



NEW CHARTER HOUSING TRUST GROUP

Customer Access Strategy

Great Homes, Great Neighbourhoods, Great People

Scope of Strategy

A customer at NCHTG is defined as anyone who requests something from us or asks us any question and uses any method to ask it.



The New Charter Housing Trust Group (NCHTG) puts our customers at the heart of all we do and strives to engage customers in shaping our services of the future.

This strategy sits above all policies and processes that have a direct link to the way we deliver our services across the Group including New Charter Homes, Gedling Homes, AKSA Homes, Threshold and the Building Company.

I. Tenant involvement and empowerment

Customer service and choice

We are committed to achieving high levels of customer satisfaction in all service areas. With the help of customers we have set a series of standards that our customers can expect when they are in contact with New Charter:

-  All services will be accessible for our customers, by having a physical presence in convenient locations, translation and interpretation services along with literature available in different formats.
-  Customers will be greeted professionally and treated in a courteous, honest and respectful manner.

- 🔗 Employees will wear identification badges at all times.
- 🔗 All customers will be treated equally and according to their individual needs regardless of their protected characteristic of race, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, marital or civil partnership status, age, disability or pregnancy and maternity status.
- 🔗 Confidentiality will be respected at all times, with spaces available in all locations for occasions when customers want to talk privately.
- 🔗 Where appointments are necessary, they will be arranged at a mutually convenient time, in agreement with our customer.
- 🔗 We will deal with your telephone enquiries in a prompt and efficient manner and aim to answer 95% of your calls when you contact us.
- 🔗 We aim to provide you with the best quality telephone service we can and will use internal quality assessments, mystery shopping and customer feedback to measure the quality of our call handling.
- 🔗 Letters, Emails and text messages (any form of communication) will be responded to within five working days. Our response will set out what will happen and wherever possible, giving timescales for a conclusion.
- 🔗 Our locations will be clean, safe and welcoming. Literature will be consistent, up to date and relevant in all locations.
- 🔗 External contractors working on our behalf will work to the same standards we do.
- 🔗 We aim to answer your calls in person, however, customers who want to leave a message for a member of staff can expect to have their call returned within two working days (unless another time is arranged during the initial call).
- 🔗 We will keep customers informed of repairs and possible waiting times.
- 🔗 We will provide 24 hour access to an emergency repairs service with trained staff able to deal with your enquiries.
- 🔗 Opening times for all locations will be visible from the outside of the building for customers to see – even when the building is closed.
- 🔗 We will regular monitor and update the information we hold about our customers to enable us to involve and communicate effectively with them.

This Customer Service Charter is our high level approach to all customer contact situations. Different teams within the New Charter Housing Trust Group may add to this Charter with further local standards appropriate to their area of the business.

We will monitor our progress against these standards by undertaking mystery shopping, using tenant inspectors, scrutiny activity and listening to customer feedback through comments, compliments and complaints. We will undertake an annual customer satisfaction survey to review our year on year performance.

We will report on our performance at senior management and board level. This information will also be made public in our annual reports and on our website.

Involvement and empowerment

Involving New Charter Housing Trust Group customers is fundamental in developing and continually improving our services.

We are committed to tenant involvement and are keen to encourage tenants and residents, both individually and collectively, to influence decisions about their homes and the environment in which they live.

We have a dedicated Resident Involvement Team who are keen to ensure that our tenants have every opportunity to be involved in decision making processes.

Some of the ways we will do this are:

- Providing good quality information
- Consulting with tenants so their views and concerns can be considered when decisions are being made
- Supporting tenants to get involved in formal consultative or decision making structures
- Monitoring and reviewing alongside tenants, the benefits and improvements achieved by involving them

New Charter will continue to involve, consult, monitor and review our business by working with our customers.

However, we understand that not everyone wants the same level of involvement and so we aim to provide a range of formal and informal involvement opportunities for customers to select from.

Responding to complaints

We would prefer all our services to run smoothly all the time, but we know that unfortunately things do sometimes go wrong. We understand that there may be times when our customers feel that we haven't offered them a good service or that we've made a decision that doesn't work for them.

When this happens, we are keen to hear about complaints. We will investigate what has happened and keep customers informed of the outcome.

Our customers play an important role in helping us get things right and by regularly monitoring complaints, we can identify where our services need improving.

We are equally keen to receive compliments from our customers and welcome comments on any aspect of our service. These help us to understand where we are getting things right and continue improving by learning from our successes.

2. Home

Quality of accommodation

New Charter formed as the new landlord to own and manage homes transferred from Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council in Greater Manchester in March 2000. Since that time the Group has grown to include Gedling Homes, based in Gedling and Aksa Homes based in Oldham.

We are committed to providing quality homes for all our customers and a 10 year improvement programme is well underway.

We aim to get the basics right, delight our customers, and build and sustain communities.

We are an enthusiastic supporter of the in business for neighbourhood's campaign, as our role is about more than just housing.

We have an outstanding Building Company in the Group which does much of our repairs and investment.

Repairs and maintenance

We aim to get things right for our customers at all times. Repairs are prioritised and customers reporting urgent repairs are offered appointment times for the repair to be carried out at their convenience.

We will service all gas appliances every 12 months.

We monitor customer satisfaction with our repairs services to consistently improve services.

3. Tenancy

Allocations

We will advertise our allocations policies to customers as well as ensuring that they are kept informed of the progress of their application at every stage.

Properties will be advertised at local customer access points and on our Looking-Local TV channel available via every week. Customers in need of extra support will be offered help in making a bid. Bidding will be accessible and will include telephone and digital channels.

Rents

We balance the provision of a quality service with providing affordable.

We will set our rents and service charges in accordance with all appropriate regulations. Customers will be advised in advance of any planned changes to their rents or service charges and will receive regular statements throughout the year.

Tenure

New Charter provides all new tenants with a tenancy agreement which is issued during sign up. Information will be given to all customers during sign up about the property and the location. Our employees are trained in checking housing benefit applications and supporting the new tenant until such time as benefits commence payment.

We will continue to provide these services along with other methods to support the people in tenancies.

4. Neighbourhood and community

Neighbourhood management

We will continue to involve our tenants and partners to ensure that all our neighbourhood areas are safe and clean.

We welcome hearing from our customers about their ideas of how their areas can be improved and will continue to encourage this.

Local area co-operation

We know our customers value our efforts to get the basics right. We also understand that to build and sustain communities, we must be more than just a landlord – collecting rent, re-letting homes and responding to repairs.

We provide a range of interventions and support for people living in our communities. Our financial inclusion, regeneration and worklessness strategies are already advanced but we know that they need to keep improving and reaching out as some of our customer's lives become more difficult.

Anti social behaviour

New Charter recognises the serious impact of crime and anti-social behaviour on residents, communities and its assets and is committed to playing a lead and active role in tackling anti-social behaviour.

We are committed to tackling issues of anti-social behaviour and adopt four key strategies in our approach:

- Partnership working
- Prevention
- Effective enforcement
- Rehabilitation of perpetrators

We are always looking at ways we can improve in this area and welcome feedback and involvement from our customers and partners.

5. Value for money

We will always consider the costs and quality of products and services to provide the best value for money at all times for our customers.

6. Governance and financial viability

Governance

All companies within the New Charter group structure have an effective board structure.

Regular appraisals and training are in place for all board members to develop their skills and knowledge and enable their full participation.

Financial viability

New Charter complies with all relevant financial regulations and manages its resources efficiently. This is monitored regularly by senior management and at board level.

7. Equality & Diversity

We have a responsibility to ensure that the services we provide are accountable, inclusive and delivered fairly to all customers and the wider community.

- ☒ All people who access our services will be treated fairly, regardless of their personal characteristic including race, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, marital or civil partnership status, age, disability or pregnancy and maternity status.

The delivery of services will be monitored to ensure any exclusion or barriers are acted upon to continually improve the access to services.

8. Communication

We aim to provide information to customers in the best way possible at all times. Using the customer profiling data we hold, we will provide information in the method preferred by the customer e.g. large print, audio version.

All written correspondence from the Group will be produced in the approved Group style.

All leaflets will be produced in a consistent style and will reflect the appropriate company brand e.g. Gedling Homes, Aksa Homes. We aim to involve our customers in the design for our leaflets to ensure that key messages are delivered in the most user friendly way.

Any contact from the media will be dealt with on behalf of NCHTG by the Director of Customer Experience.

9. Website and Digital Communications

We know that a growing number of our customers prefer to receive information by email and contact us by using our website. We will continue to provide a website facility that is easily accessible for a range of customer needs and holds useful, relevant and up to date information. We have also introduced our Looking Local digital service, Facebook and Twitter sites to provide additional communication channels for all customers.

10. Continual Improvement

NCHTG is a learning organisation that strives to be a leader in the housing sector. Our aim is to build upon our solid framework and continually improve, wherever possible.

We do this by involving customers as “mystery shoppers” or “resident inspectors” or at resident involvement events. These people will, on an ongoing basis, review our services and give feedback to us.

We will act on this feedback and regularly review our processes to make improvements for the benefit of our customers.

We will continue to be actively involved in sharing ideas of best practice and benchmarking across all our services with a view to streamlining processes for the benefit of our customers.