

# Customer Service Standards - The Homelessness, Homelessness Prevention/Housing Options Service

## Our Corporate Customer Care Standards are:

We aim to deliver the following standards (and any other customer care standards that we are legally obliged to follow) whenever and however you contact us. This includes services that may be provided by us, or by another partner or agency on our behalf. We aim to try to ensure that partners and other agencies also deliver services to a similar high standard. We will measure our performance against these standards and take action if necessary.

### We want to:

- Be polite and treat you with courtesy, fairness, honesty and respect
- Make sure that services are accessible to everyone
- Listen to you carefully and use plain English when we speak or write to you
- Explain our decisions and the reasons for them
- Respect confidentiality

We will do our best to provide services and information in ways that make them accessible for everyone, including the provision of:

- An interpreter face to face or over the phone, including a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter.
- Information in a number of formats on request - for example, audio tape, Braille, large print or an appropriate language – as quickly as possible.
- A text phone (minicom) number.
- Public meetings in accessible venues and the use of an induction loop or other suitable system for deaf and hard of hearing people.
- Our aim is to have contact details provided in all our published documents.

### If you contact us by telephone:

- We will aim to answer your call within 15 seconds and if your call is in a queue we will try to keep you informed by recorded messages while you wait.
- We will greet you courteously and let you know which service you are through to.
- Whenever possible, a member of staff will deal with your telephone enquiry during the normal working hours of the office or service you are calling (these vary - check our website at [uttlesford.gov.uk](http://uttlesford.gov.uk)).

- If a person is not available, we will use voice mail and check these regularly so that we can respond within 24 hours.
- If we have to pass on your call, we will try to make sure it goes to the right person and we will explain your call to them before we pass it on.
- We will take any messages with care and hand them on with out delay.
- We will try to give you a full answer to your telephone enquiry immediately, or respond fully within 3 working days. If we can't answer you fully within that timescale, we will give you the name and telephone number of the person who is dealing with your enquiry and the date by which we hope to give you a full answer. Mostly we expect to give a full answer to enquiries no more than 10 working days after you contact us. Should it take longer than 10 days to resolve your enquiry, we will keep you informed of progress.
- When we telephone you, we will give you our name, tell you we are calling from Uttlesford District Council and explain clearly why we are phoning.

**If you contact us by letter, e-mail, text phone (minicom) or fax:**

- Letter or fax - we will try to give you a full answer as soon as possible. This should be no more than 10 working days after you contact us. If you can give us a phone number or e-mail address to respond to, it could help to speed up our reply email or text phone - we will try to give you a full answer as soon as possible. This should be no more than 5 working days after you contact us.
- If we can't answer you fully within those timescales, we will let you know we are dealing with your query and give you the name and telephone number of the person who is doing this.
- There will be some circumstances when we are not able to give you a full answer in 10 working days - for example with some complex enquiries or where we need to make a visit or request information from someone else. If so, we will keep you informed of what we are doing, including the date by which we hope to give you a full answer.
- We will use plain English and printed text in typeface Arial 12 point size or larger in our letters, emails and faxes.

**If you visit us:**

- We aim to see you within 5 minutes of your appointment time. It is very helpful if you arrive a few minutes early and let us know if you are delayed or have to cancel.
- If we are delayed, we will explain why, tell you how long you may have to wait and give you the option of coming back on an alternative day and time.
- We will provide a clean, tidy and comfortable waiting area, with information about our services and, where possible, facilities for children.

- Whenever possible, we will provide a place to discuss matters in private, if you wish.

#### **If we visit you:**

- We will normally agree a time with you in advance and if not, we will be happy to return at another time if our visit is not convenient. If necessary, we will let you know as early as possible if we are delayed or have to cancel the visit.
- We will say who we are, where we come from and why we are calling. We will show you our identity card before you invite us in.
- We will give you the opportunity to make a phone call to check our identity before we come in. (Please do not let any one into your home unless you know them or have checked their identity).

## **The Homelessness, Homelessness Prevention/Housing Options Team**

#### **Opening times**

- We will provide an assessment service Monday to Friday, and will advertise our opening times
- We will provide a 24 hour service for emergencies

#### **When you contact us for assistance**

- We will, whenever possible, try to prevent you from becoming homeless
- We will provide a service offering advice and information on a range of issues, e.g. housing option, debt, threat of eviction etc
- We will offer immediate or pre-arranged appointments with a housing options/homelessness prevention officer
- If you are unable to attend the offices then a home visit will be arranged
- If appropriate we will ask you to complete a Housing Register form and this will be registered within five working days once we have received all the required documentation
- We will liaise with other service providers and agencies, as appropriate, to ensure that you receive any necessary support
- If we are unable to prevent your homelessness we will complete our enquiries into your homelessness approach within 33 working days (subject to us receiving all necessary information)
- We will issue a decision letter within three working days of this decision being made

#### **Domestic Violence**

- We have officers whose area of responsibility will be to deal with people who have been subjected to domestic violence, and who have received additional training in this area

### **Emergency accommodation**

- Temporary accommodation may be offered to homeless clients during the assessment of their application, and may be extended if their application is accepted
- We will offer temporary accommodation suitable to the needs of the household
- We will offer advice and support to people placed in temporary accommodation
- We will contact 'floating support' agencies for people who are placed in temporary accommodation
- We will monitor the condition of the temporary accommodation on a regular basis
- We will take action against anyone not keeping to the 'conditions of occupation'

### **Finding a home**

- A housing officer will support you in finding a home, either through HomeOption, or in the private sector
- If you are given limited time to make expressions of interest and are not making any, we will contact you to make sure you know what you need to do or make expressions of interest on your behalf

### **Appealing against our decisions**

- You will be told in writing if you have the right to appeal against our decisions on your homeless application
- If you want to appeal and are unsure about the process, a housing officer will provide you with details of what you need to do

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

- Please be patient; there are times when we are very busy and you may have to wait to see someone
- Please provide the information we ask for: if you delay it will take us longer to deal with your application
- Please arrive on time for appointments, and let us know if you need to cancel, or are running late
- Please help us to develop our service by completing and returning customer feedback forms
- Please tell us straight away if your circumstances change at all

### **Complaints and compliments about services:**

We welcome all comments about our services and use them to improve the way we do things. To help us respond we will follow the Uttlesford District Council

corporate Compliments and Complaints scheme - for more information see our leaflet or visit our website at [www.uttlesford.gov.uk](http://www.uttlesford.gov.uk).

**In summary, our complaints procedure is: -**

- Register complaints made by letter, e-mail, fax, phone or in person.
- Send an acknowledgement by letter or e-mail.
- Respond to all complaints in writing within 10 working days.
- We will make every effort to respond to complaints within 10 working days. However, if this is not possible because we have to carry out a detailed investigation, we will acknowledge your complaint within 5 working days. A full response will be sent within a further 10 working days.
- If we need further information before dealing with your complaint, we will write to you within 3 working days. If, when the Council's complaints procedure is completed, you are still not satisfied and wish to pursue the matter further, please tell us and we will send you the appropriate form to enable you to take the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman (Tel 020 7217 4620).

**Your responsibility:**

Uttlesford District Council employees work hard to provide its customers with the best possible service. We will not tolerate verbal or physical abuse or damage to our property. These circumstances are very rare but our staff are not expected to stay in situations where they:

- feel threatened either verbally or physically
- fear for their own safety, that of colleagues or members of the public

**Contact Details**

Uttlesford District Council  
Housing Services Department  
Council Offices  
London Road  
Saffron Walden  
Essex  
CB11 4ER

Tel: 01799 510510

Fax: 01799 510550

Minicom : 01799 510429

Email: [housingoptions@uttlesford.gov.uk](mailto:housingoptions@uttlesford.gov.uk)  
[uconnect@uttlesford.gov.uk](mailto:uconnect@uttlesford.gov.uk)

Website: [www.uttlesford.gov.uk](http://www.uttlesford.gov.uk)

Our opening hours are:

Monday to Thursday 8.30am to 5pm

Friday 8.30am to 4.30pm