



CUSTOMER SERVICE & COMMUNICATION POLICY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Good communications are crucial to Almond's success in the development and provision of effective services. In line with our Business Plan priorities delivering excellent customer service is paramount. Our Customer Service Charter (outlined below) outlines the customer service standards we will provide to our customers across the business.

1.2 The purpose of this policy is to:

- a) Clarify the level of service we will provide to our customers
- b) Ensure effective two way communication.
- c) Promote and enhance our reputation.
- d) Promote and encourage customer and stakeholder engagement.
- e) Explain our approach to being open and transparent while recognising the importance of ensuring confidentiality where appropriate.
- f) Acknowledge accountability to our stakeholders.
- g) This policy applies to all staff within the organisation.

2.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

2.1 Board of Management

- To ensure that there is in place a policy on Customer Service & Communication that complies with current guidance, quality standards and good practice.

2.2 Management

- Chief Executive: To ensure that the policy is communicated to all employees and implemented throughout AHA Ltd.
- People & Culture Manager: To co-ordinate the implementation of agreed customer services standards throughout AHA Ltd., providing employee training where required, and to oversee the production of publicity and information materials, ensuring high standards of clarity and design etc.
- Directors and Managers: To ensure that agreed customer service standards are provided by their staff and that all publications are of a high standard.

2.3 Employees

- To read the policy and implement agreed customer service standards at all times.

3.0 CONFIDENTIALITY

- 3.1 Employees, consultants, contractors and members of our governing body will be made aware of the need to treat information gained through their relationship with Almond as confidential and should not disclose any information which may be of a sensitive nature to any unauthorised person.

In complying with our policy and procedures on Confidentiality and the requirements of current data protection legislation and related guidance, AHA Ltd. will aim to ensure that: we process all personal information (data) in accordance with current requirements.

4.0 MEDIA CONTACT

- 4.1 Enquiries from the media should be directed to the People & Culture Manager, Communications Officer or, in their absence, the Chief Executive. Departmental Managers may be asked to deal with enquiries with the approval of the Senior Management Team.

5.0 AUDIENCE

- 5.1 Almonds customers will have their own particular communication requirements. The messaging, flow of information and platform of delivery will vary according to need and will be identified in our Communications Strategy which is currently being developed.

Broadly, Almond's audience can be segmented into Customers and Stakeholders.

- a) Customers: Customers are at the heart of all we do and we recognise that their needs vary. Identifying these various needs through customer profiling allows us to tailor our communications to maximise their effectiveness to the benefit of our customers. Customers include tenants, residents, supported individuals and their families.
- b) Stakeholders: For the purposes of this policy, stakeholders are people or organisations with a direct involvement or interest in our operation and performance, including employees, consultants, contractors, the media, members of the governing body, sector groups, RSL's, community groups, investors, funders, MPs, MSPs, Local Authorities and Government.

6.0 MESSAGE AND CHANNELS

- 6.1 Almond expects to send and receive communications using a wide variety of platforms. The messaging and channels will vary depending on the target audience and reason for communication.

Details of Messages, Methods and Channels and how these various approaches will be adopted now and in future will be detailed in our Communications Strategy.

7.0 CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

- 7.1 We realise the importance of ensuring effective communication with our customers and stakeholders and of involving them in decision making. This policy is complementary to our Community Impact Strategy and Tenant Participation Policy.

8.0 ACCOUNTABILITY

- 8.1 We will be open and transparent with our customers and stakeholders.
- 8.2 We will provide information in accordance with Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.
- 8.3 The Scottish Social Housing Charter sets the standards and outcomes that all social landlords should aim to achieve when performing their housing activities.
- 8.4 The Scottish Housing Regulator requires to be notified of any significant or exceptional issue, event or change within our organisation (a notifiable event) and how we intend to deal with it. The events relevant to this policy would come under the Regulator's heading of Performance and Service Delivery issues or Financial and Funding issues. The Scottish Housing Regulator's Guidance, Notifiable Events, gives examples of notifiable events.

A link to the Scottish Housing Regulator's Guidance is below:

<https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/for-landlords/statutory-guidance/notifiable-events>

9.0 CUSTOMER SERVICE CHARTER

- 9.1 AHA will meet the following standards when providing services to our customers- We will:
 - a. Be friendly, welcoming and helpful while conducting themselves in a proper and professional manner at all times;
 - b. Show patience, understanding and sensitivity when dealing with an individual's problems.
 - c. Ensure office opening hours are well publicised and our offices are accessible to all, in particular for parents with prams or pushchairs, or for wheelchair users and others with physical disabilities;
 - d. Answer 85% of phone calls within 30 seconds.
 - e. Aim to resolve all queries at the first point of contact by ensuring our front-line staff have the training and resources they need.
 - f. Be clear about what you can expect from us at each stage of your issue.
 - g. Never leave you in the dark. If the person you speak to can't deal with your issue and they pass your query on to the person who can, they will tell you their contact details and when you can expect a response from them.
 - h. Offer you a call back at a time to suit you if the person you are looking to speak to isn't available.
 - i. Keep to the appointment times made, or if we are unable to, we give adequate notice and arrange an alternative date/time without delay;
 - j. Make it easier for you to do business with us online as a time to suit you, by offering more services digitally.
 - k. Respond to emails and tell you when we are away on holiday and won't be able to respond
 - l. Issue employees with badges so you should know who you are talking to
 - m. Record each contact we have with you on our central system so you never have to repeat your story twice.
 - n. Accept when we have got it wrong, apologise and fix it quickly. We will respond to simple (stage one) complaints within five working days and complex (stage two) complaints within twenty working days.
 - o. Introduce ourselves to the person(s) we are dealing with, and give our first name when answering the telephone;

- p. Treat every individual they contact with honesty, courtesy and respect as part of complying with our Equality & Diversity policy, and treat the homes of those they visit with respect;
- q. Provide private interview rooms which are available and accessible to all;
- r. Ensure potentially confidential information or advice being provided to a tenant or an applicant is not easily overheard by other individuals in the reception area.

10.0 WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

10.1 In our written communications AHA Ltd. will aim to ensure that:

- a. All incoming correspondence is dealt with promptly and efficiently
- b. As detailed in the Complaints policy and procedures, AHA Ltd. will aim to respond within the target timescales, and to resolve all complaints effectively.
- c. Our letters, forms and all our key information, including the Tenancy Agreement, Policies, Information Sheets, Newsletters are clear, concise, easy to understand, use everyday language avoiding the use of 'jargon', technical or legal language wherever possible, and are inviting to read;
- d. We make appropriate use of readable fonts, print size and uncluttered layouts (offering larger version print size or Braille versions for those with reading difficulties);
- e. We will provide written communications in relevant minority languages where requested, and will liaise with translation services where necessary.
- f. If a tenant or applicant has literacy difficulties AHA Ltd. will deal with the individual in a sensitive way, providing explanation or advice as required on the content of letters or forms, and assistance with the completion of forms.
- g. We provide alternative versions of Tenancy Agreements and other documents such as the Tenant Information Sheets or Policies, as required by tenants or applicants who are unable to read them.

11.0 COMPLAINTS

11.1 As detailed in the Complaints policy and procedures, AHA Ltd. will aim to respond within the target timescales set by the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (see 9.1n above), and to resolve all complaints effectively.

12.0 TRAINING

12.1 To ensure that this policy can be implemented AHA Ltd. will ensure that all employees have the appropriate skills and knowledge to carry out their roles.

12.2 AHA Ltd. will provide all employees who come into contact with customers and stakeholders with the necessary training in interviewing skills, handling difficult or potentially violent situations, customer care issues and equal opportunities.

13.0 IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW

- 13.1 Where targets have been set, AHA Ltd. will monitor our performance through regular checks through surveys and performance management.
- 13.2 Reports on the results of surveys and any other monitoring exercises will be reported to our Board of Management and, where appropriate, AHA Ltd. will incorporate the results from such surveys and feedback in the regular reviews of our policies, procedures and practices.
- 13.3 Where the need for improvement is identified AHA Ltd. will set achievable targets within realistic timescales within which the changes are to be implemented, and monitor progress.
- 13.4 The People and Culture Manager will ensure that the Senior Management Team reviews this policy at least every five years.

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