

Access and Customer Care Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Trust is committed to building strong and vibrant communities and is focussed on providing support to local people to help them to live healthy, rewarding and fulfilled lives.
- 1.2. We recognise the negative impact of poor housing and homelessness and aim to provide services which deliver decent homes, positive health outcomes and a great place to live.
- 1.3. The Trust acknowledges the importance of ensuring its services meet the needs of those individuals who are, or become vulnerable owing to age, illness, mental health etc. and will work with them to sustain their tenancies and continue to live independently in their own home.
- 1.4. By putting our residents at the heart of everything we do, we will offer a service tailored to meet the diverse requirements of our current and future residents working with them to reduce the impact our services may have on their health and wellbeing.
- 1.5. We will use customer insight and feedback to inform the development of customer focussed services enabling new and existing residents to have the flexibility to access our services when and how they want.
- 1.6. The Government has a Digital by Default agenda whereby access to their services will be online only, this along with the benefits provided by online access (such as cost comparison sites, online only deals, social inclusion via sites such as skype) make it vitally important that we encourage and support our residents in accessing digital services.
- 1.7. The use of digital technology is becoming more widespread and influential, enabling greater access for customers to access information and services therefore it is important that we enhance our contact methods to engage our residents in a variety of ways.

2. Outline of Service

- 2.1. The Trust's approach to customer care encompasses the health and well being of our residents which is threaded through all our services. We will support residents and communities so that together we can work to meet their needs now and in the future.

- 2.2. The Trust operates in areas of deprivation some of which are designated as “Red Areas” where there are poorer life chances and greater concentrations of health and mental health issues. The Trust will therefore offer a range of diverse and flexible services as we recognise that many of the issues facing our residents cannot solely be solved through meeting a housing need. Employment, health, mental health and social inclusion are just some of the wider issues which we will endeavour to provide help and support. Examples include:
- Additional Housing Management Service supporting potentially vulnerable groups such as those with mental health needs
 - Community engagement
 - Digital inclusion and non-digital services
 - Money advice
 - Employment and skills initiatives
- 2.3. The Trust will work in partnership with others to help to support people in the right way and at the right time:
- Using a collaborative approach to meet housing needs strategically, to avoid placing people away from their family or local community
 - Working in partnership with Multi-Agency groups (MAG) such as GP’s, social services, mental health teams etc
 - Making full use of money advice services to ensure that health issues resulting from financial hardship are addressed
 - Building resources within communities-combining community facilities with pharmacies, GP surgeries etc
 - Embedding our safeguarding policies for children, young people and adults
 - Linking with NHS to ensure that end of life care can be received at home
 - Working with Bucks County Council to look at how excess capacity in extra care and Independent living schemes can provide “step-down” accommodation
- 2.4. The opportunity for the Trust to fully deliver on the health and wellbeing agenda will lie in our ability to look beyond housing as simply part of the physical environment. We will need to extend our understanding of the potential of housing, to encompass social, cultural and economic aspects as well.
- 2.5. The Trust works with a number of different communities, each with its own needs and unique characteristics. They include the rural communities in the outlying areas where the Trust operates as well as the communities of people who live in our Independent Living schemes and general needs housing.
- 2.6. The Trust’s approach to financial inclusion outlines our commitment to ensuring residents have access to financial services such as Credit Unions to enable them to sustain their tenancies by being better informed about their benefit entitlement, utility costs and general financial awareness.
- 2.7. The Trust will provide support and advice to residents who find themselves financially excluded through assisting them to maximise their incomes, reducing debts, developing financial awareness and accessing financial services.

2.8. The Trust supports diverse, vibrant and successful communities by delivering services that focus on the real needs and aspirations of our residents. We recognise that in order for this to be possible, services need to be accessible to meet the diverse needs of our residents.

2.9. Our approach sets out how we will:

- better understand residents' needs
- increase choice and information for residents accessing our services
- understand the impact our services can have on residents health and wellbeing
- support our residents to sustain their tenancies and continue to live independently

2.10. We will ensure the following outcomes to make services accessible:

residents:

- can easily access our services in the ways that best suit them
- receive information that is accessible, current, clear, easy to understand and jargon free
- receive annual reports detailing how we are performing against agreed customer service commitments
- will be supported to help them retain their tenancies and live independently
- influence services to help drive continuous improvement

employees will:

- demonstrate a "can do" attitude
- provide an efficient and professional service
- resolve enquiries received at the first point of contact where possible
- be highly trained in customer care, equality and diversity and data protection
- be appropriately trained to recognise vulnerability
- work with residents and offer support and advice or signpost them to other agencies where appropriate to ensure they can continue to live in their property
- wear corporate identity badges
- respect customers' privacy and confidentiality

when visiting residents:

- employees will carry out home visits by appointment
- employees and contractors will identify themselves on arrival and produce their corporate name badges
- employees and representatives of the Trust will leave "no access cards" if the resident is not at home

in our reception area we will:

- clearly display opening times and out of hours emergency telephone number(s)
- display new and relevant information on the plasma screen

- display the Trusts full range of customer service commitments
- provide private interview rooms
- have disabled toilet facilities
- provide internet access to support our residents in accessing digital services

when contacting the Trust:

by telephone:

- calls will be answered promptly
- the Trust's Contact Centre is committed to answering calls within the time specified by our Customer Commitments
- employees will answer calls politely and respectfully

in writing:

- we will deal with all written correspondence quickly, efficiently and courteously
- we will include details in our response of who is dealing with your enquiry and their contact details
- all correspondence will be in plain English and jargon free

via the internet:

- the website address is www.vaht.co.uk where a range of services and information is provided
- residents can contact the Trust via a dedicated email address

make services accessible by:

- providing a loop system for people with hearing aids
- providing public internet access in our reception area along with facilities such as a range of play equipment for children
- providing private interview rooms
- offering an interpreting and translation service upon request
- ensuring the office is compliant with the Equality Act 2010 where practicable
- providing a fully wheelchair accessible public toilet

2.11. Highlights of our performance against the customer service commitment targets will be published to residents and monitored by the Tenant Scrutiny Panel.

2.12. The Trust will obtain customer feedback through a range of methods to enable residents to have a voice in shaping future policies and challenging our services.

3. Equality and Diversity

3.1. The Trust is committed to promoting social inclusion by applying the principles of equality and diversity to everything we do.

3.2. We will ensure equality of opportunity across the full range of our activities, including both employment and service provision.

3.3. The Trust adheres to and works within the relevant legal and regulatory requirements a social housing provider is required to fulfil. These comprise the Equality Act 2010, The Human Rights Act 1998, Social Housing Equality Framework (SHEF) and the Homes and Communities Agency's Regulatory Framework for Social Housing.

3.4. Equality impact assessments are carried out on all our policies.

4. Value for Money

4.1 Real efficiencies will be made by getting things right first time and simply making our contact with customers smoother and smarter.

5. Consultation

5.1. This policy has been developed with residents through the customer service commitment group where they have had the opportunity to influence how we provide our services.

6. How the Policy will be Implemented

6.1. The Head of Customer Services and Independent Living will hold the responsibility for the implementation of this policy.

6.2. Customer Service Commitments will be used to ensure residents are fully aware of what they can expect.

7. Performance Measures

7.1. The level of service detailed in this policy will be measured through the agreed Customer Service Commitments across all service areas.

7.2. The Customer Service Commitments will be measured quarterly and monitored by the Tenant Scrutiny Panel. All feedback will be used to drive continuous improvement and highlights will be published in our Residents Newsletter.

7.3. To ensure our standards remain high and in line with the needs of our residents the Customer Contact Centre are annually assessed by an external Global Customer Contact Association (CCA).

8. Review

8.1. This policy will have a 3 year lifespan, running from January 2017 to January 2020.

9. Legislation and Other Documents

9.1. This policy will link with the documents listed below:

Customer Service Strategy
Equality and Diversity Policy
Customer Service Commitments
Value for Money Strategy
Data Protection Policy
Customer Care Framework

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