



## SERVICE STANDARDS

### **Who are our customers?**

Our customers can be defined as;

- **external** *e.g. members of the public, partners etc*
- **internal** *e.g. colleagues from Aspire Housing and Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, including Board Members and Elected Members.*

### **Our Staff;**

- will be polite, helpful and treat our customers with respect
- will not discriminate because of race, religion, age, sex, sexuality or disability
- will be consistent and efficient when dealing with our customers
- will wear official identification at all times
- will be trained and have access to accurate and up to date information regarding the Newcastle Housing Advice's policies and practices relating to homelessness and housing advice issues
- will ensure that our information leaflets are made available to our customers in a variety of formats on request
- will develop and maintain effective partnerships to ensure that benefits are passed on to residents in the Borough
- will ensure that your enquiries are dealt with in confidence

### **Our Offices;**

- will be open and staffed between the hours of nine to five, Monday to Friday
- will be clean, safe and accessible to our customers
- will have private interview rooms available for customers to use

### **Telephone Calls;**

- will be answered within 6 rings during office hours
- will be answered with a greeting of the department and the name of the member of staff answering
- will be transferred if necessary to another member of staff to deal with a specific enquiry
- will be returned on the same day when a message is left wherever possible

### **Correspondence;**

- will be clear and in plain English
- will be made available in different formats and/or languages on request
- will inform the customer details of who is dealing with their enquiry so that they are able to make direct contact
- will be responded to within 10 working days. If a response is likely to take longer the customer will be informed of this within 5 working days and a full response sent within 20 working days of the original enquiry.

### **Emails;**

- will be clear and in plain English
- will be responded to within 1 working day. If a response is likely to take longer the customer will be informed of this and a full response sent within 10 working days of the original enquiry.

### **Prevention and Housing Advice;**

- we will try to find a way to prevent you from losing your home
- we will liaise with the Borough Council's Homelessness Prevention Officer to arrange services such as Family Counselling, Legal Advice, Debt Advice and referrals to the deposit guarantee scheme where appropriate
- we will ensure that our staff have up to date training and information so that the advice given will always be of the highest quality and consistent
- we will offer private interview within 7 working days of request
- we will provide good quality comprehensive information that may help you prevent your own homelessness

### **Homelessness;**

- we will provide a same day emergency appointment if someone is homeless due to an emergency
- we will provide a 24-hour emergency homeless advice service if someone becomes homeless outside office hours
- we will help you to complete any forms, including homelessness applications and benefits applications
- we will provide you with a named Housing Advisor who will deal with your case until it is resolved
- we aim to fully explain the reasons for our decisions, what information we have used to make the decision and what options you have next
- we aim to complete homeless investigations and provide written notification of our decision within 33 days and an explanation of the decision in person if someone has difficulty understanding the consequences of the decision
- we will advise you of your right to appeal a homelessness decision both face to face and in writing when our decision has been made

### **Homeless Decision Reviews;**

- we will ensure that a homeless decision reviews procedure is in operation for applicants who wish to challenge the decision made regarding their homelessness application
- we will ensure that copies of the homeless decision reviews procedure are available on request
- an applicant has the right to request a review (appeal) of a homeless decision regarding;
  - eligibility for assistance
  - duty owed
  - local connection
  - suitability of accommodation
- reviews are available following a request from applicants, providing made within 21 days of the receipt of the original decision
- reviews will be completed within 56 days from the date the request is received by NHA
- reviews will be undertaken by a member of the Housing Strategy Team at Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, who has had no previous involvement in the case and who is senior to the person who made the original decision, as per the Homeless Decision Reviews Procedure, which is available on request
- you will be given the opportunity to present additional information to the Housing Strategy Officer regarding your case either in writing or verbally, for them to take into account.

### **Temporary Accommodation;**

- we will offer you temporary accommodation if we have reason to believe that you are homeless and have priority need and have no alternative accommodation
- we will advise you how much you are required to pay towards the cost of your accommodation and how you can pay it
- we will assist you to complete a Local Housing Allowance (LHA) (formerly Housing Benefit) application – please remember that you are responsible for the total cost if you do not make an effective LHA claim
- we will ask you to sign an occupancy agreement
- we will advise you what will happen if you fail to adhere to the occupancy agreement
- we will provide information detailing local amenities to your temporary accommodation
- we will keep in regular contact with you throughout your stay in temporary accommodation
- we will ensure that referrals to support services are made where appropriate
- we will inspect all temporary accommodation every 12 months to ensure that properties are properly maintained to a good standard, meet all health and safety standards and comply with Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council's HMO Standards, which can be seen on request
- we will arrange storage for your personal possessions if required and will advise you of the charges to you for storage
- we will ensure that if you are not offered temporary accommodation that we explain why and help you find a suitable alternative

#### **Complaints;**

- will be recorded and monitored so that we are able improve our service
- will be addressed and investigated under the guidance in Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council's Complaints Policy, which is available on request.

#### **What else can our customers expect?**

- home visits will be available on request for people who have difficulty in getting to the office due to ill health, disability or other special reasons
- an interpretation service will be facilitated, if you do not speak, or have difficulties speaking or reading in English
- housing advice information will be available in other formats on request
- the services of intermediaries will be sought if someone has hearing or speech difficulties or other special needs
- an interview with a Housing Advisor of the same sex will be available on request.

#### **How you can help us?**

- by showing our staff the same respect and courtesy that you expect from us
- by providing necessary information that will assist in us dealing with your application promptly e.g. proof of income / benefits, proof of identity, medical information etc.
- by refraining from using abusive language or threatening behaviour to staff or your call will be terminated and/or you will be asked to leave the building
- by ensuring that you attend appointments when made and informing us when you are unable to attend
- by informing us of any changes to your circumstances promptly