



# Our commitments to you

## **East Devon District Council's Housing Service Standards**

Published March 2011

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To request this information in an alternative format or language please call 01395 516551 or email [csc@eastdevon.gov.uk](mailto:csc@eastdevon.gov.uk)

We consider requests on an individual basis

# Introduction

East Devon District Council is the landlord of over 4,250 homes, 700 garages, and 150 leasehold flats. Our aim is to ensure that our tenants and leaseholders live in decent homes and receive an efficient and effective housing service.

In this document we have put together all our housing customer service commitments. We have many service standards that have been in place for some time. We also have some new 'local standards' which have just been agreed and will become effective from April 2011. These are set out in full at the back of this document.

## Our commitments

We will:

- aim to answer telephone calls, letters and emails promptly
- treat all tenants, leaseholders, and those who use our services with respect and courtesy
- deal with all enquiries in a confidential manner, listen to our customers' needs and provide assistance as quickly as we can
- attempt to resolve all issues and requests – if we have to say 'no', which we may do on occasion, we will explain why
- provide a professional service through experienced and trained staff
- consult with groups and individual tenants, leaseholders, and other customers on key issues and ask for regular feedback on the services we provide.

We expect our customers:

- to be polite and courteous and to treat staff with respect
- to keep us informed of changes that affect their tenancy or housing needs.

## Our values

To ensure that we deliver a high standard and consistent service we have adopted a Housing Management Plan and a simple set of values, as follows.

We aim to:

- maintain our tenants' homes in a good condition and above the Decent Home Standard, a nationally recognised government standard
- undertake repairs promptly and conveniently for tenants
- respond to complaints and requests for service in a timely manner
- provide an efficient and effective estate management service
- maintain an ambitious range of programmed, cyclical, and annual improvements
- improve the energy efficiency of tenants' homes
- provide an efficient housing management service to leaseholders
- collect rent and other income due to finance housing services and the maintenance of tenants' homes.

- provide good value for money services for tenants that are easy and convenient to access
- deliver housing management services that are tenant focussed and accountable to service users.

In delivering housing services we value:

- openness, honesty, and trust
- courage, passion, and enthusiasm for housing, people, and communities
- tenant and leaseholder views and opinions
- partner contributions towards achieving service aims and targets
- well trained, committed staff
- good performance, quality, and customer focussed improvements
- high standards of customer care.

## Our commitments to you

### Accessing our service

When you contact us we will answer you promptly, listen carefully, and treat you with respect. We will respond to letters and emails within ten days and to telephone calls within twenty seconds.

If you call at our offices with an appointment we will see you within five minutes. If you call without having made an appointment, we will see you within twenty minutes.

We will try to respond to your request positively but on occasions we may have to say 'no'. In these cases we will always explain our decision to you.

We will make sure that we do not knowingly treat you differently due to your race, ethnic or national origin, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, age, religion or belief, or political beliefs.

When you contact us about issues which are not related to repairs, we will put you in touch with the right person to answer your query straight away. They will keep you informed of the progress of your case. Repeat service requests (excluding repairs) will be logged as complaints by the receiving officer.

Meetings will be held at small local venues throughout the district and we will make sure that the right staff attend. As well as meetings we will use a range of involvement methods which will be widely published. We will listen to what you tell us and make service improvements as a result.

*When you contact us we will answer you promptly, listen carefully, and treat you with respect*

We have a Tenant and Council Partnership Agreement, drawn up with tenants, that sets out our commitment to tenant involvement within the housing service. The tenant handbook sets out many of the ways in which tenants can get involved. It also gives more details on customer care, how to access our service, and equality and diversity.

### **Applying for housing**

The Council allocates housing through the choice-based lettings system Devon Home Choice. If you wish to apply for council housing or for a transfer to another property you need to be registered on Devon Home Choice.

We have a legal duty to assist homeless persons under the Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Act 2002. However our aim is to prevent people from becoming homeless. A housing officer is available to deal with emergencies and people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. We will operate an 'out of hours' homeless service to deal with homelessness occurring outside normal office hours.

Decisions on homeless applications will be made within thirty-three working days. Where an applicant challenges our decision we will complete homeless reviews within fifty-six working days.

### **Your tenancy and paying your rent**

We aim to let our empty homes as soon as possible. All homes let will meet the adopted void standard ensuring that new tenants enjoy homes in good repair and decorative order.

The conditions of your tenancy will be explained at your sign up interview. You will be provided with a tenant handbook and welcome pack, containing advice on how to conduct your tenancy.

We will send you a rent statement every six months (more often to those tenants with rent arrears). You will be sent a rent statement within ten days of a request. Tenants will be given twenty-eight days notice of any rent increases. We offer a range of ways in which you can pay your rent. We closely monitor our performance with regard to rent collection and actively pursue unpaid rent using a debt collection agency if necessary.

All enquiries for information about the Right to Buy will be responded to within ten working days. If you are permitted to buy your home you will get a valuation offer within eight weeks of your application for a house and twelve weeks for a flat.

### **Your home and our repairs service**

We prioritise council home repairs according to how serious they are so that the most urgent repairs are dealt with first. Our website gives details of how we have categorised a hundred of the most common repairs. We aim to complete repairs within the following timescales:

## OUR COMMITMENTS TO YOU

REPAIR TYPE	TIMESCALE
Immediate	One day
Emergency	Three days
Urgent	Seven days
Priority	Three weeks
Non urgent	Six weeks

When you report a repair to us, we will ask you whether you have reported the issue before. This will help reduce the number of times you may have to report a particular repair.

We will give you written notice of any major works to your home and an indication of how long the work will take to complete. An annual gas safety check will be carried out. You will be given fourteen days notice of when our gas engineers will be in your area.

Our contractors will treat you with respect and courtesy. The standard of workmanship will be monitored and we will aim for a 'right first time' service.

We are also committed to working toward improving the living environment for tenants living in blocks of flats.

### **Improvements and tenant choice**

We will produce a rolling five-year plan to identify improvement works to our properties, prioritising areas highlighted by the stock condition survey and feedback from the local standards consultation.

If refurbishment work is carried out, tenants will be given a choice of the style and colour of doors, worktops, kitchen fittings, and tiling.

If you have a disability or special needs and your accommodation needs to be adapted in some way, please contact us, or Care Direct on 0845 155 1007. You may require a recommendation from your occupational therapist for us to make the necessary alterations to your home. Alternatively we may offer you a move to more suitable accommodation.

*Tenants will be given some choices about doors, kitchen fittings, worktops, and tiling*

### **Managing our estates and antisocial behaviour**

Incidents of vandalism, litter, nuisance or antisocial behaviour will be investigated and dealt with within ten working days. We will attempt to resolve routine cases within twenty-eight days and all cases within seventy-two days. A twenty-four hour emergency service will be operated so that serious incidents and ongoing nuisance problems can be reported to us.

We regularly carry out local estate walkabouts. As well as these we will introduce regular in-depth estate inspections. In 2011 we will pilot this in Honiton and Axminster.

We are committed to engaging with young people in free-time activities that help them create positive outcomes for their lives.

The Council will work with other local agencies to tackle antisocial behaviour issues. Incidents reported by EDDC tenants will be monitored by housing officers who will feedback regularly to the person reporting the problem.

### **Supporting our older and vulnerable residents**

We provide sheltered housing across East Devon where tenants can benefit from the support of mobile support officers. The support offered is based around the needs of the individual and is decided through an assessment known as the 'single assessment process'. Although accommodation is mainly for older people, we do support individuals with a range of support needs. All our sheltered housing properties are linked to our Home Safeguard alarm service to ensure that help can be accessed twenty-four hours a day through the activation of a pendant, or in some cases through pull cords.

We provide the Home Safeguard community alarm service twenty-four hours a day for seven days a week. This is available to people who aren't council tenants and also to tenants in general purpose accommodation. We will install urgent requests for alarms within two working days of receiving a request and non-urgent requests within five working days. We will answer Home Safeguard calls within sixty seconds.

### **What to do if you are not happy with the service you receive**

If we make a mistake we will apologise and put it right as quickly as possible. If you are dissatisfied with the service you receive please contact the relevant housing officer. If they are unable to assist you the matter will be referred to the section leader.

We will have a complaints process for housing that is easily accessible. Officers will be able to help you with this on request. We follow the East Devon District Council corporate complaints process.

Complaints will be monitored quarterly by the Customer Care Commitments Service Review Group, made up of tenants and staff. Feedback will be given in the Annual Report to Tenants.

*We are committed to engaging with young people in free-time activities that help them create positive outcomes for their lives*

# The new local standards

The Tenant Services Authority now expects social landlords to set local standards. We have been working with tenants since July 2010 to set these for three of the national standards. These become effective from April 2011. We will regularly monitor these and during the next year will be working with tenants to review them and set standards for two further service areas: the tenancy standard and the value for money standard.

## 1 Tenant involvement and empowerment standard

1.1 When you contact us we will answer you promptly, listen carefully, and treat you with respect.

*What this means:* We will respond to letters and emails within ten days and telephone calls within twenty seconds. If you call at our offices with an appointment we will see you within five minutes. If you call without an appointment we will see you within twenty minutes.

We will try to respond to your request positively but on occasions we may have to say no. However we will always explain our decision to you. We will make sure that we do not knowingly treat you differently due to your race, ethnic or national origin, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, age, religion or belief, or political beliefs.

An annual survey of tenants will be carried out to check that this standard is being met and the findings will be reported in the Annual Report to Tenants.

1.2 When you contact us about issues which are not repairs related we will put you in touch with the right person to answer your query straight away. They will keep you informed of the progress of your case.

*What this means:* You will be given the name of the officer dealing with your query. If we are not able to answer your query straight away we will agree with you how frequently and in what way you wish to be kept informed of progress.

1.3 We will have an easily accessible complaints process for housing. Officers will be able to help you with this on request.

*What this means:* Making a complaint about a housing issue will be a simpler process. You will be told the name of the officer dealing with your complaint and they will keep you informed about what is happening.

1.4 Repeat service requests (excluding repairs) will be logged as complaints by the receiving officer.

*What this means:* If we do not resolve your service request within a reasonable period of time and you have to contact us again, the matter will be referred to a manager. We will make every attempt to deal with your service request 'right first time'.

1.5 Complaints will be monitored quarterly by the Customer Care Commitments Service Review Group, made up of tenants and staff. Feedback will be given in the Annual Report to Tenants.

*What this means:* We will use the information gathered about the complaints received to improve our service and ensure complaints of a similar nature do not arise in future. The Housing Review Board will receive an annual report on formal complaints and we will learn from complaints we receive.

1.6 We will hold meetings at small local venues throughout the district and ensure the right staff attend.

*What this means:* Staff who can directly answer your questions will be at the meetings. The meetings will be held near to where you live, in our local community centres if possible.

1.7 As well as meetings we will use a range of involvement methods which will be widely published. We will listen to what you tell us and make service improvements as a result.

*What this means:* We will use methods such as housing drop-ins, e-consultation, telephone surveys, postal surveys, service review groups, and annual conference. We will produce a Tenant Involvement Strategy to compliment the Tenant and Council Partnership Agreement.

## **2 Home standard**

2.1 We will produce a rolling five-year plan to identify improvement works to our properties, prioritising areas highlighted by the stock condition survey and feedback from the local standards consultation.

*What this means:* This plan will be refreshed each year, to include work picked up by our housing officers throughout the year. We will use the results of the stock condition survey along with local standards feedback to prioritise areas of spend. The Business Plan will be updated identifying a thirty-year plan for major expenditure. We will identify additional funds for the programmes prioritised by tenants.

2.2 We will ensure all our contractors treat you with respect and courtesy. We will monitor the standard of workmanship and aim for a 'right first time' service.

*What this means:* The Repairs and Maintenance Monitoring Group will monitor customer care performance of contractors. We will secure the benefits of a Partnering Agreement with our main contractors. The number of visits by contractors to complete your repair will be reduced. We will also measure contractors' performance including workmanship and 'right first time'.

2.3 We will introduce a question to ask when you report a repair to establish if there is a repeat repair issue occurring.

*What this means:* Repeat repairs will be more easily identified and dealt with and we will investigate the possibility of a diagnostic reporting system so that the repair required is correctly identified the first time round.

### **3 Neighbourhood and community standard**

3.1 As well as our current local estate walkabouts, we will introduce regular in-depth estate inspections. In 2011 we will pilot this in Honiton and Axminster.

*What this means:* The inspections will include a review of gardens, footpaths, parking areas, rubbish, dog fouling, abandoned vehicles, and other antisocial issues. We will take the opportunity to 'door knock' and speak to tenants about issues affecting them and address any problems which may have been identified during the inspection. We anticipate that these inspections will highlight ongoing problems and enable them to be resolved more speedily.

3.2 We will engage young people in positive free time activities that help them create positive outcomes for their lives.

*What this means:* We will look to develop the SWITCH project aimed at 16 to 25 year olds. This currently provides age specific events and activities and recruits SWITCH volunteers to help put on events for children between the ages of 8 and 16. It also provides a weekly information service with free internet access and advice on training, volunteering and employment activities. Providing age related recreational activities should lead to a reduction in antisocial behaviour among this age group.

3.3 We will work with other local agencies to tackle antisocial behaviour issues. Incidents reported by EDDC tenants will be monitored by housing officers who will feedback regularly to the person reporting the problem.

*What this means:* You will receive regular information about the progress with any incidents reported to us.

### **4 Living in flats standard**

4.1 We will work to improve the living environment for tenants who live in blocks of flats.

*What this means:* We will pay particular attention to enhancing the grounds' maintenance, insulation, and the level of cleaning of any communal areas within our blocks of flats.

# How to contact us

The phone number for our main switchboard is 01395 516551 and the Tenants' Handbook contains a comprehensive list of how you can contact us and which department to ask for. You can access our website at [www.eastdevon.gov.uk](http://www.eastdevon.gov.uk). Alternatively, you can visit us or write to us at:

Housing and Social Inclusion Service  
East Devon District Council  
Knowle  
Sidmouth  
EX10 8HL

## What you can do if you do not think that we are meeting these standards

We are trying hard to deliver an excellent service. If we get this wrong we want to know, so please call the relevant Section Leader (see below). We will always say 'sorry' where we agree we have not achieved the standard of service explained in this document.

We will take action to put things right if we get them wrong. If we don't do this or you are not satisfied with our response, you can make a formal complaint by contacting the Complaints Officer on 01395 516551 or by visiting our website at [www.eastdevon.gov.uk/making\\_a\\_complaint](http://www.eastdevon.gov.uk/making_a_complaint).

### Contact details for Section Leaders:

ESTATE MANAGEMENT AND ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR	
Section Leader: Senior Housing Officer	01395 516551
HOMELESSNESS	
Section Leader: Senior Homelessness Officer	01395 517469
HOME SAFEGUARD AND COMMUNITY ALARMS	
Section Leader: Home Safeguard Manager	01395 578237
HOUSING NEEDS AND DEVON HOME CHOICE	
Section Leader: Senior Housing Needs Officer	01395 517469
RENT ISSUES	
Section Leader: Rental Manager	01395 517444
REPAIRS	
Section Leader: Senior Repairs Administration Assistant	01395 517458
SHELTERED SERVICES AND MOBILE SUPPORT OFFICERS	
Section Leader: Support Services Manager	01395 516551
TENANT INVOLVEMENT AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	
Section Leader: Tenant Participation Officer	01395 517453

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