

Housing Services

Our Service Standards

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Introduction

Welcome to Mid Devon District Council's, Housing Service, Service Standards. This Service Standards document covers all aspects of our housing service and informs you what you can expect from us as a tenant or leaseholder.

Our Service Standards are divided into four areas:-

- Tenancy Standard
- Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Standard
- Neighbourhood & Community Standard
- Home Standard

We will review our Service Standards, in conjunction with tenants, every four years. We will inform you how we have performed throughout the year in our Annual Report. We also publish our monthly performance statistics on our website each month which is monitored internally by staff, Councillors and tenants.

We are happy to receive feedback from you about our services. If you feel we have not met our obligations, or if you want to make a complaint or compliment about our service, please let us know. There are a variety of ways to make contact with us which include:

- Telephone: 01884 255255;
- Online: www.middevon.gov.uk;
- Email: customerservices@middevon.gov.uk or htenancy@middevon.gov.uk;
- Visit: Phoenix House, Phoenix Lane, Tiverton, Devon EX16 6PP;
- Post: send us a letter to the above address; or
- Completing a "Have Your Say" form which can be obtained from the Council office's

Tenancy Standard

We aim to be fair and transparent in the way we offer a tenancy, let our homes and offer housing advice. We will take into account the housing needs of tenants and potential tenants.

Allocations

We will:

- Publish clear guidance to our approach to tenancy management, including interventions to sustain tenancies and prevent unnecessary evictions and tackling tenancy fraud
- Use Devon Home Choice Scheme to advertise our vacant homes
- Allocate our properties in accordance with published policies
- Offer practical assistance with making an application for housing, where requested, or appropriate
- Aim to provide confirmation of your Devon Home Choice application within 20 working days of you providing all of the required information
- Offer tenancies or terms of occupation which are compatible with the purpose of the accommodation, the needs of individual households, the sustainability of the community and to make the best use of our housing stock
- Arrange and carry out accompanied viewings at an agreed time with you
- Arrange for you to attend a meeting to sign your tenancy and collect your keys.

Letting our properties

We will:

- Arrange and carry out a pre-void inspection at your property before you move out, where possible
- Inform you of any repairs that you have to carry out before you move out and the amount you will be recharged if you do not carry out this work
- Advise of when and where you need to return the keys to your home when the tenancy ends
- Advertise your property, where applicable through the Devon Home Choice Scheme
- Minimise the time that properties are empty between each letting. We aim to re-let homes within published timescales.

Housing advice

We will:

- Work in partnership with other agencies to prevent homelessness, under occupation and overcrowding
- Offer a duty officer service for housing advice
- Provide you with a name of the officer dealing with your case
- Provide advice by telephone and/or in person
- Ensure that we work with applicants to help them to remain in their own homes wherever possible
- Maintain a list of applicants who require help and assistance to bid for properties
- Ensure staff are made aware of current legislation and welfare rights to ensure we are able to provide comprehensive housing advice and homelessness prevention
- Seek to undertake detailed investigations showing empathy and due consideration of the difficult circumstances our applicants are facing
- Seek temporary accommodation that is suited to your household needs within the confines of the emergency nature of temporary accommodation.

Mutual exchanges

We will:

- Provide an opportunity to exchange your tenancy with that of another tenant, by way of internet-based mutual exchange services
- Take reasonable steps to publicise the internet based mutual exchange service that we subscribe to
- Provide reasonable support for you to access the mutual exchange service we subscribe to when you do not have access to the internet
- Process all mutual exchange applications within 42 days
- Notify all applicants in writing the result of their application
- Arrange for the necessary health and safety checks to be completed prior to the exchanging of properties
- Carry out a post tenancy visit after the exchange has taken place.

Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard

We will work with you to shape our services and monitor our work. Tenants will be given support to develop and implement opportunities for involvement and empowerment. Our complaints process will resolve issues promptly, politely and fairly.

Service delivery

We will:

- Be committed to the principles of openness and transparency and for this reason we will ensure that our policies are well publicised
- Provide services in line with current policy and legislative requirements
- Ensure that you are made aware if there are any operational matters which impact upon our ability to operate our policies and that this information is given to tenants and stakeholders
- Carry out service reviews to ensure that our services continue to be efficient and effective
- Publish and have readily available a copy of our Service Standards so you know the standard of service to expect from us
- Publish our performance in our Annual Report and on the website
- Listen to your feedback to improve services
- Review our policies in accordance with legislative changes and good practise.

Customer Service

We will:

- Provide a range of different contact methods, you can call into our offices, phone, email or write to us, or use online services
- Provide a range of different ways you can communicate with us
- Foster good relations with people when providing services to eliminate discrimination and to promote equal opportunities
- Ensure that our staff are polite, friendly, helpful and listen to your enquiry
- Treat you with fairness and respect
- Respond to the diverse needs of our tenants, adapting our approach as required
- Ensure that publications are available in standard and alternative formats
- Ensure that our offices comply with legislative requirements for disabled access
- Provide telephone interpretation services and arrange interpreters on request
- Train staff in diversity and safeguarding issues

- Refer you to other agencies when we cannot assist or if it will be beneficial to you
- Provide a duty officer to deal with your query if the member of staff you wish to speak with is absent from their desk
- Introduce ourselves and wear an identification badge when we greet or visit you.

When you telephone us we will:

- Answer telephones as quickly as possible
- Provide the name of the caller when we answer your call
- Tell you the name of the person we are transferring your call to and the service area they work in where we have to redirect your call
- Keep the use of answerphones/voicemail to an absolute minimum during office hours
- Provide an out-of-hours telephone emergency service.

If you write or send us an email we will:

- Respond fully to letters, emails, online comments, requests for information in accordance with the timescales set out in the Council's Customer Care policy which is available to view on our website
- Include a named person, telephone number and email address on all written correspondence.

When you visit us at our offices we will:

- See you as quickly as possible
- See you as soon as the duty officer is available if you don't have an appointment, or offer to make an appointment for an alternative time
- Provide a private interview facility to discuss confidential matters
- Arrange for someone to sign, translate or interpret if you let us know you need one prior to visiting us
- Provide you with a clean, tidy, comfortable and smoke free environment
- Have a range of up to date leaflets available in reception.

If we visit you at home, we will:

- Arrive on time or contact you if we are delayed
- Give you an AM or PM appointment if we are to carry out work
- Not enter your home unless a responsible adult is present
- Not smoke or use inappropriate language
- Leave a calling card if no one is at home when we visit.

If we have to carry out repairs at your home, we will:

- Keep noise to a minimum and use dustsheets to protect your carpets and furnishings
- Only use radios or play music with your permission
- Keep all materials and tools in a safe position and inform you if it is necessary to obstruct doorways, stairs etc
- Respect your privacy when carrying out repairs and knock before entering any rooms
- Inform you if we need to turn off services, tell you before we do and when you can expect them to be turned back on
- Inform you if we need to leave your home during the course of the job, tell you why and when you can expect us back
- Ensure that essential utility services are available at the end of each working day
- Provide temporary heating if we are not able to put your heating back on at the end of each working day
- Clear away all our materials and rubbish when the job is finished.

Involvement and empowerment

We will:

- Ensure that you are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in the:
 - Making of decisions about how housing related services are delivered;
 - Formulation of landlord's housing related policies and strategic priorities; and
 - Scrutinising our performance
- Involve tenants in producing an Annual Report
- Publish News 4 U newsletter's each year
- Listen to your views and offer a variety of ways to communicate with us, including Facebook, Twitter, telephone and our website
- Provide support and resources to encourage tenant involvement such as providing training, information, practical support, paying travel and carer expenses
- Offer you a range of opportunities to be involved in issues that interest you
- Communicate and provide useful information on a regular basis using social network sites such as Facebook or Twitter
- Ensure you have the same opportunities as everyone else if you want to be involved
- Publicise opportunities to be involved on our website, newsletter, Facebook and Twitter

- Consult with you at least once every three years on the best way of involving you in the scrutiny of the housing management service and publish the results.

Complaints

We will:

- Have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly
- Publish clear guidelines on how to report a complaint, the procedure followed, timescales and what you can do if you are still unhappy with the outcome of a complaint
- Provide you with information on how we have used complaints to improve our services
- Publish information about complaints each year, including the number, nature and outcome of the complaints
- Learn lessons from your complaint
- Include details of how to contact the Housing Ombudsman in our response to a complaint
- Monitor, evaluate and report complaints to the relevant working groups on a regular basis.

Neighbourhood and Community Standard

We keep the neighbourhood and communal areas associated with your homes in a safe, clean and secure environment. We work in partnership with other agencies to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour. We offer advice and information on a wide range of housing functions provided by us.

Tenancy management

We will:

- Provide you with the contact details of your Neighbourhood Officer when you sign up for your tenancy
- Publish on our website contact details of your Neighbourhood Officer
- Carry out a post tenancy visit at your home after you have signed your tenancy
- Provide a tenancy agreement and an information pack which will be explained to you when you sign up for your tenancy
- Explain clearly your rights and responsibilities as a tenant when you sign up for your tenancy
- Work with you to avoid and resolve tenancy breaches
- Support you to maintain your home and sustain your tenancy
- Carry out Tenancy Home Checks to identify illegal occupation, misuse of property and fraud
- Offer introductory tenancies to most new tenants
- Signpost to appropriate agencies for tenancy support.

Estate management

We will:

- Inspect all communal areas periodically
- Inspect our estates twice a year and invite you to attend, according to the timetable published on our website
- Carry out regular fire risk assessments of interior communal areas
- Clean internal communal areas every month on a rota basis
- Arrange for needles and dangerous objects to be removed within 1 working day
- Remove offensive graffiti within 1 working day and non-offensive graffiti within 7 working days of being notified
- Investigate all reports of abandoned and illegally parked cars on Council land
- Listen to and work with you to improve our estates

- Publish a Neighbourhood Management Policy which explains how we will maintain and improve the neighbourhoods associated with your homes including communal areas.

Income management

We will:

- Provide advice and support if you are experiencing difficulties with paying your rent and charges
- Investigate all cases of rent arrears after a missed payment by making early contact with you
- Offer a variety of ways to pay your rent and charges
- Give you a minimum of 4 weeks' notice of any proposed increase or decrease of rent or charges
- Provide clear details of the rent and service charges for individual properties at the time of signing for your tenancy
- Encourage you to contact us at any point during your tenancy if you are worried about maintaining your rent payments
- Provide advice on how to apply for benefits or help with housing costs
- Provide quarterly rent statements and at any other time when requested
- Make arrangements wherever possible to help you pay your rent arrears over a reasonable agreed period
- Decide what appropriate action we will take when you owe us money, which could include legal action
- View eviction as a last resort where other debt recovery action has failed
- Provide an estimated final rent account balance when you give us notice to end your tenancy
- Make referrals to supporting agencies.

Independent living

We will:

- Offer a lifeline service (charge payable) which connects to a Control Centre to promote independent living
- Repair faulty lifelines
- Explain the procedure of installing a lifeline when we visit
- Pass on your emergency contact details to the Control Centre
- Provide a lifeline service 365 days a year, 24 hours a day
- Support you to maintain or improve your health and well-being.

Leasehold services

We will:

- Send out service charge bills every year
- Offer a variety of different ways to pay your service charge bills
- Encourage leaseholders to become involved in service delivery and scrutinising our performance
- Provide an account balance when requested
- Provide a leaseholder handbook to all new leaseholders
- Provide opportunities for you to give your views about the services you receive
- Consult with you in line with current legislation and good practice.

Right to buy

We will:

- Inform you about any costs you should consider when buying your home
- Provide help and advice on any matters relating to the purchase of your home under the Right to Buy Scheme
- Confirm if you are eligible to buy your home within 4 weeks of receiving your application
- Carry out a home visit to confirm the boundaries of your property for the Right to Buy sale
- Instruct our Valuer to make an appointment before visiting your home
- Issue you an offer price for your home within 8 weeks for freehold properties or within 12 weeks for leasehold properties
- Give you 12 weeks to appeal against the valuation to the independent district valuer, once you have received your offer
- Liaise with our Legal team to make sure that the completion of your sale is carried out efficiently.

Anti-social behaviour

We will:

- Work in partnership with other agencies to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour (ASB)
- Publish a policy and procedures which explain how we work to prevent and address ASB. It will also explain how we work with agencies to prevent and tackle ASB in areas in where we own properties
- Respond to complaints of harassment, neighbourhood nuisance or ASB in accordance to our published policy
- Provide you with a named officer who will lead and handle your case

- Investigate complaints of ASB and nuisance
- Agree an action plan with you and regularly review the actions taken
- Tailor action plans to take account of the circumstances of each case
- Make best use of the remedies available
- Involve vulnerable tenants, victims and perpetrators, to resolve ASB problems
- Deal with all reports of harassment and hate crimes efficiently and sensitively
- Provide support, either directly or through other agencies to victims, witnesses and those causing ASB
- Work in partnership with other agencies to prevent and tackle ASB
- Inform you before we close your case and ask for feedback on how we have dealt with it and the outcome
- Use our computerised system to manager our ASB cases and provide reporting information on the types and location of ASB complaints. This will enable us to direct our resources more appropriately and effectively
- Use the tools and legal remedies available to prevent and resolve ASB
- Include clear statements about your rights and responsibilities in our tenancy agreement
- Help you to consider all of the housing options available to you in cases where it has been agreed by the Police it is unsafe for you to remain in your home. In cases of domestic abuse, racial harassment and hate crime carry out, within 24 hours, any emergency repairs needed to ensure your home is secure.

Home Standard

We aim to provide you with a repairs and maintenance service that will maintain your home to a good standard. To encourage independent living we will provide aids and adaptations to help you or a member of your household to remain in your home.

Quality of accommodation

We will:

- Continue to invest in our homes and provide a planned maintenance programme to maintain Decent Homes standards
- Plan and prioritise a programme of works in advance
- Consult you about our improvement programme
- Offer a choice of style and colour for replacement kitchens
- Inform you in advance when we will be carrying out improvement works
- Provide contact details of the contractor carrying out the works.

Repairs and maintenance

We will:

- Provide a cost effective repairs and maintenance services to homes and communal areas
- Meet all statutory requirements that provide for the health and safety of the occupants of our homes
- We will provide a variety ways for you to report a repair, for example by telephone, email and online
- Provide an emergency out-of-hours service
- Provide you with a repairs handbook when you sign up for your tenancy
- Aim to offer an appointment at first contact
- Carry out repairs whenever we can without having to carry out a pre-inspection first
- Provide you with a job number when you report a repair and the priority code your repair has been given
- Aim to complete repairs at our first visit, where possible
- Complete day to day repairs in accordance with our published priorities, these are currently set at:
 - Priority 1 (Emergency Repairs) within 24 hours
 - Priority 2 (Urgent Repairs) within 7 days
 - Priority 3 (Routine Repairs) within 28 days
 - Priority 7 (Planned Repairs) within 90 days
 - Priority 8 (Major Repairs) within 49 days
 - Priority R (Minor Aids & Adaptations) within 28 days
 - Priority X (Major Adaptations) within 365 days

- Pay you compensation if we fail to keep to a pre-arranged appointment
- Inform you whether you are responsible for paying the cost of a repair at the time you report one
- Undertake inspections of a percentage of repairs to make sure they meet our quality standard after completion
- Provide an annual gas safety inspection by qualified engineers
- Provide you with a copy of the landlord gas safety record when the inspection is completed
- Take steps to secure access to a property where access is denied and where necessary use gas restrictor devices or take legal action. You may also be liable for these additional costs.

Adaptations

We will:

- Work with you and appropriate agencies to assess your needs in providing aids and adaptations
- Complete minor aids and adaptations within 28 days of your enquiry
- Complete major adaptations within 365 days of receiving a valid statement of need or referral
- Complete major adaptations within 90 days of our first visit (except where planning permission or building regulations are required)
- Keep you informed of the progress of your referral at all stages
- Explain the reasons and explore other options where we do not feel that the work required is possible or appropriate
- Examine alternative housing options where adapting your current home is not appropriate
- Provide information to indicate properties that would be suitable for tenants experiencing disability when advertising our properties
- Undertake inspections of major adaptations undertaken after completion.