



Our service standards

at Two Castles
Housing Association



At Two Castles Housing Association, we are committed to providing our residents with excellent standards of service.

To make sure that our residents know what levels of service they can expect to receive, we have developed service standards for the following:

1. Tenant Involvement and Empowerment

Customer service, choice, complaints and understanding the diverse needs of tenants.

2. Neighbourhood and Community

How schemes and neighbourhoods are maintained and how we address anti-social behaviour.

3. Home

The quality of your accommodation and our repair and maintenance standards.

4. Tenancy

Letting of empty rented properties, including provisions for mutual exchanges and our approach to different types of rented tenure.

How we have agreed our service standards

We are committed to resident involvement and, to agree these service standards, we set up a working group of residents and staff.

The group met in 2011, in 2012 and again in 2014 to look at our existing standards and agree new standards.

How we will monitor our service standards

We will check we are meeting these standards by:

- measuring our performance directly
- carrying out satisfaction surveys with our residents
- carrying out anonymous checks by residents (Reality Checking)
- carrying out spot checks on services
- holding focus groups with our residents to gather their views.
- scrutiny exercises undertaken by the Residents' Scrutiny Panel

We will then report back to you on our performance by publishing results in our annual report, Fanfare, our website and through our Customer Service Committees.

Service standards will be reviewed every 2 years.

Tenant Involvement and Empowerment

Customer service and choice

We aim to provide your services in the most appropriate way, taking all of your needs into consideration. Our Equality and Diversity strategy and action plan sets out how we will meet our objectives in providing these services. This includes:

- providing information in a range of languages and formats on request
- providing private interviews at offices or in homes if requested by a same sex member of staff
- recording accurate voicemail messages letting you know how to contact staff in our absence and when you can expect your call to be returned
- treating all information you give us confidentially and not disclosing it to others without your permission, unless we are required to do so by law





- always introducing ourselves by name, wearing name badges and being polite and helpful in our dealings with you
- publicising the opening times of our offices and any out-of-hours numbers at all our offices and on our website.
- keeping appointments with you when requested and notifying you in advance if we are unable to keep it
- leaving a calling card when a home visit is made and there is no reply
- ensuring that all policies and procedures bear a publication date and are regularly reviewed
- providing information leaflets in all of our offices and on our website
- providing facilities in all our offices and for use in external meetings and other rooms for customers who are hard of hearing
- providing a New Residents' Pack for all of our new residents
- answering your phone calls within 30 seconds (following our initial welcome message if you are ringing our 0800 085 1171 or 0300 123 1747 Customer Services numbers)
- replying to your correspondence (including emails) within 10 working days of receiving them
- offering alternative contact arrangements which our contractors will adhere to.

- providing a range of methods for payment of rent and service charges (ie Standing Order, Direct Debit, Allpay card, Debit card payment – over the telephone or through our Resident’s Portal)
- offer advice and guidance following the implementation of the Welfare Reform Act
- aim to deal with queries at first point of contact (ensuring development and training of our staff is paramount in delivering customer services)
- offer ways to allow you to communicate with us and give feedback (ie as well as telephone and email, by postal surveys, by text, by Resident’s Portal, or through our website – using online surveys)
- respect equality and diversity when delivering customer service
- have active Residents’ groups who meet regularly to evaluate services and performance
- collect and use resident profile information to compliment service delivery

Complaints

Details of our complaints, compliments, comments and compensation policies and procedures are available in our offices and on our website. We also display posters in our offices describing how to make a complaint.

Two Castles uses your feedback to improve our services where relevant and we report back on our performance to our Customer Service Committees on a quarterly basis.

Formal complaints

Stages 1 and 2 complaints

- we will acknowledge your complaint within 3 working days

- we will respond to your complaint within 10 working days from the date of the initial complaint.

Stage 3 complaints

- we will provide you with papers relating to an Appeal at least 5 working days before a hearing
- we will provide you with a decision in writing following an Appeal within 5 working days.
- if you remain dissatisfied, you then have 2 options to refer the matter to the Independent Housing Ombudsman:

Option 1 – refer the matter to a designated person (which can be an MP or local Councillor).

Option 2 – you can wait 8 weeks following exhaustion of our complaints procedure before referring the matter to the Ombudsman.

Informal complaints

- We will respond to your complaint within 10 working days from the date of the initial complaint.

All complaints

- We will publish information regarding the number and type of our formal and informal complaints annually.



Involvement and empowerment

We offer varied and flexible resident involvement options, depending on your individual needs. The Association has a specific budget for resident involvement and a designated member of staff to implement our Resident Involvement Strategy and Action Plan.

We will also:

- provide you with you a leaflet and an up to date web page, showing how you can get involved
- publish Fanfare, our resident newsletter, 4 times a year
- have at least 3 elected residents sitting on our Customer Services Committees
- have at least 2 elected residents sitting on our Board
- involve residents in the design and review of all appropriate projects, policies and procedures
- provide a range of opportunities for residents to become involved in helping us develop our services and how we feedback any changes
- take into account and assist with residents' support needs to enable them to get involved
- monitor the diversity of residents who take part and take positive steps to attract under-represented groups
- monitor satisfaction with involvement in both the wider resident body and with involved residents
- publish an annual resident involvement impact report showing how residents have influenced our work.
- support an independent Residents' Scrutiny Panel

Neighbourhood and Community

Neighbourhood management

Two Castles aims to ensure that the area in which you live is clean, safe and well maintained. We currently have a policy which covers communal areas only and includes internal decoration, furnishings and fittings, lifts, health and safety, fire safety and security. It also includes external areas such as landscaping, fencing, paving, parking bays and television aerials.

We will:

- ensure landscaped areas including lawns and hedges are maintained in line with our published frequency of visits schedule
- monitor resident satisfaction with the landscaping service
- review landscaping contractors' performance annually
- remove any items which cause a serious health and safety risk in the communal areas within 24 hours of being told, e.g. syringes and hazardous substances
- encourage residents to inform us of any problems with the communal areas
- publish the name of your Housing Officer and the date of their annual scheme visit



- provide residents in our schemes with communal areas with written advice about safety issues
- provide residents with emergency contact numbers at all times
- maintain all smoke detectors installed by ourselves in communal areas
- carry out periodic water management checks to meet statutory guidelines on housing schemes which have the appropriate water delivery and storage systems
- ensure that fire fighting equipment and portable electrical appliances are serviced and tested in line with approved guidelines
- ensure that properties with communal areas have Fire Risk Audits carried out in line with our Fire Management Policy
- liaise with the relevant authorities to ensure that the physical environment around our schemes is maintained to an adequate standard.

Anti-social behaviour

Our policy on anti-social behaviour allows us to use the landlord powers available to us by law and under the terms and conditions of tenancy agreements and leases to ensure that our residents can have quiet enjoyment of their homes, without the threat of harassment, nuisance and violence.

We will:

- keep you up to date with progress in relation to your anti-social behaviour complaint and agree with you how we will do this and how often
- offer you an interview within 24 hours in cases where serious assault has taken place or there are threats of violence
- offer you an interview within 48 hours in cases of serious nuisance, such as continual excessive noise and/or prolonged verbal abuse
- offer you an interview within 10 working days in less serious incidents, for example noisy dogs, untidy gardens or car repairs
- provide a list of what constitutes the types of anti-social behaviour within the three levels of response, as agreed in our policy





- provide you with information about how to report out-of-hours anti-social behaviour
- write to let you know what our agreed response is, following our initial interview with you about your anti-social behaviour complaint
- offer a range of solutions to help resolve your complaint of anti-social behaviour, e.g. advice and support, mediation or legal action
- refer your complaint to the agency responsible for dealing with it (e.g. graffiti, litter, abandoned cars, fly tipping), if your anti-social behaviour complaint is not our responsibility
- follow up any anti-social behaviour complaint referred to another agency, to check that it has dealt with the problem
- remove offensive graffiti within 24 hours of it being reported to us
- remove non-offensive graffiti within 5 working days of it being reported to us
- keep the identity of victims/witnesses confidential when requested, unless required to not do so for legal reasons.



Local area co-operation

Two Castles works closely with other service providers and landlords within our neighbourhoods. We aim to ensure that our residents are able to live their lives peacefully and that the environment in which they live is pleasant and free from harm.

We work in partnership with other agencies such as local authorities, police, neighbourhood wardens, victim support and probation to provide co-ordinated responses to incidents and individuals. We also have access to specialist services in many areas including mental health, drug and alcohol, and domestic violence support agencies to ensure appropriate support and that signposting can be found where necessary.

The Home Standard

Two Castles recognises that well maintained and sustainable properties are fundamental for us to ensure that we meet the expectations of you, our residents.

The Two Castles' Home standard helps us to provide the highest quality properties and we want to make it clear to our residents what they should expect from one of our properties.



Responsive Repairs

We will:

- offer a variety of ways to report repairs including in person, by telephone, letter, email, website and text messages
- provide a 24 hour a day, 7 days a week dedicated phone number for reporting repairs
- prioritise repairs so that they are attended to/completed within 24 hours, 7 days or 21 days
- complete non-urgent repairs within 90 days and repair all properties which need such a repair on the same scheme, at that time
- train staff to diagnose repairs
- provide appointments for repairs and pre-inspections when you report your repair. If a pre-inspection is required, we will arrange a convenient appointment to attend within 7 working days of the problem being reported
- provide convenient appointments over timescales
- develop an accountable appointments system where failure to be present will result in either a charge to the contractor or resident
- provide a receipt in a variety of ways for a reported repair
- attend emergency repairs within 6 hours and complete or make safe within 6 hours
- undertake urgent and routine repairs from 8:00 am to 6:00pm Monday to Friday, and 10:00am to 2:00pm on a Saturday, excluding bank holidays
- ask contractors to telephone 1 hour ahead prior to attending the repair
- get repairs 'Right First Time', with performance measured against agreed number of visits via residents' surveys.
- action no heating or hot water repairs within 24 hours (attending within 6 hours) between 1 October through to 31 March (completing within 7 days between 1 April through to 30 September, dependent upon circumstance)

Gas Servicing

We will:

- undertake the servicing of gas heating appliances within 12 months of the previous service
- install and check carbon monoxide detectors at the time of gas heating servicing
- take legal action against those residents who fail to provide reasonable access to have their gas heating appliance serviced.

Service quality and value for money

We will:

- regularly review the performance of the contractors we use
- use various ways to obtain resident views about our entire repairs service
- undertake targeted post-inspections of completed work to ensure quality control
- regularly review the repairs service to ensure that value for money is achieved taking into account the entire repairs process
- provide a more flexible service to vulnerable residents.

Contractors

We will:

- expect our contractors to respect you and your home.
- equally, we will expect you to respect our contractors and staff.
- only use contractors who abide by our Code of Conduct
- ask our contractors to seek DBS checks for their operatives and ensure they carry photographic identification.

Tenancy Standard

Allocations and mutual exchanges

Our Lettings policy sets out how we manage the allocation of our rented properties and the following statements set out the principles of the standards of service applicants for our properties can expect to receive:

- we will work together with Local Authority partners to give priority for re-housing to those people in the `reasonable preference` categories of need prescribed by government guidance, and to find joint solutions to housing problems.
- we will treat all those applying to us fairly, to be inclusive of all groups and for our procedures to be clear and open. We will provide support to more vulnerable customers where this is required.
- we aim to provide greater choice for applicants but in many areas the demand for housing will outstrip the supply. To mitigate this we will provide good quality information to applicants to enable them to be clear about their prospects of being offered accommodation. For people unlikely to be offered accommodation we will aim whenever possible to give advice about alternative housing options or to signpost them in the direction of that advice.
- we will make the best use of the housing stock available to us.
- we will aim to attract new customers to areas of lower demand and to reduce the time which more difficult to let properties stand empty.

- we will increase the opportunities for tenant mobility, including the provision of an internet based mutual exchange service.
- we acknowledge that some people who apply to us for re-housing will be deemed to be ineligible either by virtue of having sufficient resources to obtain their own housing solution or because of their previous unacceptable behaviour. Our policy is clear and open about the reasons for which we will exclude certain people, but we also advise such applicants what actions they can take to subsequently be accepted onto our waiting lists.

Tenure

Our Rented Stock Tenure Policy sets out types of rented tenures the Association will grant.

The principles of such are as follows:

- To ensure security of tenure, the Association will normally grant **assured tenancies** to all of its tenants.

However, we reserve the right to grant **assured shorthold tenancies** for specific reasons and for specific schemes.

Some examples of relevant circumstances are:

- Local Lettings Schemes – will be introduced where there are particular characteristics of properties or applicants, e.g. specialist accommodation or specific client groups
- Short term leases – where the Association is not the owner of the property but is leasing the property, e.g. Living Over The Shop schemes
- Starter Tenancies – will be introduced to deal with particular risks to tenancy management, e.g. Anti Social Behaviour

- to ensure best use of scarce stock resources – will be used to ensure supply of accommodation in areas where the Association has very limited supply
- to meet any future legal and regulatory requirements – to be able to respond to any regulatory or legal obligations.

This type of tenancy will only be used after consultation with the relevant local authority and following the approval of the Customer Services Committee.

The respective obligations of the tenant and the Association will be clearly outlined in the Tenancy Agreement, including circumstances under which the tenancy can be brought to an end by either party.



Other formats, other Languages:

If you require this information in large print, Braille, audiotape or in other languages, please do not hesitate to ask.

Si vous souhaitez des informations dans une autre langue ou sous un autre format, veuillez nous le demander.

如欲索取以另一語文印製或另一格式製作的資料，請與我們聯絡。

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo uzyskać informacje w innym języku lub w innym formacie, prosimy dać nam znać.

Türkçe bilgi almak istiyorsanız, bize başvurabilirsiniz.

Se deseja obter informação noutra idioma ou formato, diga-nos.

اگر آپ کو معلومات کسی دیگر زبان یا دیگر شکل میں درکار ہوں تو برائے مہربانی ہم سے پوچھئے۔

यदि आपको सूचना किसी अन्य भाषा या अन्य रूप में चाहिये तो कृपया हमसे कहे

Approved by **Two Castles Housing Associations Readers Panel**

For more information, visit www.twocastles.org.uk or telephone **Customer Services** on 0800 085 1171 (free from landlines) or 0300 123 1747 (local rate/ low call charge from mobiles); email us at customerservices@twocastles.org.uk or fax to 01228 597822

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