



Customer Care Policy

KARIN HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED

Customer Care Policy

Introduction

Karin is committed to providing a good quality service to tenants, applicants, the general public and others with whom we have contact. This policy is about the services we provide, the standards we aim to achieve and the expectations we have of our residents.

COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

- You can get advice and information on all our policies and services that affect you by telephoning us or visiting our office during opening hours.
- You can made an appointment with our housing staff to discuss more complicated problems.
- All new residents will receive a tenant handbook containing important information about their home and the services provided by Karin.
- We issue four newsletters to our tenants each year.
- We produce an annual report which will include our performance over the year under review.

OUR COMMITMENT TO YOU

Telephone calls

We will:

- answer all calls promptly, courteously and politely;
- respond to all telephone messages by the next working day;
- arrange for an officer to respond to any urgent calls or enquiries within 24 hours.

Office

We will:

- ensure our office has a welcoming environment for tenants and other visitors;
- see all visitors to the office within five minutes of arrival and will interview callers in a private area or office to respect confidentiality.

Home Visits

- We will:
 - visit tenants at home if requested;
 - always treat tenants, household members and possessions with respect;
 - carry identification when visiting your home;
 - explain our reasons for visiting if we call without giving prior notice to you.

Letters

- We will:
 - acknowledge or reply to a letter within 7 working days;
 - provide translations where required;
 - provide a straightforward response to tenants' enquiries;
 - when we cannot give you an answer immediately, let you know when we will be able to do so and give reasons for the delay.

Staff

- Staff will always be courteous and professional.
- We will:
 - issue all staff with identity cards that can be produced upon request;
 - ensure that tenants know who their housing officer is;
 - offer appointments and home visits with housing officers;
 - give you as much notice as possible if we are unable to keep an appointment and offer an alternative date to you.

COMPLAINTS

We will:

- Implement a fair and accessible system for making complaints and advertise the procedure for doing so.
- Acknowledge all complaints within three working days of receiving them.
- Settle complaints sensitively, apologise if we have made a mistake and learn from our mistakes.
- Allow you personal representation or to have another person act on your behalf.
- Aim to answer all complaints in full within the agreed timescales.
- Publish records of complaints to tenants and to stakeholders.

We expect you to:

- Be polite to our staff.
- Report any concerns to our staff as quickly as possible.
- Provide us with information we need to be able to assist you.
- Update us on any changes in your circumstances to ensure that we have accurate information.
- Let us know if you are unable to keep an appointment with us.

SERVICES

We will:

- Provide tenants with a statement of their rent account on request.
- Explain what rent and service charge covers.
- Review service charge costs to ensure value for money.
- Endeavour to keep rent levels affordable and within Government guidelines.
- Help you complete Housing Benefit claims.
- Take action to prevent and minimise arrears of rent;.
- Recover bad debts from former tenants.
- Undertake annual occupancy checks of all tenancies in order to combat illegal subletting.
- Consult with tenants and other service users when we are reviewing our services to seek their views and gauge their satisfaction.
- Provide tenants with details of cleaning specifications for their blocks of flats, if appropriate.
- Ensure that all communal and shared areas are maintained to a good standard and regularly inspect communal areas.
- Handle all complaints promptly and sensitively.
- Provide an out-of-hours emergency response service to our tenants.
- Work with external support services to provide support to vulnerable tenants in our general needs properties.

We expect you to:

- Pay your rent promptly.
- Inform us of any difficulty in making payments;
- Make claims for Housing Benefit promptly and renew claims within timescales.

ALLOCATIONS AND LETTINGS

We will aim to:

- Assess all applications quickly.
- Be sensitive to the needs and circumstances of all applicants.
- Review our waiting list every six months.
- Advise applicants and transfer cases of their position on the waiting list.
- Let our homes to people in need and ensure that we are fair to all our applicants.
- Accompany people to view new homes wherever possible.
- Sign-up tenants with the minimum bureaucracy.
- Provide information about our services at sign up.
- Assist people to settle into their new homes.
- Provide information on lettings in our quarterly newsletters and annual report.

We expect you to:

- Give us accurate information about yourself on your housing application.
- Give us accurate information about your household and what needs there are.

REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE

We will aim to:

- Meet our repairing obligations as outlined in the tenancy agreement.
- Have a repair satisfaction slip on our repair orders to our contractors that should be filled in by the tenant when the repair is completed.
- Respond to any work marked as "poor".
- Offer an out of hours repairs service for emergencies.
- Meet our legal obligations by carrying out an annual gas safety check.
- Inspect at least 20% of all completed repairs to assess the standard of work.
- Offer repair appointments that are as convenient as possible.
- Ensure that all contractors comply with a Code of Conduct set by us and carry identification.
- Carry out annual cyclical repairs to properties identified in our stock condition survey and consult with tenants about such work.
- Seek the view of tenants on the standard of our repairs service at regular intervals.

We expect you to:

- Observe our published timescales for completing repairs.
- Give reasonable access to your home for repairs.
- Inform us quickly when repair needs arise.
- Keep your home in good decorative order and keep communal areas tidy.
- Use the out of hours service in emergencies only.
- Pay for the cost of repairing any damage caused by you, your visitors, or your household.

NEIGHBOUR DISPUTES, NUISANCE AND HARASSMENT

We will aim to:

- Investigate all cases sensitively, fairly and within published timescales.
- Offer mediation in such cases if considered appropriate or useful and if agreed with the parties involved.
- Respond quickly to serious incidents and deal firmly with those who breach their tenancy conditions.
- Work with tenants, voluntary agencies and community groups to combat anti-social behaviour.
- Remove graffiti within 28 working days.
- Provide additional security or alternative accommodation to people in danger.

We expect you to:

- Make children and visitors aware of the need for good behaviour.
- Keep us informed of ongoing problems.
- Give positive consideration to attempting mediation if the need arises.
- Try to resolve differences with neighbours directly before involving Karin.
- Understand Karin's limitations when dealing with antisocial behaviour and nuisance problems and have realistic expectations.

TRANSFERS

We will aim to:

- Give you information about all re-housing and purchasing options available to you.
- Promote opportunities for people to exchange their homes and try to "match" up potential partners for exchange.
- Let you know your position on the transfer list and points total.
- Let you know what alternatives are available.

We expect you to:

- Have a clear rent account before being eligible to move.
- All you home to be inspected to ensure it is in good condition before the move is agreed.

TENANT INVOLVEMENT, CONSULTATION AND PARTICIPATION

We will aim to:

- Identify the best ways of hearing your views, e.g. meetings, surveys.
- Consult with you and take your views into account on the services we provide.
- Involve and consult tenants on all our service reviews.
- Ensure that the Board of Management has tenant representation and hears the result of consultation with tenants.
- Offer financial and other support to all tenants who wish to form a tenants' association.
- Assist tenants with arranging and running meetings and communicating with each other.

TENANT WELFARE AND SUPPORT

We will aim to:

- Provide advice on benefits to which you may be entitled.
- Assist with completion of forms.
- Refer tenants to specialist organisations providing advice, support, (e.g. welfare benefits), debt counselling.
- Liaise with local support agencies to ensure the needs of our vulnerable tenants are met, e.g. alcohol support, mental health agencies.

VOID PROPERTIES

We will aim to:

- Ensure that empty properties are turned around and let as soon as possible.
- Ensure that they are to an agreed minimum standard.
- Take quick action to evict unlawful occupants.

We expect you to:

- Give us four weeks notice if you intend to vacate your property.
- Ensure your property is left in good condition.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

- All staff will carry out their duties within an equal opportunities framework and will ensure that all our customers are treated fairly, equally and with respect.

We expect you to:

- Comply with equal opportunities and treat Karin staff and contractors with respect.

KARIN HOUSING ASSOCIATION LTD

Customer Care

Guidance for Employees

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REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Housing Management Policies on:

- Customer Care Policy
- Confidentiality
- Complaints Policy
- Tenant Participation
- Dealing with Difficult Tenants

Staff Handbook

Code of Conduct for Contractors

1. Introduction

Dear Staff Member

The Customer Care Code

At Karin we are committed to delivering a high standard of service to our customers. We aim to ensure this by continuously improving our performance. Our success depends upon all of us applying the principles of good customer care

A customer is:

"An individual or organisation who uses or has expectations of Karin's services".

Our customers can be grouped into the following three classifications:

- a) **Direct Customers:** i.e. tenants, their families and their representatives.
- b) **Business Customers:** i.e. people and organisations from or to whom we buy or supply services.
- c) **Stakeholders:** i.e. any individual or organisation with an interest in Karin e.g. local authorities and the Housing Corporation.

The Customer Care Guidance only applies to our direct Customers.

This documents sets out the principles of good customer care and gives guidance to staff on how we are expected to behave. This document is for internal use only.

All members of staff need to familiarise themselves with this document, and I hope that this Guidance note will be useful when dealing with some of the more difficult aspects of assisting the customer.

Certainly by all working together as a team, we can continue to improve the service we offer to our customers.

Thank you all for your commitment and co-operation.

Director

2. Dress and appearance

To promote a professional and approachable image to all customers.

- Staff dress should be clean and tidy at all times.
- Style of dress, hair and presentation should project the message that Karin is a professional, responsible and reliable organisation.
- Style of dress should be such that it will not be offensive to any customers.
- Staff should dress at all times as though they will be meeting customers.
- Staff should be smartly dressed for formal occasions, e.g. court appearances, committee meetings or receptions.

3. Reception

The reception areas at Karin's offices should be accessible and welcoming to all customers.

- All callers must be greeted politely.
- Reception area to be kept clean and tidy.
- Reception areas should have the following amenities and facilities:
 - adequate seating;
 - refreshment facilities, such as water cooler;
 - details of complaints policy displayed;
 - out of hours emergency repair contact numbers.
- **Do not keep callers waiting while you are have long chats on the phone or are seen drinking tea/coffee.**

4. Identification of staff to customers

- At the beginning of each customer contact, including telephone calls, staff should introduce themselves and give their job title.
- Staff should verify the customer's identity before giving information or advice on sensitive matters, e.g. rent arrears.
- Staff should decide whether they want to be addressed by their first name and surname or by their title and surname.

5. Telephone

- Telephones should be answered within five rings.
- Staff should give the standard greeting agreed by the office. Always state your name to callers.
- Answer phones should be available outside office hours. Telephone calls should be returned within one working day.
- Callers should be told if their call needs to be transferred and to whom the call will be transferred.
- The identity of callers must be confirmed if the call concerns a personal or sensitive matter.
- Staff transferring calls should announce the caller.
- When staff are unavailable to answer their telephones they must ensure that they divert their calls to someone briefed for, and capable of, taking such calls.

6. Constructive contacts with customers

- Customers and their homes should be treated with courtesy and respect as you would wish to be treated with as a customer. Staff should provide an equal and consistent service to all customers.
- Staff will introduce themselves giving their name and job title before entering a customer's home.
- Where customers' requests fall outside the service provided by Karin they should be informed of this and directed to the appropriate source of assistance.
- Customers should be addressed by their title and surname.
- When staff deal with a customer they must:
 - give an appropriate greeting;
 - give their name, job title and department;
 - ask how they can help the customer
- Staff may be visiting to enforce tenancy conditions. The desire to treat the customer with courtesy and respect should not prevent staff from pointing out any breaches of tenancy condition, for example if a tenant has damaged their property.
- Wherever possible, staff should assess their performance by considering which interactions were effective, and what they can do in future to improve those customer contacts.
- **Never be rude or abusive to customers, no matter what the provocation.**

7. Dealing with difficult customers

- Threatening or abusive behaviour from customers should not be accepted. Staff should try to diffuse aggression.
- Staff should try to turn difficult situations into constructive ones by avoiding aggravating or reflecting the customer's anger, and stating positively what can be done to help the customer.
- Staff must find acceptable ways of giving what may be an unacceptable message.
- The principles of constructive customer contact must be followed where we are asking for compliance from the customer.
- Where a customer is threatening or being abusive it may exceptionally be necessary to end an interview or telephone call. Customers should be advised of this and given the opportunity to moderate their behaviour before the interview or phone call is brought to an end. The staff member should record on file when this has been necessary.
- Staff should record all incidents where they are threatened or physically or verbally abused. The Director should be made aware that the incident has taken place and should decide on the course of action to be taken. This may include serving a Notice of Seeking Possession in the case of tenants, or giving support to staff in taking action for assault where appropriate.
- Where a tenant is considered to put staff who are visiting or interviewing at risk of violence, the file should be clearly marked.
- Staff are often in a situation where they are giving a service that the customer does not want, e.g. arrears recovery or inspecting a property. In these circumstances, staff should be assertive in dealing with any breach of tenancy issues in a courteous and professional way. Staff's desire to deliver a good standard of customer care should not prevent them from tackling difficult issues.
- Staff should remain polite when dealing with the reluctant customer and remember that they should advise the customer of other agencies who may be able to help.

8. Complaints

- Tenants wishing to make a complaint should be assisted and not treated in a hostile uncooperative manner.
- Tenants should never be victimised for making complaints.
- Staff should try and distinguish between informal complaints which are dealt with by staff and formal complaints.
- Time scales for responding to complaints must be rigidly followed.

9. Service standards

- Staff should be aware of the service standards we aim to provide.
- Do not make promises we cannot keep but do keep all the promises we make.
- Do not be afraid to apologise for service failures.

10. Customer confidentiality

- Do not disclose confidential information on a tenant or customer without his/her permission unless absolutely necessary or manifestly beneficial to the customer. This includes names, addresses and telephone numbers.

Person Responsible for the review of this policy:
Date of this review:
Date Board approved:
Date next review is due:

Ibrahim Mohamoud
21st October 2008
21st October 2008
21st October 2011