

The Moray Council Community Services Department

Housing Service Customer Feedback Policy

1. Scope of the Policy

- 1.1 This policy encompasses the roles and responsibilities of the Moray Council's Housing Service to ensure customer feedback is meaningful, effective and acted upon. The policy ensures that service delivery is measured against expectation, identifies any problem areas and ensures corrective action is taken.
- 1.2 The term 'customer' incorporates tenants, former tenants, prospective tenants, and people who use or have used a service provided by housing. It also incorporates other people or organisations that may have an interest in any aspect of service delivery provided by the Moray Council's housing service.
- 1.3 This policy ensures that all customers are treated in an equitable way and that customer opinion and beliefs are valued. The Council seeks to ensure that this policy does not discriminate against customers on the grounds of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religious belief, disability or illness or age. All communication used will be in 'plain language' and in an easily understood format. Appropriate arrangements will be made for communicating with tenants and other customers who have alternative needs, for example by using signers and confidentiality will be maintained at all times.

2. Corporate Development Plan/Local Housing Strategy/Homelessness Strategy/Service Improvement Plan

- 2.1 This policy will assist the Council to meet its commitments within the Corporate Development Plan, Local Housing Strategy, Homelessness Strategy and Service Improvement Plan aims and priorities. In particular, it will ensure the Housing Service is open, accountable and responsive to changing needs and demands, and will aid the ongoing development of customer focused services.

3. Objectives and Principles of the Policy

- 3.1 The overall aim of the Council's Housing Service Customer Feedback Policy is to ensure that housing services are provided in a customer focussed and cost effective manner that meets current and future needs of those using them. To assist us to meet this aim the Council will gather information on performance and use it to take action that improves service delivery.

- 3.2 This policy will assist The Moray Council in achieving its vision by providing an effective voice for the people of Moray and ensuring that good quality services are accessible in relation to housing service delivery.
- 3.3 The specific objectives of the Housing Service Customer Feedback Policy are:
- to involve tenants and other customers in shaping housing services provided in Moray;
 - to monitor performance and enable continual improvement of services within the resources available;
 - to be responsive to the changing needs and demands made upon the service;
 - to be accountable to tenants and other customers for the services we provide; and
 - to ensure customer feedback influences continuous improvement of the housing service to meet the needs and aspirations of the Council's customers.
- 3.4 The key principles underpinning the Housing Service Customer Feedback Policy are:
- we will be open, accountable, fair and transparent in all areas of service delivery;
 - we will provide consistency through policies, procedures and standards applied across the service;
 - we will provide comprehensive services at the point of customer contact; and
 - we will provide a comprehensive framework for self-assessment, evaluation and continuous improvement.

4. Legal Framework

- 4.1 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 (Sections 72 and 73), gives Scottish Ministers the power to carry out inspections on local authorities. During inspections the housing management and related functions of local authorities will be analysed, as will tenant and other customer involvement with the management of the services provided. The Moray Council's housing service fully supports this process and is committed to ensuring service delivery continually improves and is customer focussed. The Council ensures all policies comply with legislation relating to Tenant Participation. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, Section 54, sets out legislative requirements for local authorities to consult with tenants and registered tenants organisations
- 4.2 The Data Protection Act 1998 governs the way information, including customer feedback, is obtained, recorded, stored, used and then eventually destroyed. The Moray Council complies with all the requirements of the Act and ensures that personal data is processed fairly and lawfully, that it is used for the purpose it was intended and that only relevant information is used. The Council will ensure that customer feedback information held is accurate, and where necessary kept

up-to-date, and that appropriate measures are taken that would prevent the unauthorised or unlawful use of any personal information given.

5. Service Delivery Standards

5.1 Service Delivery Standards set down the level of service that tenants and other customers can expect. For example how quickly a repair is carried out and to what standard, how customers will be treated during a homelessness interview.

5.2 The housing service will review existing and, where necessary, provide new service delivery standard information for all services provided. This will not only clarify the level of service customers can expect, but will make the service standards more visible to allow performance to be measured against them.

5.3 At the beginning of the financial year the Council will prioritise the review and development of service delivery standards taking into account concerns raised at a strategic level; by external agencies, for example the Care Commission; internally, for example complaints received and other customer concerns. Initial services to be targeted are:

- homelessness (including temporary accommodation standards);
- allocations;
- repairs; and
- antisocial behaviour.

5.4 Service delivery standards will be publicised and promoted, for example by using posters and the regular tenants' newsletter, and are available in a variety of languages and formats, if required.

6. Customer Feedback

6.1 On a three-yearly basis a large-scale survey will be undertaken to measure tenants' perceptions of performance in housing services. This will be benchmarked against previous results. An Action Plan to address any improvement areas will be agreed by the Community Services Committee.

6.2 Current methods of feedback include:

- airing views/concerns through elected members;
- questionnaires sent out following service provision (currently only available for a limited number of services);
- response repairs receipts sent out with each repair carried out;
- individual tenant responses;
- tenant meetings;
- the tenants' newsletter;
- the corporate complaints procedure; and

- consultation.
- 6.3 The Council will analyse existing methods of feedback annually to ensure their effectiveness and relevance.
- 6.4 Alternative methods of feedback will be piloted where appropriate. Alternative methods include face to face interviews, exit surveys, estate walkabouts, focus groups and Internet comments box.
- 6.5 Opportunities for tenants and other customers to influence service delivery will be enhanced with tenant involvement in working groups.
- 6.6 Feedback methods will be targeted to meet the needs of client groups and individuals. For example where people have a learning disability, a picture board may be a more appropriate format to gauge feedback.
- 6.7 When feedback is received, individual managers will retain responsibility for the initial response to customers where this is required, for example where an issue is highlighted that requires an explanation or action.
- 6.8 Where no action is taken as a result of feedback a full explanation will be given to customers to support decisions, for example where a customer suggests a change to the way we allocate housing in the area that contravenes legislation the Council would advise him/her accordingly.
- 6.9 Time limits will be set for managers to respond to feedback. These are:
- written feedback (that requires a response) will be replied to within 10 working days or any other formal response time stated by the individual/agency;
 - telephone calls will be returned within one working day or a message given to the caller to advise of a different time scale; and
 - where face to face contact has been made, best endeavours will be made to give an immediate full response. If this is not possible contact details will be taken and followed up within the above time scales.
- 6.10 Within the Housing Service, the Service Development Manager will co-ordinate the management of all feedback. This will be in consultation with representatives from each section within the Housing Service that uses feedback methods.
- 6.11 Feedback from partner agencies will be taken into account when reviewing service delivery. For example, reports received by the Care Commission will be analysed and responded to by the Manager of the service. The results of this will be relayed to the Service Development Manager.
- 6.12 External accreditation will be used, where appropriate, to enhance service delivery, service delivery standards and methods of customer focus. For example, leaflets published by the Housing Service will meet the Crystal Mark

standard, housing information and advice will be accredited by the National Standards for Housing Information and Advice (Communities Scotland).

- 6.13 Customer care and other forms of staff training will be undertaken to enhance staff awareness of the relevance all feedback can make.
- 6.14 Informal views and aspirations expressed by tenants and other customers will be recorded, analysed and used to influence service delivery. For example a tenant does not want to make a formal complaint but has a comment to make on an area of service delivery this will be taken into account when reviewing the service.
- 6.15 The Council will work with partner agencies and other internal colleagues to reduce the possibility of duplicate consultation taking place. The Council will set down a clear programme for obtaining customer feedback and the methods used. This will be published annually and distributed to all our partner organisations operating in Moray and internal departments.

7. Complaints Procedure

- 7.1 The Moray Council has a well-developed Corporate Complaints Procedure. Complaints relating to the housing service will be analysed when received to establish any changes needed to improve service delivery or staff training. The manager of the service will be responsible for the initial response to the complainant and will then pass this to the service development manager for inclusion in future service reviews and training plans.

8. Performance Monitoring

- 8.1 Regular monitoring of Housing Service Customer Feedback Policy will be carried out by managers and reported to the Housing Best Value Group on a quarterly basis.
- 8.2 The Community Services Committee will receive an annual report to update them on the levels of feedback received and actions taken by staff to address any of the issues raised. This report will also highlight the feedback methods used and how effective they are.
- 8.3 This policy will be reviewed in August 2008.