

Policy	Access to services policy
Date adopted	May 2005
Date of next review	July 2024 (or sooner if required)
Version	2.0
Responsible board	Homes board
Responsible officer	Head of customer services

## 1. Overall Policy Statement

1.1. Stafford and Rural Homes is committed to providing all customers with easy access to its range of services. We believe in ensuring our services are inclusive and equally accessible.

We value diversity, and we seek to remove any barriers to our services by understanding the different needs of our customers.

## 2. Policy Aims & Impact

2.1. The main aims of the policy are to:

- ◆ Deliver a cost effective and customer focused service, reflecting the values of Fair Landlord.
- ◆ Meet national standards set out by the Regulator for Social Housing.
- ◆ Meet all relevant legislation including Equalities Act 2010 and Occupiers Liability Act 1957

## 3. Access to Services Definition

3.1. We believe we should provide customers with easy access to:

- ◆ Places
- ◆ Staff
- ◆ Services
- ◆ Information

## 4. Accessible Places

4.1. All our sites are accessible in accordance with equality legislation. Site specific risk assessments have been carried out to ensure accessibility, health and safety and fire safety requirements are met.

4.2. Main offices (Acton Gate, Brassey Road and Parker Court) have comfortable and accessible reception areas with private and secure interview rooms, facilities including a fully wheelchair accessible public toilet and baby changing area. The reception service operates an appointment-based service, ensuring the relevant officer will be available to resolve the customer's enquiry.

4.3. We support customers to remain in their home by providing adaptations to meet their personal needs following occupational therapy assessment.

- 4.4. Stafford and Rural Homes recognises that it is a major stakeholder in local communities and attends and organises community events and stages local meetings, roadshows and conferences as required, again ensuring that these are accessible to all.
- 4.5. Digital Dens are based in the local communities which provide advice and support for our customers in respect of benefit and debt advice, support and digital training to help move customers closer to and into work.
- 4.6. Community Centres have facilities including a fully wheelchair accessible public toilet and baby changing area.

## 5. Accessible Staff

- 5.1. Main offices are open and accessible for customers to attend with a pre booked appointment.
- 5.2. We provide a 24-hour repairs service, offering emergency repairs outside of customer opening hours.
- 5.3. Customers can request home visits where this is more appropriate to their needs.
- 5.4. We offer help for customers to complete forms and paperwork where required.
- 5.5. Providing a Quality Assurance Framework to ensure that our staff are delivering a high-quality service to resolve enquiries effectively at the first point of contact. Regular coaching and training are provided to ensure our staff are providing information that is up to date, effective and demonstrate excellent soft skills.

## 6. Accessible Services

- 6.1. Stafford and Rural Homes offers a range of ways for customers to contact us including:
  - ◆ in person (by booked appointment)
  - ◆ by telephone
  - ◆ in writing
  - ◆ by email
  - ◆ via the website
  - ◆ social media through Facebook
  - ◆ home visit on request
  - ◆ My Homes App.
- 6.2. Stafford and Rural Homes recognises the need to continue modernising the way we communicate with customers. We plan to offer customers access to online tools including a chatbot, whilst also increasing the functionality of our self-serve portals.
- 6.3. The Customer Service Centre is the first point of contact for all customers who contact us. The Customer Service Centre provides a one-stop, professional response in a positive and friendly manner, resolving enquiries at the first point of contact. Enquiries of a specialist or technical nature are passed to appropriate staff where necessary, and an audit trail is created through the CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system
- 6.4. Sign language service is available on request.
- 6.5. Interpretation service for a range of languages to which customers are given access to on request.
- 6.6. Customers can request documents in different formats (such as large print, audio tape or Braille) and languages other than English on request.

- 6.7. A loop system is available in our boardroom, reception, and the customer interview room. A portable loop system is also accessible for use off site.
- 6.8. Stafford and Rural Homes website offers the ability to change font size and colours and the 'browsealoud' facility

## 7. Accessible Information

- 7.1. A wide range of documents detailing services provided are available on our website. Leaflets can also be found in our reception area or upon request via our Customer Service Team.
- 7.2. Customer documents are written in plain language, and we aim to use a written style which is straightforward and understandable. Customer facing documentation is checked for user friendliness by a reading group of customers prior to publication.
- 7.3. We are committed to ensuring that our online resources are accessible to all visitors to our website. We review our site and modify pages to remove accessibility problems for people with disabilities and to make information accessible for all users. More details are provided on our website.
- 7.4. We work with customers to agree performance targets and standards to ensure consistent levels of service to all users. Performance against these standards is monitored, published, and fed back to customers via the annual report.
- 7.5. Stafford and Rural Homes undertakes regular reviews of the information held about its customers to keep details up to date. This is done at tenancy sign up and at contact points (i.e., when a customer calls in, contact details are checked with them).
- 7.6. Information is used to enable Stafford and Rural Homes to provide services tailored to the customers' needs and to enable us to contact them in the way in which they prefer. The information also gives insight into all the possible diverse needs of the tenant, allowing us to tailor our approach accordingly. We actively seek to capture information on all protected characteristics:
  - ◆ Age
  - ◆ Disability
  - ◆ Race (including Colour, and Ethnic and National Origin)
  - ◆ Religion or Belief
  - ◆ Pregnancy and Maternity
  - ◆ Gender
  - ◆ Sexual Orientation
  - ◆ Gender Reassignment and Transgender
  - ◆ Marriage and Civil Partnership

## 8. Customer Feedback

- 8.1. To ensure that services remain accessible it is vital to get feedback from customers including from complaints and compliments. This feedback is used to help shape services, inform continuous improvement and helps us compare performance with other organisations. Service improvements made as a result of this feedback are monitored, published and fed back to service users via, the Annual Report, newsletters and the website.

## 9. Service Commitment

9.1. Our service standards are outlined in our Customer Commitments Document. This document covers general response timescales and services standards not otherwise documented in the service area policy.

## 10. Risk Assessment

10.1. The main risks associated with this policy are:

1.5 The Group's reputation is harmed as a result of its activities.

1.6 The Group fails to communicate its brand and culture effectively with customers and stakeholders, and its reputation suffers.

6.3 The Group fails to scrutinise its activities in line with the expectations of the Regulator and is downgraded.

## 11. Consultation

11.1. Consultation will be undertaken with customers on the development of communication platforms. Ensuring that the platforms are user friendly and meet the required level of functionality for self-serve. This policy has also reviewed by the Scrutiny Panel, to obtain customer feedback.

## 12. Regulation

12.1. The Regulatory Standards applicable to this policy are the Consumers Standards, Tenant Involvement and Empowerment, Homes, Tenancy and Neighbourhood and Community.

### Links to Other Policies, Procedures or Documents

There are links to several other policies:

- ◆ Health & Safety Policy
- ◆ Repairs Policy
- ◆ Complaints Policy

## 13. Monitoring and Review

13.1. We will monitor our performance quarterly as part of our suite of Key Performance Indicators. The Annual Report will also include repairs performance information.

This policy will be reviewed every three years or sooner as required.

### Impact Assessments

13.2. The impact of this policy will be measured as it is implemented and used as part of a scheduled one-year implementation review.

## 14. Appendix A

Customer Commitments (Customer Service Standards)

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