

## Our Vision, Values And Objectives

### About Us

We are a new and vibrant, forward-thinking company, owning and managing approximately 5,600 homes within Stafford Borough.

We are a Registered Social Landlord, registered with the Housing Corporation, formed following a positive ballot of Stafford Borough Council tenants in March 2005. We are run by a Board of five tenants, five Council nominees and five independent people, chosen for their skills and experience.

We are committed to delivering a home repair and improvement programme of over £60 million by 2010, together with the other promises made when we were formed.

### Our Vision

To provide quality affordable housing in a safe environment. To strengthen communities in the towns and villages and to provide excellent services for all our customers in partnership.

### Our Values

- **C**ommunicating with one another in a range of ways that are timely and informative
- **A**pproachable so that people can talk with one another, share ideas and remain informed
- **R**especting of each others' differences, values and opinions, treating everybody as we would wish to be treated ourselves
- **E**mpowering of staff, customers and stakeholders to have real and meaningful input into the business
- **S**upportive of each other, offering only constructive criticism and being willing to help to make the service as excellent as we aspire to be

## Our Objectives

Our objectives were written following full consultation with staff, tenants and the Board. The statements reflect the enthusiasm of all stakeholders to create an organisation that strives for excellence in service delivery.

Our objectives are:

1. To deliver the five year promises made at Transfer by 2011
2. Deliver a 3 star excellent housing service by 2009 through innovation, efficiency and strong leadership
3. Manage our resources efficiently and invest in our staff to make SARH a viable company people want to work for
4. Meet the needs of all our customers by putting residents at the heart of the business, transforming services and aiming for top quartile customer satisfaction
5. Invest in our neighbourhoods by planning future investment, delivering decent homes and localising service delivery to improve local communities in partnership with others
6. Manage our business through identifying opportunities for growth, developing a strong corporate identity, sound governance and continuous improvement

## Our Commitment To You

### Our commitment to you

We are committed to providing high-quality customer services and to making sure we shape our services around our customers' needs.

By customers we mean:

- our tenants
- our leaseholders
- residents on our estates
- our staff
- applicants for housing or employment
- anyone requesting or receiving a service from us

Our services will take account of the different needs of our customers and will also recognise that some customers need extra help to use our services. We are committed to not simply 'saying the right thing' but to actually 'doing the right thing'.

We want our customers' experience of dealing with us to be positive and, as far as possible, to meet their needs and expectations. We will provide good quality, clear information, so our customers know about our services.



We will train our staff to help them to deliver the best possible customer service. We will also listen to our customers and learn from our mistakes. We will regularly review our service standards to make sure that they continue to meet our customers' needs and expectations, and improve over time.

## Our Customer Care Charter

### Our Vision:

To provide “Customer First” services that are shaped, influenced and scrutinised by service users and result in consistently high satisfaction ratings, in partnership with our customers.

### Our Objectives:

- To champion Customer Care improvements across the service, sharing and feeding back all developments and issues with colleagues and customers in an open and honest way
- To achieve the Charter Mark (a customer service award) for the company by April 2008
- To strive for excellence, reflecting Stafford and Rural Homes' Vision, Objectives and Values, in all we do
- To ensure that customers get the services they require in a prompt and timely way, and to an agreed high quality standard
- To ensure that all our processes are open and accessible and that customers are involved in service development from the beginning
- That everybody is treated fairly and account is taken of special needs
- To help motivate, develop and train staff in Customer Care strategies and outcomes, identifying key ways to help and support staff to strive for excellence in service delivery
- To ensure that our achievement is measured by regular satisfaction surveys and audit in a variety of ways, engendering a “feel good” factor from our customers
- To provide evidence of our achievements by managing and publishing details of our performance against targeted commitments

## Involving You - What Is The Partnership Agreement?

### Involving you - What is the Partnership Agreement?



The Partnership Agreement is between ourselves and the residents who live in our homes, including;

- Tenants (including those in temporary and supported housing)
- Leaseholders
- Those owner-occupiers who pay a service charge to the company

The Agreement includes the customer-focused aims and objectives that we, our Board members, staff, and residents share, together with the Partnership's own objectives for encouraging resident involvement over the next 12 months.

It gives both our ourselves and our customers a great opportunity to show commitment to existing and new levels of participation, and the developing sense of mutual trust between us.

#### The Partnership Commitment

Strong and sincere commitment has been pledged to the Partnership Agreement by The Chair of the Board of Stafford and Rural Homes, Jack Kemp; the Chief Executive, Karen Armitage; and the Chair of Stafford and Rural Homes Tenant and Resident Federation, Patricia Evans-Nixon.

The Agreement was formally adopted and signed by all three in January 2007 and a commitment to a yearly review agreed, to ensure that the Partnership is customer focused, workable and contributes to achieving real customer empowerment.



## Involving You - What Is The Partnership Agreement?

### Why do we need a Partnership Agreement?

The Agreement promotes a real customer focus for the delivery of our services.

It provides a way of encouraging customers to get involved with decision making at a level that suits them, from Board membership to focus groups and telephone surveys.



The Agreement also actively encourages new and existing Tenant and Resident Groups, individuals and 'hard to reach' groups to get involved. You don't have to be part of a Tenant and Resident Group to have your views heard, though it can often help.

Some benefits to tenants and residents in having a Partnership Agreement are:

- Having an informed view of all our services
- Knowing how you can be involved in the planning and improvement of services
- Being able to check out how we are really performing
- Identifying problems and creating plans to make improvements
- Working in partnership and with an equal voice.

## What Customer Service Standards Can I Expect?

### What Customer Service standards can I expect?

These are the minimum standards of service you can expect from us. We will carry out regular spot checks with our Tenant Auditors, gather feedback from customers and monitor all complaints about our services.

We have set service standards for:

- dealing with enquiries
- visiting our offices
- repairs and improvements
- tenancy services
- collecting rent
- involving and consulting our residents
- information
- handling complaints



### Dealing with enquiries

We will:

- make sure that our staff are approachable and polite
- give our names when dealing with customers
- use plain English in spoken and written communications
- provide an interpreter if English is not your first language
- carry identity cards and show them
- take messages and return telephone calls within one working day
- reply to letters and e-mails within 10 working days
- make and keep appointments for visits and inspections that are convenient for you

## What Customer Service Standards Can I Expect?

### Visiting our offices

We will provide:

- a welcoming and friendly atmosphere
- access for people with disabilities or special needs
- information and advice you need on a range of housing issues
- private and confidential interview facilities, wherever possible

### Repairs and improvements

We will:

- accept reports of emergency repairs 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- complete emergency repairs within 3 hours or 24 hours depending on the problem, urgent repairs within 3 or 10 working days, and routine repairs within 28 working days
- service your gas central heating system every year
- consult residents on, and publish details of any maintenance work we are planning
- keep you informed about improvements to your home
- work in partnership with an aids and adaptations service to help those with special needs



## What Customer Service Standards Can I Expect?

### Tenancy services

We will:

- carry out a detailed assessment of your housing options within 2 weeks of you registering your application on the waiting list
- visit you in your home within 6 weeks of you moving in
- update your details within 1 working day of you informing us
- let you know, within 6 weeks of receiving your mutual exchange application, whether it will be possible to exchange
- keep up-to-date details at each office and on our website of tenants who want a mutual exchange
- carry out estate inspections every 8 weeks, publish an action list within 10 days of the inspection and check progress weekly
- inspect communal areas regularly, keeping them clean and tidy
- acknowledge complaints of anti-social behaviour within 3 working days. If the complaint involves threats of violence, domestic violence or serious harassment we will acknowledge it within 1 working day
- carry out a full and thorough investigation of all complaints of anti-social behaviour and decide the most appropriate course of action within 14 working days
- work with other agencies such as Age Concern and Social Services to jointly provide information and support for elderly people, people with special needs and other vulnerable groups



## What Customer Service Standards Can I Expect?

### Collecting rent

We will:

- offer a range of ways for you to pay, including online through our website at [www.sarh.co.uk](http://www.sarh.co.uk), direct debit, standing order, with swipe cards at a Post Office, at PayPoints and at Payzones
- issue rent statements every three months
- give at least four weeks' written notice of any rent review
- tell you if you fall behind with your rent, and agree a repayment schedule with you
- help you contact debt advice agencies such as the Citizens' Advice Bureau when you need them

### Involving and consulting our residents

We will:

- work in partnership with our Tenant and Resident Federation
- have Tenant Representatives on our Board
- actively encourage and support Tenant and Resident Groups
- carry out a Tenants' Survey at least every 3 years
- positively welcome your views and comments, and take them into account when making decisions about the services we provide
- feed back to you through our newsletters, website, press releases and other publicity materials on how your needs, aspirations and comments have shaped our service



Please refer to our Partnership Agreement with Tenants and Residents, available as a separate document.

You can read a brief summary and further details on how to get a copy of the Partnership Agreement on page 11

## What Customer Service Standards Can I Expect?

### Information

We will:

- produce a newsletter at least four times a year
- regularly publish information about our performance
- tell you where our income comes from and how we spend it
- produce clear information leaflets about our services, in plain English
- provide information in other formats if you ask us to. This includes information on audio tape, in large print and in other languages
- publish an annual performance review to all tenants
- comply with the law when handling personal information



### Handling complaints

We will:

- have a positive and open approach to handling complaints
- actively encourage feedback
- learn from our mistakes so we can improve our services
- deal with all formal complaints within the timescale as described in our complaints procedure. Please see the “How Can I Comment On, Compliment, Or Complain About Services?” section on page 22.

## Equality and Diversity

We firmly believe that all customers and staff should receive a fair service, one that treats everyone as an individual, embracing and understanding our differences to ensure that no one is excluded.

We understand that we provide homes and services to a local community with many different needs, and that these needs may alter over time. This is why we have been asking our customers to provide, where they feel comfortable to do so, information about age, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, religious belief and information requirements, so that we can try to tailor services to meet these needs both now and in the future.

We work with both tenants and staff in an Equality and Diversity Steering Group to develop an understanding of issues that are important to tenants and staff, monitor progress on our Equality and Diversity Action Plan, and review key policies.

We do not condone discrimination, harassment or victimisation for any reason and will take appropriate action against the perpetrator.



## What Services Can I Get From You?

### What services can I get from you?

#### How can I get advice on housing options?

We provide advice on the housing options available. Whether you wish to rent from us, another Housing Association or from a private landlord, we are able to offer informed advice on the choices available and manage the Housing Register within Stafford Borough. If you wish to rent from us please contact our Housing Choices Team on 01785 216789.

#### What do you do for your tenants?

Our main business is to manage our homes. This means collecting the rent and charges due, carrying out repairs, letting empty homes, making sure the tenancy conditions are followed, investing in local communities and looking after the environment on and around our estates. We are investing millions of pounds to improve our homes with uPVC windows and doors, new kitchens and bathrooms, improved heating and insulation, re-roofing and other works.

#### Do you provide any services for older people?

We own a sizeable number of sheltered housing schemes which provide accommodation and services tailored to meet the needs of older people who wish to maintain an independent lifestyle. Support packages vary dependent on the customer's requirements.

Our Lifeline service can help you live independently in your own home by providing a reassuring link to our Community Alarm Centre, 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year. The Community Alarm Centre is staffed by friendly, trained staff, able to offer practical help in any situation.

## What Services Can I Get From You?

We also provide a range of other services including home safety, personal security and medicine reminders, all aimed at supporting older and vulnerable customers. We also provide aids and adaptations to allow customers to maintain a good quality of life.

Please see 'Section 4 – Support Services' for further information.

### Do you only provide services for your tenants?

No, we have a much wider customer base that includes people on the Housing Register, Leaseholders, Owner Occupiers, other Housing Association Tenants etc.

### Can I rent a garage?

We maintain a stock of approximately 1,950 garages, which are mostly located adjacent to our properties in various parts of the Borough. They are let at a rent that will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Historically, the "Council garages" were built with the intention that they were let to "Council House Tenants". The sale of many of the Council Houses has led to many garages being let to Owner Occupiers and Private Tenants. Following the Stock Transfer, new lettings will be allocated to the following categories in order:

1. Stafford & Rural Homes tenants and leaseholders who are in receipt of the Mobility Component of Disability Living Allowance
2. Other Stafford & Rural Homes' Tenants and Leaseholders
3. Other applicants in receipt of the Mobility Component of Disability Living Allowance
4. Other applicants

## What Services Can I Get From You?

There is not a limit to how many garages an applicant can rent and we will maintain a waiting list for each of the above categories ranked in order of date of application. When a garage becomes vacant it will be offered to the person at the top of the highest priority group. If no one can be found in that group it will be offered to the person at the top of the next priority group, and so on.

Existing Tenants of garages can join the waiting list so that they can be considered for a garage in a more convenient area or to apply for a second garage.

Applicants who have rent arrears on their house or garage or any other outstanding debt to us will not be allocated a garage. Before a garage is allocated, a check will be made to see if any money is owed to us by the prospective garage tenant, including former tenant arrears. If this is the case, they will not be allocated a garage until the debt has been cleared.

### Can I rent a shop?

We have shops in various locations that are available on a leased basis. If you wish to find out more, please contact our Asset Management Team on 01785 216677



## How Can I Comment On, Compliment, Or Complain About Services?

### What is a comment?

A comment is any feedback received about our services. If you have any suggestions for improving and developing services please let us know.

### What is a compliment?


A compliment is positive feedback for a job well done. It is as important for us to know what we have done well as it is for us to know what needs to be improved.

### What is a complaint?

A complaint is where a customer tells us they are not happy about our standards of service, actions or lack of action. We will apologise when we get it wrong and put it right whenever we can.

### How can I make a comment, compliment or complaint?

Any customer can make a comment, compliment or complaint about us in any of the following ways:

- Telling a member of staff
- Having a family friend, advocate or Councillor contact us on your behalf
- Completing the form attached to the 'How To Comment On Services' or 'How To Make A Complaint' leaflet and returning it to us 
- Writing to us
- Completing the "Have Your Say" form on our website [www.sarh.co.uk](http://www.sarh.co.uk)

## How Can I Comment On, Compliment, Or Complain About Services?

### What happens next and how do you use this information?

All comments and compliments are recorded and an acknowledgement letter sent out. If you have made a comment the acknowledgement letter will explain who is dealing with it and the timescale for responding.

All complaints are recorded and an acknowledgement letter sent out within 2 working days, explaining who is dealing with your complaint and the timescales for responding.

We have a complaints process that has several stages. The first time a complaint is received it will be sent to the team who deliver the service. The team will answer your complaint or explain that your complaint is being investigated within 10 working days.

### What if I am not satisfied?

If you are not satisfied with the reply, please tell us why you are not satisfied, so that we can try to improve the situation for you.

If this is the case then another manager, not involved with the original response, will consider your complaint and write to you within 10 working days to advise you of the situation.

If you are not happy with this second response, please tell us why.

The Chief Executive will then review your complaint and respond to you within 20 working days.

## How Can I Comment On, Compliment, Or Complain About Services?

If you are still unhappy with Stafford and Rural Homes' answer you have the right to contact:

- **The Independent Housing Ombudsman**

For complaints regarding either the management of your home or access to our accommodation.



For further details see the separate Government leaflet about the Independent Housing Ombudsman, available from our offices or by calling us on 01785 216612.



- **The Housing Corporation**

For complaints about other matters, details are available from our offices or by calling us on 01785 216612.



Usually, both organisations will only investigate a complaint after our complaints procedure has been used. So, please contact us first and give us an opportunity to deal with your complaint.

All comments, compliments and complaints are viewed as a positive source of customer feedback and are used to inform reviews, and as an opportunity for Stafford and Rural Homes to develop its services to reflect its customers' needs. We will publish twice yearly examples of comments that have led to service improvements, examples of compliments received and the number of complaints received and what has altered as a result.