

ARCON'S CUSTOMER CARE POLICY

INTRODUCTION

Putting Customers First

- * Finding out what customers need and want.
- * Delivering services to meet those requirements.
- * Seeking customer feedback on services provided.
- * Consulting customers and taking their views into account in decision making.
- * Enabling tenants to be involved in the management of their homes.

Respect for Tenants and their Homes

- * Setting codes of conduct for staff and contractors when in contact with tenants.
- * Respecting and upholding tenants' rights to privacy and confidentiality.
- * Taking tenant complaints seriously and responding speedily and appropriately.
- * Offering appropriate compensation when forced to disturb tenants in their own homes.

Information and Accountability

To give tenants relevant information in a readable format so that they are able to:

- * understand their rights and responsibilities
- * assess the service provided by Arcon
- * influence the practices and policies of the Association.

CONTACT WITH ARCON

Accessibility to Office and Staff

The following are the minimum standards applicable to the office at 1 Jackson's Row.

- * Office is open from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm and remains open at lunchtimes.
- * Telephones are answered between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm.
- * Office appointments are available between 9.30 am and 4.30 pm.
- * Duty officer always available to see tenants or answer queries when area housing officers are not available.
- * Callers without appointment should not have to wait longer than 10 minutes in the reception area before being seen by the duty officer or other member of staff.

Contact by Telephone

- * Telephones are directed at evenings and weekends to Astraline who provide cover for emergency repairs and other essential matters.
- * Calls are dealt with immediately where possible. If not, we would aim to return calls within 24 hours.

Contact by Letter

- * Arcon aims to acknowledge all letters within 3 working days of receipt, with a full reply sent within 10 working days.
- * Letters from Arcon will be on official headed paper and signed by a named officer.
- * Forms and literature requested by tenants or the public will be sent out promptly and within the target times applicable.

Home Visits

- * Staff will not enter a tenant's home (except in defined emergencies) without the express permission of the tenant or without giving at least 24 hours' notice in writing.
- * All staff and contractors must wear and show approved identity badges when calling on residents in their homes.
- * If the resident is not available at the time of the visit a printed calling card or a note on headed paper should be left at the premises.
- * Maintenance operatives working in tenants' homes are required to abide by the conditions of the Code of Conduct for Contractors.

INFORMATION TO TENANTS

Tenancy Agreement

All tenants receive a written tenancy agreement setting out the rights and obligations of both Arcon and the tenant. The details of the agreement are also explained verbally by the housing officer whenever a tenant moves into a new home.

Tenants Handbook

In addition all Arcon tenants are provided with a copy of the Tenants Handbook. The handbook is a folder of leaflets outlining the principal policies and activities of the Association, services to tenants and the rights of tenants. These leaflets are updated at regular intervals.

Tenant Newsletters

Newsletters for tenants are provided twice a year. Articles in the newsletter cover information on improved and additional services available to tenants; cash incentives and other opportunities for home ownership; feedback on surveys, questionnaires and other forms of consultation.

Annual Report for Tenants

An annual report specifically for tenants is provided once a year. The report gives details of Arcon activities throughout the year. More specifically it gives information on:

- * new homes produced
- * the different groups to whom they have been let
- * the rents charged for different sizes of homes and success in collecting that rent
- * the number of units that were empty and the speed at which they were let
- * speed in carrying out repairs compared to the published response times.

Other Information

Other information is provided to tenants as and when required, eg reports on the results of surveys and consultation meetings.

Easy to Read

Arcon seeks to make the information it sends to tenants easy to read and understand. This includes avoiding the use of jargon and using clear, concise and simple language and having good layout and design practices, eg readable type faces and print sizes.

Translations, Interpretation and Signers

Arrangements for language interpreters to be present at interviews are made as requested by tenants or their representatives.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

General

1. Interviews and conversations with customers about personal and confidential matters will be carried out in private.
2. Memos and correspondence about customers on confidential issues will be marked "Private and Confidential". Access to this information is strictly limited on a need to know basis.
3. Confidential information will only be passed to other sections of the organisation where it is necessary for the provision of a service to the tenant, eg in support of a tenant's request for an urgent transfer to another geographic area or where special adaptations are needed.
4. Arcon provides contractors with a Code of Conduct under which they must take special care to maintain confidentiality and respect the privacy of tenants and their homes.

Information to Other Organisations

Requests from outside organisations for information on tenants must be in writing and accompanied by authority signed by the tenant unless there are good reasons for the matter to be dealt with orally.

The Police - The Association wishes to co-operate with the police in the prevention and detection of crime. Therefore, if a request for information is made by the police relevant information may be given by senior directors, where it is considered appropriate to do so.

Council Tax - The Association will give the names of tenants but not details of their households. We will also give information on the property, eg whether or not it is tenanted, squatted or empty, etc.

Gas and Electricity - The Association will give information only on the new address or whereabouts of tenants with outstanding bills.

DSS and HB Agencies - The Association will normally give the relevant information from the Tenancy Agreement which is required to process a tenant's claim for benefit.

Social Services/Probation Service etc. - The Housing Director may decide whether or not to give relevant information depending on the type of information required and the reason for asking for the information.

Individuals - No information is given to individuals without the tenant's formal consent.

No information is given on the state of an individual's rent account unless the Association has the explicit permission of the tenant.

The Association's aims would at all times be to comply with its statutory obligations required by

Data Protection legislation.

Tenants' right to inspect their file

1. Tenants may call at the Association's office at 1 Jackson's Row and read their file by appointment during office hours. At least 24 hours' notice should be given. The file may not be taken off the premises but a copy of any document may be made on request.
2. The Association reserves the right to refuse access to information if:
 - a) It would identify another individual or organisation who has not consented to the disclosure.
 - b) In Arcon's opinion or in the opinion of a health professional it would be likely to cause serious harm to the physical and mental health of the tenant or other person.
3. A tenant may challenge any information held in their files if they feel it to be incorrect and can provide evidence to support this.
 - a) If Arcon accepts that the information is incorrect it will correct or erase the information and send a revised copy to the tenant as soon as possible.
 - b) If Arcon does not accept that the information is incorrect it will attach a note recording the tenant's view and the decision not to alter. The tenant will be sent a copy of this note and a statement of the reasons why Arcon believes the original information to be correct.

SERVICE STANDARDS

1. Arcon has compiled detailed policy and procedure guides for staff on all areas of its operation. These guides include:
 - * Lettings, Transfer and Exchanges
 - * Rent and Arrears
 - * Maintenance, Repairs and Improvements
 - * Complaints and Appeals
 - * Nuisance
 - * Harassment
 - * Tenant Participation and Consultation
 - * Compensation

* Equal Opportunities

2. These guides detail what service is to be provided, the procedures to be followed in providing the service and how customers are to be treated.
3. Summaries of all these policies are provided to tenants as leaflets in the Tenants Handbook.

TENANT FEEDBACK

Arcon seeks to obtain feedback from tenants and its services in a number of structured ways. These include:

1. Tenant Satisfaction Surveys

Arcon carries out surveys of tenants as and when required. These surveys give vital information on the demographic characteristics of existing tenants, changes in needs and tenant requirements, and feedback on the Association's services and performance.

2. Surveys of need and requirements

Surveys of need and tenant requirements are targeted at specific groups of tenants, such as elderly people, or at specific areas or groups of properties, such as individual estates. These surveys seek to obtain more detailed information on tenant requirements than can be achieved in the general satisfaction survey and are used to plan for the provision of services more closely targeted to local and individual need.

3. Feedback Questionnaires

In-house questionnaires are used to gain feedback from tenants on specific areas of performance such as satisfaction with response repairs and the maintenance service. The results of such questionnaires give immediate feedback on day to day operations and are conducted at frequent intervals.