Walkabouts
* undertaking telephone, postal or web based satisfaction surveys
* provide training to groups and individuals to develop skills relevant to your chosen customer involvement activity
* meet any reasonable travel expenses you incur directly relating to the involvement work you are doing with us
* publish annual information about the resulting service improvements made in response to your involvement