



THREE OAKS HOMES

Customer Care Policy

1. Underlying values

We believe that the starting point for any policy on customer care has to be the values that underpin our organisation. These values and principles are set out in our Business Plan, alongside our mission statement:

“We aim to be an excellent landlord and service provider that empowers our customers, keeps our promises and is accountable to our partners and to the wider community that we serve.”

Three Oaks Homes has adopted the following values underpinned by the value of TRUST:

Tenants
Respect
Unity
Security
Transparency

These values, in turn, directly impact upon how we treat and empower our customers. Through the implementation of our EMH Group resident involvement strategy, we aim to:

- ensure that our customers have genuine influence over the housing services we deliver;
- work in partnership with our customers to improve the way we work;
- understand what our customers want, and to seek and welcome their opinions;

- offer choice wherever we can;
- recognise that our customers are individuals, and that they have a diverse range of views, circumstances, needs, abilities and cultural backgrounds;
- be flexible enough to enable all of our customers to get as involved as they wish;
- communicate effectively with all of our customers;
- let them know how their views have been taken into account and what impact they have made on our performance, and on the choices we make;
- help our customers to bring about the changes they want for their neighbourhoods;

and above all, to

- avoid acting as though “*we know best*”.

2. Who are our customers?

For the purposes of this policy we define our customer as:

Service users – people who are living in our homes or using our services, and with whom we have an on-going relationship (e.g. tenants, leaseholders, homeowners, licensees, care users). We spend time developing products and services to meet their needs and aspirations – delivering better value for money, a better service, and challenging the status quo. For the purposes of this policy, service users are referred to as “**tenants and residents**”.

Potential customers – anyone who might wish to buy our services or to live in one of our homes.

Communities – As a partner within the EMH Group, Three Oaks Homes takes a proactive role, re-investing in communities. We see neighbourhood management as a core business function, and are accountable not only to our immediate customers, but also to people living in the wider communities around our homes.

Treating our suppliers and partners as part of the team - We can only deliver on our corporate values if our suppliers and partners are in tune with

our way of thinking. So suppliers and partners of Three Oaks Homes are seen as an integral part of our business ethos.

Colleagues – we will strive to provide excellent services to our customers, in an organisational culture in which colleagues respect and value each other. We consider internal customer care to be a vital part of what defines Three Oaks Homes as an organisation.

This policy sets out the standards of customer care we aim to deliver for these groups.

3. Tenants and Residents, potential customers and other service users

3.1 Our Promises:

We are committed to:

- continuously improving our performance and services to achieve the highest standards of excellence, and to
- promoting excellent, locally accountable customer services with opportunities for customer to actively participate in the management of their homes.

This means that we will always strive to go the extra mile and do our best for our customers.

When we cannot help, we will say so promptly and explain why. If your enquiry takes a long time for us to investigate or sort out, we will keep you informed of progress.

We will work with tenants and residents to make the most of the resources available to us, and will avoid acting as though “we know best”.

When visiting tenants and residents, we will always remember that the property is their home, and we will treat it as such and with respect.

3.2 Our Standards of Service

We want to ensure that our service to you is as good as it can be and so we have worked with tenants and residents and staff to develop a set of ‘Service Promises’. These promises, are the minimum level of service you can expect from us.

Not all of our Service Promises apply to our home owner residents – service standards for leaseholders will be set out in their leaseholder handbook.

If at any time the service you receive falls below this standard, please let us know and we will try our best to put it right.

We review our Service Promises every year and add or change them to reflect our customers' views. Our team of customer mystery shoppers, regularly tests our service. We use their feedback to as part of the review of our promises and to identify where we need to improve.

The following service promises have been developed in consultation with tenants and residents, and will be clearly set out in our "Tenant Handbook".

Service Area	Service Promise	Monitoring Arrangements
Contact with Three Oaks Homes	Promote tenant involvement at every opportunity	Impact assessment
	Our staff will always give you their name and be polite and professional at all times. We will provide you with a full name if you wish.	Surveys, Mystery shoppers
	We aim answer the telephone within 3 rings wherever practical.	Internal performance monitoring
	All telephone messages will be acknowledged by the end of the next working day, although it may sometimes take longer to deal fully with the matter. If this is the case, we will give you an estimate of how long we think it will take for us to reply in full.	Mystery shoppers
	Show ID badges on all home visits	Mystery Shopping
	We will keep our personal answer phone messages up to date, making it clear when a member of staff is on leave or not likely to be able to respond to messages within 24 hours.	Internal monitoring
	We will acknowledge emails to our general office email addresses by the end of the next working day. Emails to individual employee email addresses may take up to five working days.	Mystery shoppers
	We aim to acknowledge receipt of letters within 3 working days. You will normally receive a full written reply within 10 working days.	Mystery shoppers
	If you ask us for any standard documents, we will send these within 3	Mystery shoppers

Service Area	Service Promise	Monitoring Arrangements
	working days of your request. If for any reason we cannot do this, we will write and tell you why and what the expected timescale will be.	
	All staff will wear name badges and will give you their name and job title if you ask.	Management spot checks; Mystery shoppers
	<p>Our office opening hours and telephone services will be:</p> <p>Monday 8.45am to 5.15pm Tuesday 8.45am to 5.15pm Wednesday 9.30am to 5.15 pm Thursday 8.45am to 5.15pm Friday 8.45am to 4.45pm</p>	Internal performance monitoring
	If you want an Officer to visit you at home we will make an appointment and will aim to visit within 10 working days. We aim to attend this appointment on time wherever possible. If delayed, we will take all reasonable steps to let you know and to agree with you a revised appointment.	Mystery shoppers
	All our staff and contractors will wear and show identity badges when calling at your home.	Management spot checks
	Office reception area will display a wide range of information leaflets, and audio tapes available free of charge.	Management spot checks; Mystery shoppers

Service Area	Service Promise	Monitoring Arrangements
	Interviews with customers will take place in private, where conversations cannot be overheard by others.	Mystery shoppers
Privacy and Confidentiality	All calls to the Association may be monitored or recorded for training and quality purposes. We will remind customers of this fact in Handbooks, and via regular news articles in their Newsletter.	Internal monitoring
	Personal information about you or your family will only be kept on file, and/or disclosed to other agencies in line with Data Protection legislation.	Internal audit
	If you wish to see the information we hold about you, we will make arrangements for you to be given access to your file within 40 days of receiving your request. An administration charge of £10 may be made for this service.	Mystery shoppers
Information Services	We will use plain language and avoid the use of jargon	Sounding Board; Mystery Shoppers
	Send tenants a newsletter at least 4 times a year.	Status survey; Feedback from BDTF
	Regularly update our website and consult users on its content and format	Sounding Board
	Publish all printed information to tenants in accessible print size, and make it available in large print on request. Offering versions in other	Mystery shoppers; Sounding Board

Service Area	Service Promise	Monitoring Arrangements
	<p>languages, Braille or audio tape as far as is practicable</p> <p>Send an Annual Performance Report to tenants and residents including a tenant and resident involvement impact assessment, and summary of complaints received.</p> <p>Send you information once a year of you landlord's average rents compared with other registered social landlords in your area. (Tenants only)</p>	<p>Annual EMH Group Residents' conference</p> <p>Sounding Board</p>
Maintenance Service (tenants & <u>some</u> leaseholders only)	<p>Operate an all year round, 24 hour service to deal with emergency repairs. Calls to our out of hours emergency repairs service may be monitored or recorded for training and quality purposes.</p>	<p>Satisfaction surveys</p>
	<p>Carry out all repairs within the target times we have published (24 hours for emergencies, 7 days for urgent repairs & 28 days for routine repairs).</p>	<p>Satisfaction surveys</p>
	<p>Confirm that a repair order has been raised by sending a receipt of the order to your home which includes details of who the contractor is, and the target date for completion. This will be sent to your home within 48 hours of you reporting your repair.</p>	<p>Mystery shoppers</p>
	<p>Ask contractors to provide you with a convenient time for them to call and undertake the repair(s). Our contractor will telephone you if he/she is likely to be more than an hour late.</p>	<p>Satisfaction surveys; Mystery Shoppers</p>
	<p>Meet our legal duty to make gas safety and gas appliance service checks every year;</p>	<p>Internal performance monitoring</p>

Service Area	Service Promise	Monitoring Arrangements
	Ensure that all our contractors follow our Code of Conduct;	Satisfaction surveys; quality monitoring meetings
	Consult you before any alterations to your home are carried out and give you at least 5 days notice before we start any major work at your home.	Satisfaction surveys
	Carry out external decorations to your home every 4 to 5 years.	Satisfaction surveys
Estate management (tenants & <u>some</u> leaseholders only)	We will carry out a detailed inspection of your estate twice a year. Tenants and residents will be invited to attend or to speak to the inspection team during this visit. Following the visit an action plan will be drawn up and shared with residents.	Monitoring form to be completed for each inspection
	Remove graffiti within 7 days – if it is racist or offensive, we will treat it as an emergency repair, and remove it within 24 hours.	Internal monitoring of repairs performance
Rent Accounts	Automatically send you a rent account statement 4 times a year	Sounding Board
	Tell you the balance on your rent account over the telephone if you provide proof of identity.	Mystery Shoppers

Service Area	Service Promise	Monitoring Arrangements
	Send you, on request, an up to date statement of your account within 2 working days.	Mystery Shoppers
Sheltered Housing	Carry out contact visits within agreed timescales	Mystery Shoppers
	Respond to requests for lifelines within 5 working days	Line Managers & customer feedback
	Answer all calls via warden call equipment within 60 seconds	Mystery shopping
	Work in partnership with other agencies to promote sheltered housing as a home for life	Liaison meetings with other agencies
	Assist tenants to maintain a sense of well-being through the completion of support plans and reviews.	Mystery shopping and supporting people monitoring

What you can do: Please help us to meet these standards of service by meeting the following customer standards:

What you can do to help:	Customer Standard:
	Keep to the terms and conditions of your Tenancy Agreement
	Treat our staff respectfully and politely. Please use the complaints procedure if you feel you are not being treated fairly or properly.
	Our staff are within their rights to discontinue conversations where they feel that they are being treated rudely or feel in any way threatened by our customers. If they feel the need to do this, they will warn you once that this is their intention, and if you continue to be rude, they will terminate the interview or phone call.
	Keep any appointments made.
	Report repairs promptly
	Carry out repairs for which you are responsible.
	Let our contractors into your home to carry out repairs and safety checks such as annual gas servicing.
	Look after your home and any areas you share with your neighbours.
	Give us 4 weeks notice and a forwarding address if you are intending to give up your tenancy
	Keep your handbook in a safe place and check with the relevant section when you have queries concerning your tenancy.
	Help us to monitor the service by taking time to complete feedback forms or surveys we may send you from time to time.
	Get involved – work with us to help us improve our service.

4. Dealing with a diverse customer base

As part of the EMH Group, Three Oaks Homes has a pro-active Diversity Strategy, Kaleidoscope, which has been phased to encompass disability; age; ethnicity; faith and religion; HIV and Aids; gender; and sexual orientation. This Strategy is overseen by our Equality and Diversity Scrutiny Panel led by members, senior officers and customers to steer the Association's approach on diversity.

Our Diversity Strategy is kept under continuous review, in order to ensure that:

- service standards and service delivery methods are flexible enough to meet the diverse needs of our residents; and that
- disabled customers or customers from black and minority ethnic groups are not any less satisfied with our service than those from other groups.

Reporting is in place to monitor continuous improvement in these areas.

As a member of the EMH Group, Three Oaks Homes is working hard to be fully compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. As part of our Kaleidoscope review, we have introduced a Disability Policy and Accessible Information Policy, the implementation of which is overseen by our Equality & Diversity Scrutiny Panel.

5. Monitoring satisfaction

Customer satisfaction and the opinion of all of our stakeholders is key to defining our success. Three Oaks Homes needs to understand our customers if we are to meet their current and future needs.

Customer satisfaction and our performance in meeting our service standards is measured in the following ways:

- Day to day repairs surveys
- Planned maintenance surveys
- Six monthly survey of the services provided by our Customer Services Centre

- Surveys for people moving into our homes
- Building and Design standard surveys for new homes
- Three yearly STATUS survey – this is a standard postal survey that checks levels of satisfaction amongst our residents and gives us the opportunity to compare our satisfaction rates with other landlords
- Spot checking will be used by line managers from time to time to ensure our standards of service are being met
- Best Value review and internal audits will be carried out on particular service areas from time to time
- We will make occasional use of other research techniques, such as focus groups, or mystery shoppers to test the effectiveness of services from a customers' perspective.

The findings of this research will be reported to customers along with details of any action plans that arise from the findings.

6. Complaints and Compensation

We aim to deliver the highest standards of service to its customers, but we do recognise that sometimes things can go wrong, or that the services we offer may not always meet the expectations of our customers. We have therefore developed an internal Complaints policy and procedure to help us deal with complaints and solve problems as quickly as possible.

We use complaints to continually improve our services by ensuring lessons we learn are fed back into the processes and procedures we operate when delivering services. We report the numbers and details of complaints to senior management and Board to ensure this process is transparent.

Where our service fails to meet statutory or contractual obligations, we may compensate them. Details of our compensation policy are available on request.

7. Quality and continuous improvement

As a member of the EMH Group, Three Oaks Homes has committed to acquiring the Charter Mark accreditation as a method of ensuring continuous improvement in customer services. This accreditation process is overseen by the EMH Group's Quality & Best Value Steering Group, comprising senior staff, Board Members, and customers.

As a minimum, we aim to achieve 85% satisfaction with all services provided. Where performance falls below this target, action plans will be published and implemented to improve performance. Where satisfaction is above 85%, we will continue to strive for improvement in service quality and value for money.

8. Communities

We understand that the impact of our work goes beyond our immediate customers, and has an impact on the communities around our homes and estates. We will therefore ensure that we actively engage with these communities, and work with them to ensure that our activities contribute to developing sustainable communities in which people want to live.

We will invest in and regenerate the communities and neighbourhoods we serve, and in partnership with other stakeholders, develop safe and decent neighbourhoods.

We are also committed to tackling social exclusion by exploring options for the provision of employment, training, care and support.

9. Partners & Suppliers

We can only deliver on our values and promises to customers if our partners and suppliers share our commitment to customer care. So partners and suppliers of the Three Oaks Homes are seen as an integral part of our business ethos.

Partners: Since the EMH Group is a family of autonomous organisations with a shared corporate parent, wherever regulation and our rules allow, business processes are promoted in a best-practice culture, as opposed to an enforcement culture.

Internal services will be delivered in line with service level agreements that, where practicable, are tailored to meet the individual needs of partner organisations.

We will seek to resolve disputes between partners informally, and in a spirit of openness and trust, with the aim of finding “win/win” solutions or solutions that are fair and equitable.

We will actively pursue opportunities for strategic alliances with other organisations, where this helps to meet the joint objectives of both organisations, bring about efficiencies, are demonstrably of benefit to customers.

Suppliers: We will regularly review standards of service and customer feedback with our suppliers in order to continuously improve our service.

Where appropriate, we will seek to use modern procurement methods that adopt a partnering approach.

10. Internal customers (e.g. relationships between colleagues, board members etc)

Three Oaks Homes’ first priority is to ensure that its tenants and residents and service users are satisfied. However, we recognise that this is unlikely to be achieved if a commitment to customer care is not embedded in the culture and core values of the organisation, and demonstrated in the way we treat our colleagues on a day to day basis.

Members of the EMH Group have adopted Code of Practice for Board Members and for Staff, setting out the standards of behaviour that are acceptable within the Group. This Customer

Care policy should be read on conjunction with these Codes of Conduct.

In dealing with colleagues, employees of Three Oaks Homes, along with employees of other members of the Group, must therefore meet the following standards:

11. General principles

Colleagues must:

- commit themselves to delivering a quality service to their colleagues;
- respond promptly and willingly to requests;
- obtain assistance when necessary, and assist those who need guidance or support;
- explain delays in responding to requests;
- avoid social conversations in areas open to the public;
- observe confidentiality requirements and requests for privacy during meetings or interviews;

12. Communication

Email, Workflow & Electronic Diary Systems

All employees with access to e-mail and electronic diary systems must:

- Read e-mail and work list items daily where possible;
- Respond to e-mail promptly;
- Send automatic response messages when on leave or out of the office for more than one working day;
- Keep electronic diaries up to date to assist staff who may need to arrange appointments or meetings.

Voicemail

All employees with voicemail facilities on their office or mobile telephones must:

- Check voicemail messages regularly and provide a same day response whenever possible;

- Record helpful answer-phone messages that give the caller other options, and some indication of when you are likely to return their call.

Meetings

All staff should:

- Attend, on time, all meetings and courses to which they have accepted invitations;
- Give your apologies to the meeting secretary in advance of the meeting if you are unable to attend;
- Devote sufficient time to reading meeting papers;
- Contribute to discussions and the decision making process;
- Switch off mobile phones during official meetings and training courses or at times when an incoming call may inconvenience or interrupt others.

3.1.1 Consultations & Suggestions

As part of the East Midlands Housing Group, Three Oaks Homes is committed to consulting employees about policies and procedures that affect their Terms and Conditions of Employment, and on matters of policy on which staff may be able to make a positive contribution.

Line Managers should:

- Ensure that all relevant staff are consulted on proposed changes to policies and procedures that may affect them or the way they work;
- Give sufficient information at the time of consultation to enable staff to contribute meaningfully to the decision making process;
- Give staff sufficient time to respond to consultations;
- Let staff know how their views have been taken into account;
- Respond with an open mind to contributions made either as part of the consultation process, or via the suggestion scheme, and where appropriate develop these suggestions further to test their ability;

- Develop ways of acknowledging high performing staff and staff who are willing to contribute their ideas for continuous improvement.

13. Requests for information

When making requests for information, staff must:

- Give or negotiate with the respondent reasonable and clear deadlines;
- Give a clear indication of the scope of information required and its purpose and priority;
- Be open to suggestions of alternative sources of data, and be willing to explore these where appropriate;
- Avoid duplication of work.

When asked for information staff must:

- Be helpful, responding promptly and willingly;
- Share knowledge of alternative sources of information if appropriate;
- Meet deadlines, or if not possible, agree revised deadlines.

14. Resolving disputes and complaints

As part of the EMH Group, Three Oaks Homes' staff will strive to create and maintain effective working relationships with all employees with whom they have dealings. Where disputes occur, employees should, in the first instance discuss these with the individual concerned, in a spirit of openness and reconciliation.

Similarly, complaints about staff should be addressed in the first instance to the member of staff concerned in an attempt to try and resolve the issue informally and to mutual satisfaction.

Should this direct approach fail, disputes between staff should be referred to their respective line managers.

15. Commitment & Training

Three Oaks Homes is committed to providing regular customer care related training for all employees. Where appropriate, we will share training opportunities with partners & suppliers.

16. Associated policies

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies and procedures:

- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Employee Code of Conduct
- Board Member Code of Conduct