



The Gateshead Housing Company Customers and Communities Committee

Monday 8 March 2010 at 2pm
Board Room 1, The Gateshead Housing Company, Keelman
House, Fifth Avenue Business Park, Fifth Avenue, Team Valley
Trading Estate, Gateshead NE11 0XA

Agenda

Item	Business
1.	Apologies for Absence <u>ITEM FOR DECISION</u>
2.	Service Standards and Tenants and Leaseholders Guide Report of Director of Finance



Report to the Customers & Communities Committee

8 March 2010

Title: Service Standards and Tenants and Leaseholders Guide

Report of: Director of Finance

Purpose of Report

1. To provide the committee with a presentation on the proposed Service Standards and Tenants and Leaseholders Guide.

Background

2. At its meeting on 20 January 2010, the committee received an update on progress being made to develop a Service Standards and Tenants and Leaseholders Guide.
3. The guide incorporates service standards, how we will measure them and also places these service standards in context by describing the service we will provide.
4. As agreed at its meeting on 20 January 2010, we are now in a position following extensive consultation to present the proposed Service Standards and Tenants and Leaseholders Guide to the committee for scrutiny. The proposed guides are attached at the Appendix to this report.

Impact on tenants

5. The proposed guides will set out clearly to all our existing and prospective tenants and leaseholders the standards of service they can expect from us. All standards will be measurable and performance will be reported on a regular basis to all tenants.
6. Tenants and leaseholders have had an opportunity to help design and influence how our services are delivered and will be involved in monitoring the standards once they are in place.

Customer Involvement

7. Customers have been involved in the development of the guide and service standards. The proposed document was discussed at a number of Service Improvement Groups over the last four weeks.

Link to Values

8. The activity outlined in this report relates to the following company values: -
 - Being customer focussed, innovative and professional
 - Being motivated, trained and committed across the company
 - Being a listening and learning organisation.

Risk Management Implications

9. The proposed guide will ensure we continue to be responsive to customers needs, provide high quality and cost-effective services that are flexible and convenient, and deliver them in fair and accessible ways.

Financial Implications

10. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. However, the cost of publishing the new standards can be met from existing budgets.

Equality and Diversity Implications

11. This guides will aim to improve customer service and ensure extended, inclusive access to services, advice and information for all customers of TGHC.

Value for Money implications

12. Development of the guides will provide value for money benefits.

Involvement carried out

13. Involvement carried out is highlighted throughout this report and the associated presentation.

Recommendation

14. The committee is asked to recommend approval of the Service Standards and Tenants and Leaseholders Guide to the Board.

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A Guide to the Services you can expect from The Gateshead Housing Company

The company is an Arms-Length Management Organisation (ALMO), which means it is fully owned by Gateshead Council, but operates independently.

Our mission is to provide excellent services to all of our customers and work in partnership with Gateshead Council and tenants and leaseholders to deliver homes and housing services that meet the aspirations of the people of Gateshead.

The Gateshead Housing Company manages over 22,000 homes and is working to improve housing and housing services in Gateshead.

Our Vision:

To provide excellent homes and housing services

Our Mission:

To work in partnership with residents and the community to create homes and neighbourhoods that meet the aspirations of the people of Gateshead.

Our Values:

- being a listening and learning organisation
- being honest, accountable and transparent
- being motivated, trained and committed
- being customer focused, innovative and professional
- caring and respecting
- embracing equality
- a commitment to all our employees

The service you can expect from us...

This booklet explains about the service you can expect to receive from The Gateshead Housing Company.

The booklet describes the range of services offered, the standards of service you can expect, and also how we will check that the business is meeting those standards.

There are a number of standards within each section throughout this guide.

If you feel that we are not meeting any of the standards on any occasion then please tell us.

We may ask for your help when checking our standards – for example by asking you to take part in short satisfaction surveys. The business promises to keep the number of surveys or questionnaires to a reasonable level, and will only ask you relevant questions to help us maintain and improve our standards.

This Guide is available to all our customers as either a full document or you can just choose the section relevant to you and we will send you these parts. The Guide is available on our website or you can telephone Customer Services on 0191 4336156 to receive the relevant sections. The Customer Service and

Involvement sections are relevant to everyone as they cover all the services we deliver to you.

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For All Services:

We offer a range of services, but across every one of them you can expect the following:

(1) Customer Service

Our aim is to deliver excellent services and for you to be happy with the service you receive.

You can access all services provided by The Gateshead Housing Company, by telephone, in person, in writing, either by letter or e-mail, on our website, by visiting one of our offices and by requesting us to visit you at home. We operate an extended out of hours service where customers can report repairs and any other issues up to 7pm on a week day and between 8am and 12 noon on a Saturday. We also operate an emergency repairs service outside of normal working hours.

We will introduce ourselves by name, wear name badges and provide proof of identity when entering your home. We will be friendly, helpful and welcoming and provide you with a positive customer experience.

We will treat all of the information you give us confidentially and not disclose it to others without your permission, unless we are required by law to do so. We will provide you with personal information we hold about you if you request it. When telephoning us, your call may be recorded for training purposes, where appropriate.

We will treat you fairly according to your needs, whatever your age, nationality, ethnic origin, disability, gender or sexual orientation. We can also provide a translator, signer or information in other formats such as audio, large print and Braille if you require it.

We will communicate with you using a variety of methods and provide you with clear, concise, easy to read and understandable information. We will ensure that information we produce is accessible and meets literacy and visual standards and we will provide information in appropriate languages for customers. We will keep customers informed about the work of the company, its successes and future plans to improve services.

We will ensure all of our offices are easily accessible and provide rooms where you can discuss things with us in private and we can offer you an appointment for a same sex interview if you require it. We will offer you a home visit if you are unable to come to our offices and we will contact you if we are unable to keep an appointment as soon as we can.

We will take all complaints made about our services seriously and deal with complaints with impartiality. If we can resolve your complaint at the time you make it, we will. If not we will investigate your complaint in line with our complaints procedure.

We will keep you informed of the progress of your complaint and agree a solution with you. We will learn from any mistakes we have made and ask you for feedback after we have dealt with your complaint.

Our Service Standards are....

- We will answer your call within 15 seconds. When ringing our Repairs service we will aim to answer your call within 60 seconds.
- We will deal with your enquiry at enquiry counters within 10 minutes
- We will reply to your written correspondence within 10 working days
- We will deal with your enquiry at the first point of contact or we will put you through to the most appropriate person to deal with your enquiry
- We will respond to complaints within 10 working days
- We will give you regular feedback whilst we are investigating your complaint

We will measure how we are performing by....

- Checking with customers that we answer your calls on time
- By asking customers if we dealt with their enquiries quickly and effectively
- By checking that we respond to correspondence and complaints within our target

....and we will report back to customers in our newspaper and via our website.

For more information about what customer service you can expect please see our Customer Service Charter or contact the Customer Service Team on 0191 4336156.

(2) Customer Involvement

We want to deliver an excellent service to all customers, whoever they are and whatever their circumstances. We want everyone to feel they can get involved in a way that suits them. This includes those who live in council housing, have purchased their flat or maisonette from Gateshead Council, plus others who live on council estates and anyone who is affected by the services we provide.

There are three levels of involvement;

- Giving you power - You can help us to make decisions about the work the company does and help make a real difference to the services we provide.
- Giving you influence - You can give us your views and help influence the decision making process.
- Giving you information - You can receive information in a range of ways that tell you what we are doing or what we are proposing to do.

By getting involved you can make your area a better place to live, give us your views on the services you receive, help us to better understand the needs of people from different backgrounds and make a difference to housing in Gateshead. Our Simple Guide to Getting Involved gives you information on the wide range of opportunities there are for you to get involved and have your say. These include joining Service Improvement Groups, becoming a mystery shopper, joining a Tenant or Resident Association, completing questionnaires and surveys and taking part in open days and events.

We will follow the commitments agreed with customers and stakeholders contained within the Resident Involvement Agreement, Shaping our Future, to make sure that you receive a consistent and high level of service when getting involved.

When we give you information we will make it available in a range of formats. We will also hold events at a variety of times and in accessible places and venues. We will also make sure you are able to tell us about your views even if you are unable to come to an office or meeting venue.

We want to make sure that our residents have the skills and confidence to challenge us and help us identify ways to take our services forward. To help you do this, we provide a programme called the Moving Forward Customer Training Programme which includes a range of courses to help you develop your skills and go on to get involved.

Our Service Standards are....

- We will offer you a range of opportunities to get involved in a way which suits you
- We will work to ensure that our involved customers represent the communities we serve
- We will provide an annual training programme to give you the skills and capacity you need to get involved
- We will provide you with feedback on how your involvement has made a difference through a variety of methods

We will measure how we are performing by....

- Asking you how satisfied you are with the opportunities to get involved
- Reporting on the representation of our involved customers every 6 months
- Publishing an annual training programme and monitoring attendance on our courses
- Asking you how satisfied you are with feedback following your involvement

For more information about what getting involved means please see our Guide to getting Involved or contact the Customer Involvement Team on 0191 4335357.

Before you become a tenant:

(3) Applying for a home (HomeChoice)

To join the HomeChoice scheme you can apply online via our website, or can request an application form. Once you have provided all of the information required, we will register you on the scheme within one week and send you all the information you will need. If you have a very urgent need for re-housing, for example if you are faced with becoming homeless, then you may need to first contact Gateshead Council's Housing Options Team at the Civic Centre. You do not need an appointment and can contact the Housing Options team directly. Whilst unfortunately we can't rehouse everybody quickly, we will offer advice on your prospects of rehousing and give a general guide to waiting times for different types of property.

Applicants will be placed in one of four categories of housing need:

- Critical Housing Need
- Urgent Housing Need
- Substantial Housing Need
- General Housing Need

For most homes advertised, applicants will be considered in order of these categories. However, a proportion of homes are advertised on the basis of longest membership of HomeChoice. Most customers will need to build up several years of waiting time.

Homes to let are advertised each week in the HomeChoice newspaper and website. You can choose to bid for up to three homes each week. You can bid on-line, by text, or by calling an automatic telephone line (these methods are all available 24 hours a day during the bidding period). You can also bid during office hours by calling our HomeChoice advice line or visiting one of our offices. We will assist anybody who requires help with bidding for properties.

Adverts always state who the property is suitable for. This will be in line with the eligibility rules contained in the lettings policy - or in a local lettings plan if one has been agreed.

We will provide feedback on the outcome of bids on the HomeChoice website, and will contact successful bidders within three days of bids closing. Sometimes the successful bidder does not always accept the offer of property, and this means that those customers next in line may be contacted by us at a later date.

If your circumstances change, you should keep us informed and we will update your application within one week of receiving all the required information

Our Service Standards are...

- We will register new applications and update changes of circumstances within one week of receiving all the required information
- We will provide you with advice and information on rehousing prospects, and typical waiting times for different types of property
- We will assist any customer who would like help in making bids
- We will contact successful bidders within three days of bids closing

We will measure how we are performing by...

- Checking we are registering and updating applications within one week
- Asking customers if they are satisfied with advice and information on applying for a home
- Asking customers about the experience of bidding for properties
- Checking that we notify successful bidders within three days

...and we will report results back to customers in our newspaper and via our website

For more information on HomeChoice, please contact the HomeChoice advice line on 0191 433 5345.

(4) Viewing a home

When you are informed that you may be getting a new home, you will have many things to think about and arrange. We will support you during this important and busy time.

We will confirm that you have been successful, and will advise you of the full cost of the rent and any service charges. Many tenants qualify for help in paying rent, so we will send you an application form for Housing Benefit, and tell you how you can calculate the amount of benefit you may receive. We can help you with this calculation, but remember it is only a guide and you will still need to complete the application form and provide proof of income. (You should bring the completed form and proof with you when you sign-up for the tenancy).

You may choose to pay for extra things like low cost home contents insurance, or a furniture package (you can choose from a wide range of items), which can be added to your weekly rent.

We will give you an indication of when you could expect the tenancy to begin, but we will confirm this once we have checked the condition of the property.

Once the property can be viewed, we will arrange an appointment with you. You will always be accompanied by a Housing Officer when you view a property, so that we can answer any questions or provide further information. It is important that you bring some identification with you to the viewing.

Where possible we will arrange for you to view the property at an early stage, which means that not all work may have been carried out, but if so you will be offered a further opportunity to view once work has been completed.

All homes are prepared to a lettable standard which ensures that they will be clean, safe, secure, and in good condition. We appreciate that customers do not want delays, and so there may be some minor repairs that can be carried out after you have moved in. It is the tenant's responsibility to decorate the home, but where appropriate depending on the condition of each room, we may award a decorating allowance to contribute to the costs of decoration.

Our Service Standards are...

- When you view a property, you will be accompanied by a Housing Officer who will offer advice and information about the property.
- The property will be prepared to our published lettable standard ready for the start of your tenancy

We will measure how we are performing by...

- Asking customers if the property viewing was useful
- Asking customers if they are satisfied with the condition of the property offered, in line with our lettable standard

...and we will report results back to customers in our newspaper and website

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(5) Signing the tenancy agreement and moving in

If you intend to accept the property on offer, then we will make an appointment for you to sign the tenancy agreement. We will ensure that you are given appropriate advice on managing your tenancy and that you understand the terms of the agreement.

You will need to bring identification with you to the sign-up interview. If you intend to apply for Housing Benefit then you should bring the application form sent out to you before you viewed the property, or given to you at the viewing. If you have not yet calculated how much benefit you may be entitled to, then you will get another chance to do this as part of the interview.

We will check with you whether you have arranged for your gas and electric supply to be switched on. We must carry out a gas safety check before you use any gas appliance at your new home, but we can only do this if both your gas and electric supplies are switched on. We will make an appointment with you to carry out this safety check either before or on the day that your tenancy starts.

If you have chosen a furniture package then we will arrange for the furniture to be delivered on an agreed day, and ensure everything is fully assembled.

In the first week of your tenancy we will contact you to check there are no issues about paying rent, and to see if you need any additional help or support. We will also arrange to visit new tenants within 6 weeks to see how you are settling in, and if you need any further advice or assistance.

Our Service Standards are...

- We will provide advice on managing your tenancy .
- Before signing-up we will help you calculate how much Housing Benefit you may be entitled to, and will contact you in the first week to check there are no issues about paying rent, and to offer any additional help or support.
- If you have chosen a furniture package we will arrange for the furniture to be delivered and assembled on an agreed date
- We will arrange to visit new tenants within 6 weeks to see how you are settling in

We will measure how we are performing by...

- Asking if you are satisfied with the advice and support offered to new tenants
- Asking customers if they are satisfied with furniture packages
- Checking we carry out visits to new tenants in the first 6 weeks

...and we will report results back to customers in our newspaper and via our website.

Whilst you are a tenant...

(6) Rent payments and advice

In addition to the support and assistance we offer before you become a tenant, you can expect the following service as a tenant:

We offer a wide range of payment methods so that you can choose a method which is best for you. This includes direct debit, standing order, payment cards for use at local shops or housing offices and telephone or internet payments.

We will contact you within the first week of your tenancy to offer advice and assistance regarding your rent and any benefit issues you may have. If you find that you are having difficulty in managing the cost of running your home, we can help you to get in touch with specialist debt and money advice agencies.

If we write to you about your rent account we will explain clearly why we are writing, and will give you a named point of contact within the Rent and Income team who you can speak to about any queries or concerns about your rent.

We will send you a rent statement every 13 weeks which is easy to understand, and will give you at least 28 days written notice about any changes to your rent or service charges.

If you fall into arrears with your rent we will write to you the first week that your payment is overdue requesting that you contact us to discuss your account. If you are experiencing difficulty in paying your rent or any of your household bills, we can refer you to independent free debt advice services.

If we need to take any action for outstanding rent arrears, we will always attempt to visit you first to discuss the matter and will write to you before we take legal action. We will always write to you to tell you the outcome.

Our Service Standards are...

- We will offer a range of payment methods
- All rent letters will be clearly written, including an easy to understand rent statement which we will send every 13 weeks.
- We will give at least 28 days notice of changes to rent or service charges.
- We will offer help to customers who are experiencing financial difficulty, including referring to specialist debt and welfare benefit advice services.

We will measure how we are performing by...

- Asking if you are satisfied with the methods of paying rent, and the information on how much to pay
- Asking if you find our rent letters and statements useful and easy to understand
- Asking if you are satisfied with the advice available on rent or on debt

...and we will report results back to customers in our newspaper and via our website.

If you would like any further advice about paying your rent please contact your Rent & Income team.

(7) HomeRepairs

Being able to report repairs quickly and easy is important to you and is also a key priority for us in providing well maintained homes.

You can report any repair by:-

- Phoning us on FREEPHONE 0800 4086008 or
- Visiting the website on www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk or
- emailing us at:- repairs@gatesheadhousing.co.uk.
- texting us Mobile: 0762 480 4167 (text REPAIR followed by your message and the first line of your **address**)

The service takes calls until 7pm Monday to Friday and noon on Saturdays. You can report an emergency repair any time day or night by phoning the Home repairs Service on FREEPHONE 0800 4086008

When you report your repair we aim to offer an appointment for all urgent and routine repairs at a time that is convenient to you. If your repair requires an inspection an appointment will be arranged.

You will be asked to pay for any repairs that have been caused by damage to, or misuse of your home caused by you, your family or friends.

To help you with minor repairs around your home that would normally be the tenant's responsibility, we provide a free Small Tasks service for tenants over the age of 50 years of age who have no support from friends or family. You can request a job by contacting the Sheltered Housing team or HomeRepairs. We will acknowledge your request to join the small task service within 24 hours and if approved we will contact you within 10 working days to arrange a suitable appointment date and time.

For further information on the repairs service please see the HomeRepairs leaflet which includes timescales to complete repairs. If you are vulnerable or have special needs you will receive a quicker response to emergency work such as heating and hot water repairs all year round.

Our Service Standards are...

- We will tell you the maximum time we will take to complete the repair
- We will offer you an appointment for all urgent and routine repairs at a time that is convenient to you

- We will take care to protect your furnishings while doing repairs
- We will clear away rubbish from the repair that has been left outside within two working days of completing
- We will acknowledge your request for small tasks within 24 hours and if approved contact you within 10 working days to arrange a suitable appointment date and time

We will measure how we are performing by...

- Asking you how satisfied you are with the repairs service
- Monitoring repair appointments to ensure they have been made and kept
- Measuring the number of repairs that are completed within target times
- Inspecting 10% of completed repairs to check the quality of work
- Asking you if you are satisfied with the services of the Small Task team
- Checking that we have responded and delivered the Small tasks service on time

(8) Gas servicing

You must allow us to carry out a gas service every 12 months to make sure that your gas appliances are working safely. This is a legal requirement.

The servicing is part of your tenancy agreement. Not allowing us to carry out this service is a breach of tenancy, for which you can be taken to court and ultimately evicted

We will carry out a gas safety check when you move into your property as well as carrying out the annual gas service

As part of our commitment to delivering quality services, we aim to provide a reliable and efficient service to our customers.

Our Service Standards are...

- We will carry out an annual gas service and will contact you 4 weeks before this date
- Take care to protect your furnishings while carrying out the gas service
- Install a carbon monoxide detector and instruct you on its use
- Service your carbon monoxide detector if previously installed
- Give you a personal copy of the CP12 gas certificate
- Show you how to use your gas appliances in a safe and efficient way

We will measure and report back to customers on our performance by:

- Asking you if you were satisfied with your gas service
- Asking you if you were satisfied with your solid fuel service
- Inspecting 5% of completed gas services to check the quality of the work

For more information about your gas servicing please contact 0191 4335445 or 4335338

(9) Improvements to your home

In addition to day to day responsive repairs there will be occasions where we need to carry out improvement work to your home.

These improvements could involve work to the exterior of your home, for example the walls or roof. They could also involve internal work such as the replacement of a kitchen, bathroom or heating system.

We will contact you if your home is included in an improvement scheme and explain how the work will be delivered and when it is likely to commence.

To identify the works needed in your home we will survey the whole property. Following the survey we will write to you explaining what improvements will be carried out and where possible offer you a choice of fittings or finishes. We will also explain to you why other elements of work are not being carried out.

Improvement work will be delivered, onsite, by one of our Capital Investment Partners. They will treat your home with respect and courtesy at all times and will clear up at the end of each working day.

We will have a Technical Team managing the work to ensure that all the improvements are delivered safely and to a high standard. We will also appoint a Tenant Liaison Assistant to work with you and be a named point of contact who you can speak to about any queries or concerns about the improvements.

At the end of the work we will inspect your home to ensure all the improvements have been completed correctly. If any minor unfinished work is found we will tell you about it and complete it within 5 working days.

At the end of the improvements we will contact you to complete a satisfaction survey. We will ask you about your experience of the work and ask you to score the services that you have received from us and our Capital Investment Partners. Once work is completed on an estate we will publish the overall satisfaction results so you can see how we have performed.

Our Service Standards are...

- We will treat you and your home with respect and courtesy at all times
- We will work with our partners to minimise the disruption to your home and keep you informed of progress during the work
- We will provide you with information about the works and how it will effect you
- You will receive at least 14 days notice before work starts on your home and we will nominate a Tenant Liaison Assistant to support you
- We will ensure we clear up following the work
- Any minor items of work will be completed within 5 working days of the work being completed on your home
- Qualifying customers will receive their HomeStyle and HomeBonus vouchers within 7 working days of the works being completed.

We will measure and report back to customers on our performance by:

- Including all our service standards in our satisfaction survey

- Conducting mystery shopping exercises with customers

(10) When you make improvements to your home

If you want to make your own improvements to your home you must first seek our permission. We may grant permission for you to carry out a range of improvements such as replacing a kitchen, bathroom, heating system or doors.

Your request for permission must be made to your local Housing Office. On receipt of a request we may visit you to discuss your plans or seek more details from you.

Some improvement work may require Building Regulation Approval or Planning Permission. We will advise you where this maybe necessary and you will be responsible for getting the required approvals before we grant you permission.

If we grant you permission for an improvement you will be responsible for its maintenance for the first year. If permission is granted, and the improvement is carried out properly, we will assume maintenance responsibility once the first year has passed.

If we have information about the presence of asbestos in your home we will provide you with a copy of the details when we respond to your request.

You may be eligible for a loan to assist you to pay for any improvements you want to make to your home. Further details of eligibility and information on how to apply for a loan can be obtained from your local Housing Office. Should you be eligible for a loan then the works would be undertaken by The Gateshead Housing Company.

If you make improvements to your home without our permission we may ask you to remove them and return the property to its original condition. If we have to carry out repair work you may also be charged.

You may be entitled to compensation for improvements you have made to your home. If you have obtained permission for improvements, you can apply for compensation when you end your tenancy. Please contact your local housing office for details.

Our Service Standards are...

- We will acknowledge requests to carry out improvements within 5 working days
- We will advise you within 10 days if you require any Building Regulation Approval or Planning Permissions.
- Improvements will be inspected within 10 days of you notifying us that they are complete.

We will measure and report back to customers on our performance by:

- Monitoring the length of time taken to acknowledge requests and post inspect completed customers own improvements.

(11) On your estate

We want to ensure the wider environment you live in is clean, safe and well maintained. As a customer you have the opportunity to be involved in monitoring the general standards of your estate and in helping us to identify any environmental improvements that are needed. You can do this by attending an Estate Tour with your local Estate Officer, the dates and times of which are advertised through the quarterly Company newspaper and on the website.

On an Estate Tour, you can walk around with the Estate Officer and other customers to identify areas that need attention. Alternatively if you cannot attend an Estate Tour you can report issues online on our website or directly to your Estate Officer. As part of the estate tour we will work with you to grade your estate, including sheltered housing and multi storey blocks at least every three months. The Estate Grading enables you to measure and monitor the standards of service delivered and work with us to improve the appearance of your estate. The feedback on the outcomes of estate grading will be publicised to customers through the quarterly newspapers and website and discussed at local Tenants and Residents groups.

Following an Estate Tour we will provide written feedback to the customers who attend within 10 days on any actions that will be taken. To support this approach we provide a Handyperson service to enable a rapid response to environmental issues. In addition we will ask for your views on a range of other initiatives that you may want to be involved in, to develop Neighbourhood Pride, Design out Crime, and Problem Solving schemes to help improve your estate.

We also carry out inspections of communal areas within multi-storey blocks and sheltered accommodation to ensure that they meet with the cleaning standards. The feedback on these is published on the notice boards within 10 working days.

The majority of customers keep their gardens tidy and free from rubbish, however where gardens are not maintained we will contact you and discuss what action you need to take to improve it. However we do recognise that some customers are unable to maintain their own garden so we provide a gardening service to help support you, for which there is a weekly service charge.

If you do not make the necessary improvements to maintain your garden we will take formal action against you.

Our Service Standards are:

- We will carry out a published programme of Estate Tours, that includes grading of all estates, at least every three months
- We will provide written feedback to customers who attend the estate tour within 10 working days.

- We will remove any racist or offensive graffiti within 1 working day.
- In partnership with Local Environmental Services we will ensure grass cutting is undertaken every 5 – 10 working days between April and October.
- Customers receiving our Gardening Service will receive a visit every 4 weeks during the growing season between March and October.

We will measure how we are performing by

- checking that we have delivered on the published programme of estate tours and how many have involved customers
- asking customers if they are satisfied with the appearance of their estate and how it is maintained
- asking customers if they are satisfied with the quality and frequency of the Garden Service visits
- monitoring the number of garden cases opened and resolved

and we will report back to customers in our newspaper and via our website

For more information please contact your local housing office.

(12) Aids and adaptations

Adaptations are changes to a home that help disabled or older people to live independently and maintain a good quality of life. We work closely with Gateshead Council to assist customers to access adaptations that are needed to meet their essential needs.

We provide two levels of adaptation, minor and major. Minor adaptations are smaller fixed alterations to your home that will assist you with independent living while major adaptations can include internal and external alterations to your home. Adaptations may not always be appropriate and there may be some occasions where we have to explore alternative accommodation.

When you request an adaptation we will arrange for an assessment to highlight your essential needs and make recommendations about how to meet them.

Our service standards are:

- We will work with Gateshead Council to provide you with a coordinated high quality of service
- Gateshead Councils Occupational Therapist and Adaptations service will contact you within three days of your initial request for major adaptation
- We will involve you in all aspects of designing and delivering your adaptation
- We will make sure that you receive notice of when work will be carried out in your home

We will measure and report back to customers on our performance by:

- Measuring the percentage of minor adaptations carried out within seven working days of the adaptation being approved
- Measuring the percentage of referrals to the Occupational Therapy service waiting list allocated within four months of referral
- Measuring the percentage of major routine adaptations completed within three months from the day work is approved
- Measuring your satisfaction with the information provided to you, your satisfaction with the quality of work and overall satisfaction.

(13) Sheltered Housing

We recognise that older people have more specific support needs as a tenant and so we have a dedicated Sheltered Housing team. The Sheltered Housing Estate Officers work closely with the Councils Sheltered Scheme Officers to deliver housing and support services to older tenants, specifically living in sheltered accommodation.

If you choose to live in sheltered accommodation you will be supported through a community alarm system, which is fitted in your home. This gives you independence and full support from Gateshead's Care Call service, which is provided seven days a week, 365 days a year. There is a mandatory charge for this service, which is included in the weekly rent.

You will also benefit from the service of either an on-site or mobile Sheltered Scheme Officer, who will visit you during the first week of moving in to welcome you to your new home. They will tell you about the sheltered scheme, what standards of service and support you will get and what activities you can join in on. There is also a mandatory charge for this service.

Some tenants may have difficulty in accessing services or even attending an Estate Tour, so drop in sessions are held at each scheme to ensure that you can have 'face to face' contact with your local officers. We will provide feedback on all enquiries within 10 days of the session to tell you what action we will take and by when.

We encourage tenants to participate in social activities and most of our Sheltered Schemes benefit from the use of a communal lounge. As well as providing a quarterly company newspaper, we send out 'Here and Now' every six months which keeps you up to date about older person's services. We also encourage tenants to get involved and we hold annual meetings at each sheltered housing scheme, to give you an opportunity to tell us your views about your scheme and the services you receive. You can also tell us about the improvements you would like to see.

Our Service Standards are:

- We will work in partnership with the Council's CareCall service to ensure you receive appropriate support to enable you to live independently
- We will produce a bi-annual newspaper to keep you informed about our older persons services
- We will hold drop-in sessions and an annual meeting within your scheme to discuss any issues and how services can be improved. We will ensure feedback is provided within 10 working days

We will measure how we are performing by

- Asking you if you are satisfied with living in your scheme and the services you receive

For more information about Sheltered Housing please contact 0191 4335356

(14) Communal areas and multi-storey blocks

We provide a Concierge or Caretaker service in all multi-storey blocks. Both services provide tenants and leaseholders with a friendly, safe and secure environment to live in. In addition, caretakers provide a cleaning service to communal areas of the multi-storey block.

In concierge multi-storey blocks, sheltered schemes and some low rise flats with communal areas, the cleaning is carried out by the Council's Building Cleaning service. All cleaning in communal areas is carried out to a published standard.

Our Service Standards are:

- We will ensure communal areas are cleaned to the published standard
- We will undertake a monthly inspection of each multi-storey block and publish the results on the notice board in each block within ten working days of the inspection

We will measure how we are performing by

- Checking that cleaning is carried out to the published standard and feedback has been provided
- Measuring the number of multi-storey blocks that meet the published cleaning standard
- Asking customers if they are satisfied with the cleaning standards
- Asking customers if they are satisfied with the caretaking and concierge services

(15) Managing tenancies and tackling Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

The vast majority of our customers may not experience anti social behaviour. However, if you do experience anti social behaviour or problems with your neighbours we will take swift appropriate action to resolve matters as soon as possible. You can report any incidents to us either at your local housing office, via the website or by telephoning us. We also accept anonymous complaints and deal with all cases in a sensitive and confidential manner.

We have a dedicated neighbourhood relations team working alongside local estate officers, who provide support and advice as well as taking appropriate enforcement action to resolve tenancy and neighbourhood issues within the community.

We work in partnership with other agencies such as Police, Neighbourhood Wardens, Victim Support and Probation to provide tailored support to individuals. We also have access to specialist services, including Mental Health, Alcohol Support and Parenting and Young person's officers, to ensure appropriate support is offered.

Our Service Standards are:

When you report an incident of anti-social behaviour

- We will provide you with a case reference number, and advise you of the name of the investigating officer.
- We will begin investigating and acknowledge your complaint within;
 - Twenty four hours for high priority cases (for example racial harassment, domestic abuse, physical assaults)
 - Five working days for other cases (for example neighbour disputes)
- We will agree what actions will be taken and how we will feedback to you.
- We will talk to you before closing your case and we will follow this up in writing

We will measure how we are performing by

- Asking you if you were satisfied with the way your ASB complaint was dealt with
- Asking you if you were satisfied with the outcome of your ASB complaint
- Checking that we have responded and started investigating cases on time
- Measuring the number of ASB cases that were resolved

For more information about Anti Social Behaviour please contact 0191 4335327 or 4335399

At the end of your tenancy...

(16) Finding a new home, or assigning your tenancy to someone else

If you are considering moving to another home then you can reapply to join the HomeChoice scheme at any time. The scheme operates for existing tenants in the same way as for other customers.

If you are looking to move to a smaller property then you may qualify for additional assistance, including financial help with the move. See our 'downsizing' scheme for further information.

An alternative to bidding for properties under HomeChoice is to look to exchange homes with another tenant. We can help you find someone to exchange homes with in Gateshead and across Tyne and Wear by joining the free mutual exchange service "HomeXchange Tyne and Wear". If you find someone to exchange homes with, you must both get written permission from your landlord before proceeding. By law, we must respond to requests to exchange within 42 days.

If a tenant dies, then a member of the family who has lived with the tenant may be eligible to take on the tenancy. This is called a succession of tenancy, and

can only happen once. A living tenant may also be able to pass on (or “assign”) their tenancy to a member of the family who would have been eligible to take on the tenancy by way of succession if that tenant had died.

Applications for succession or assignment of tenancy must be made in writing, and we will respond to requests within two weeks.

(17) Ending your tenancy

Before making a final decision to leave your home, we ask that you give us an opportunity to talk through all your options with you. If you decide to leave your home we can give you advice about:

- The length of notice you must give before you end your tenancy
- Any outstanding rent or service charges
- Handing in the keys
- The condition you should leave the property
- Your possible entitlement to claim compensation if you have made improvements
- How we may advertise your home to find a new tenant

By law tenants must give 4 weeks written notice, although there are some circumstances where we may agree a shorter period, such as where the tenant has died and the ‘next of kin’ is giving notice, or where the tenant is moving to residential care.

Our “Ending your tenancy” leaflet available in all Housing Offices contains the information you will need and comes complete with the notice form and a pre-paid envelope. You are asked to provide a forwarding address.

Once we receive your signed notice we will confirm receipt, and make an arrangement to visit you so that we can discuss any tenancy matters and inspect for any repairs which may need to be carried out.

When you leave, you should hand in your keys by 12 noon on the Monday that your tenancy ends. You will be given a receipt for the keys. If keys are not handed in on time then you will be charged a further week’s rent. You may also be recharged if the property has not been left in an acceptable condition.

If you leave an amount outstanding on your rent account or other related account then we will contact you within two weeks to inform you of the outstanding balance and to make a repayment agreement. If you leave with a credit balance then we will arrange to refund you within 2 weeks.

Our Service Standards are...

- We will respond to requests to exchange homes within 42 days
- We will respond to requests for successions and other types of assignment within 2 weeks
- We will contact you within 2 weeks of your tenancy ending to inform you of the outstanding balance (and refund you if it is a credit balance)

We will measure how we are performing by...

- Checking we respond to requests to assign, succeed or exchange within timescale
- Checking that we contact former tenants within 2 weeks of tenancy ending to inform of outstanding balance or refund credit balances.

...and we will report results back to customers in our newspaper and website.

For more information on HomeXchange Tyne and Wear please see their website at:- homexchangetyne&wear.org.uk, and for more information on ending your Tenancy please see contact your local housing office.

Buying your home

One way your tenancy may come to an end is if you are thinking of buying your home. Secure tenants can apply to the Home Ownership Team at Gateshead Council for an application to purchase your property. The Home Ownership Team will confirm whether you have the right to buy your property.

If you live in a flat or maisonette and you buy your home you will become a leaseholder with The Gateshead Housing Company. For more information see our guide for leaseholders.

The previous sections have covered the services you are most likely to experience but there are additional services you may choose to take up

Some of these additional services may have an eligibility criteria or a cost, these services include:-

- Renting a garage
- Low cost home contents Insurance
- Gardening Scheme
- Furniture packages
- Small tasks team

Please get in touch with us for further information.

What we ask in return

We value your views and suggestions about the services we provide and we want to work with you to improve the service you receive from us. If you feel you have not received an excellent service, please tell us and let us know your ideas about how we can get better.

To help us give you the best possible service, we ask that you;

Treat us with respect

- Be considerate and polite to our employees and other customers
- Be on time for appointments or let us know if you are unable to attend

You can also help us by:

- Giving us all the information we need to help you
- Letting us know if you have any individual requirements
- Telling us how we can improve our service or if there was anything we did particularly well
- Asking us to explain anything you're not sure about
- Being patient. We are very busy at times but will always do our best to keep waiting times to a minimum

Your responsibilities:

- Keep up to date with your rent and service charge payments and let us know if you are having trouble paying
- Keep your tenancy clean and in good condition and ensure if you have a garden it is well maintained
- Avoid behaviour that may cause nuisance to your neighbours
- Report any repairs to us as soon as possible

Useful Contact Information

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**Leaseholders
Guide to
the Services you can
expect from
The Gateshead Housing
Company**

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What we ask for in return

The company is an Arms-Length Management Organisation (ALMO), which means it is fully owned by Gateshead Council, but operates independently.

Our mission is to provide excellent services to all of our customers and work in partnership with Gateshead Council and tenants and leaseholders to deliver homes and housing services that meet the aspirations of the people of Gateshead.

The Gateshead Housing Company manages over 22,000 homes and is working to improve housing and housing services in Gateshead.

Our Vision:

To provide excellent homes and housing services

Our Mission:

To work in partnership with residents and the community to create homes and neighbourhoods that meet the aspirations of the people of Gateshead.

Our Values:

- being a listening and learning organisation
- being honest, accountable and transparent
- being motivated, trained and committed
- being customer focused, innovative and professional
- caring and respecting
- embracing equality
- a commitment to all our employees

The service you can expect from us...

This booklet explains about the service you can expect to receive from The Gateshead Housing Company.

The booklet describes the range of services we offer, the standards of service you can expect, and also how we will check that we are meeting those standards.

There are a number of standards within each section throughout this guide.

If you feel that we are not meeting any of the standards on any occasion then please tell us.

We may ask for your help when we check our standards – for example by asking you to take part in short satisfaction surveys. We promise to keep the number of surveys or questionnaires to a reasonable level, and will only ask relevant questions to help us maintain and improve our standards.

This Guide is available to all our customers as either a full document or you can just choose the section relevant to you and we will send you these parts. The Guide is available on our website or you can telephone Customer Services on 0191 433 6156 to receive the relevant sections. The Customer Service and Involvement sections are relevant to everyone as they cover all the services we deliver to you.

For All Services:

We offer a range of services, but across every one of them you can expect the following:

(1) Customer Service

Our aim is to deliver excellent services and for you to be happy with the service you receive.

You can access all services provided by The Gateshead Housing Company, by telephone, in person, in writing, either by letter or e-mail, on our website, visiting one of our offices and by requesting us to visit you at home. We operate an extended out of hours service where customers can report repairs and any other issues up to 7pm on a week day and between 8am and 12 noon on a Saturday. We also operate an emergency repairs service outside of normal working hours.

We will introduce ourselves by name, wear name badges and provide proof of identity when entering your home. We will be friendly, helpful and welcoming and provide you with a positive customer experience.

We will treat all of the information you give us confidentially and not disclose it to others without your permission, unless we are required by law to do so. We will provide you with personal information we hold about you if you request it. When telephoning us, your call may be recorded for training purposes, where appropriate.

We will treat you fairly according to your needs, whatever your age, nationality, ethnic origin, disability, gender or sexual orientation. We can also provide a translator, signer or information in other formats such as audio, large print and Braille if you require it.

We will communicate with you using a variety of methods and provide you with clear, concise, easy to read and understandable information. We will ensure that information we produce is accessible and meets literacy and visual standards and we will provide information in appropriate languages for customers. We will keep customers informed about the work of the company, its successes and future plans to improve services.

We will ensure all of our offices are easily accessible and provide rooms where you can discuss things with us in private and we can offer you an

appointment for a same sex interview if you require it. We will offer you a home visit if you are unable to come to our offices and we will contact you if we are unable to keep an appointment as soon as we can.

We will take all complaints made about our services seriously and deal with complaints with impartiality. If we can resolve your complaint at the time you make it, we will. If not we will investigate your complaint in line with our complaints procedure.

We will keep you informed of the progress of your complaint and agree a solution with you. We will learn from any mistakes we have made and ask you for feedback after we have dealt with your complaint.

Our Service Standards are....

- We will answer your call within 15 seconds. When ringing our Repairs service we will aim to answer your call within 60 seconds.
- We will deal with your enquiry at enquiry counters within 10 minutes
- We will reply to your written correspondence within 10 working days
- We will deal with your enquiry at the first point of contact or we will put you through to the most appropriate person to deal with your enquiry
- We will respond to complaints within 10 working days
- We will give you regular feedback whilst we are investigating your complaint

We will measure how we are performing by....

- Checking with customers that we answer your calls on time
- By asking customers if we dealt with their enquiries quickly and effectively
- By checking that we respond to correspondence and complaints within our target

....and we will report back to customers in our newspaper and via our website.

For more information about what customer service you can expect please see our Customer Service Charter or contact the Customer Service Team on 0191 4336156.

(2) Customer Involvement

We want to deliver an excellent service to all customers, whoever they are and whatever their circumstances. We want everyone to feel they can get involved in a way that suits them. This includes those who live in council housing, have purchased their flat or maisonette from Gateshead Council,

plus others who live on council estates and anyone who is affected by the services we provide.

There are three levels of involvement;

- Giving you power - You can help us to make decisions about the work the company does and help make a real difference to the services we provide.
- Giving you influence - You can give us your views and help influence the decision making process.
- Giving you information - You can receive information in a range of ways that tell you what we are doing or what we are proposing to do.

By getting involved you can make your area a better place to live, give us your views on the services you receive, help us to better understand the needs of people from different backgrounds and make a difference to housing in Gateshead. Our Simple Guide to Getting Involved gives you information on the wide range of opportunities there are for you to get involved and have your say. These include joining Service Improvement Groups, becoming a mystery shopper, joining a Tenant or Resident Association, completing questionnaires and surveys and taking part in open days and events.

We will follow the commitments agreed with customers and stakeholders contained within the Resident Involvement Agreement, Shaping our Future, to make sure that you receive a consistent and high level of service when getting involved.

When we give you information we will make it available in a range of formats. We will also hold events at a variety of times and in accessible places and venues. We will also make sure you are able to tell us about your views even if you are unable to come to an office or meeting venue.

We want to make sure that our residents have the skills and confidence to challenge us and help us identify ways to take our services forward. To help you do this, we provide a programme called the Moving Forward Customer Training Programme which includes a range of courses to help you develop your skills and go on to get involved.

Our Service Standards are....

- We will offer you a range of opportunities to get involved in a way which suits you
- We will work to ensure that our involved customers represent the communities we serve
- We will provide an annual training programme to give you the skills and capacity you need to get involved
- We will provide you with feedback on how your involvement has made a difference through a variety of methods

We will measure how we are performing by....

- Asking you how satisfied you are with the opportunities to get involved
- Reporting on the representation of our involved customers every 6 months
- Publishing an annual training programme and monitoring attendance on our courses
- Asking you how satisfied you are with feedback following your involvement

....and we will report back to customers in our newspaper and via our website.

For more information about what getting involved means please see our Guide to getting Involved or contact the Customer Involvement Team on 0191 4335357.

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Before you become a leaseholder....

(3) Purchasing your flat or maisonette through the Tenants 'Right to Buy' Scheme

If you are a current tenant who would like to purchase your flat or maisonette through the tenants 'Right to Buy' Scheme you will need to complete a 'Right to Buy' application form. Gateshead Council will confirm if you are eligible to purchase the lease to your flat or maisonette. Once you have purchased your property you will be known as a 'Leaseholder'.

As a leaseholder you purchase the flat or maisonette on a long lease from Gateshead Council. You will own your own property but not the block it is in, or the land it is build on. Gateshead Council remain the ultimate freeholder of the flat or maisonette.

Before you complete your purchase we will offer you a pre-sale guidance interview to explain your rights and responsibilities as a leaseholder and advise you of the Landlords obligations under the terms of your lease. The rights and obligations of a Leaseholder and Landlords obligations are set out in law. During your pre-sale guidance interview we will explain the financial help and support available to you as you become a leaseholder. We will provide you with information concerning the estimated annual cost for the provision of services to your block and any major works which may be undertaken within the first five years of your purchase. As a leaseholder you will be expected to contribute towards these costs.

The Gateshead Housing Company, act as the managing agent, for Gateshead Council. Therefore, within this arrangement we will be responsible for managing the block that your flat or maisonette is located within.

(4) Purchasing your flat or maisonette privately 'on the open market'

If you purchase your flat or maisonette privately through an estate agent on the 'open market' we will send your solicitor an Information Pack prior to the completion of the sale, providing this is requested from us. The pack will confirm the annual cost of services provided to the block and major works to be undertaken by the Company to improve or repair the premises.

You will receive in writing an estimate of the service charges you will be expected to pay on an annual basis for the services provided to your block of flats or maisonette. We will also inform you of any major works which may be carried out to your building, within the first five years of your purchase, and provide you with an estimate of the cost of the works. You are required to pay for a proportion of the works we carry out to your building.

We will also provide you with our new owners Information Pack once you have purchased your flat or maisonette be this on the 'open market' or through the 'right to buy' process.

Our Service Standards are....

- We will keep you informed of changes in law that affect you through our twice yearly newsletter, forums and Service Improvement Group.
- We will respect and protect your right as a leaseholder and will expect you to respect our rights and responsibilities as the landlord's agent.
- We will send you a leasehold information pack within seven days of being told that you have bought your flat or maisonette.

We will measure how we are performing by....

- Monitoring that we hit our deadline of sending out the leasehold information pack within seven days.
- Asking whether you are satisfied with the service you received prior to becoming a leaseholder.
- Asking if we provided you with all of the information you needed before you became a leaseholder.

...and we will report results back to customers through our Service Improvement Group and in our newspaper and via our website.

Whilst you are a leaseholder....

(5) Service Charge Billing and Collection

As your landlord, Gateshead Council is responsible for maintaining the exterior and shared areas of your block. As the managing agent, The Gateshead Housing Company is responsible for the services provided to your block and any repairs to these areas, and as a leaseholder, you have to pay a share of these costs which are referred to as service charges.

We will send out two service charge bills each year, which cover the period 1 April to 31 March. The estimated bill is sent in February of each year, and is an estimate of how much we expect it will cost to provide services to your block of flats, this will also include the buildings insurance. This bill can be paid over 10 or 12 monthly instalments.

You will receive your actual bill in June each year. This bill will show the actual amount spent on each service for the previous year. Any outstanding amount due must be paid within 21 days.

We offer a wide range of payment methods so that you can choose a method which is best for you. This includes direct debit, standing order, payment cards for use at local shops or housing offices and telephone or internet payments.

If you find that you are having difficulty in managing the cost of running your home, we can help you to get in touch with specialist debt and money advice agencies.

If we write to you about your service charges we will explain clearly why we are writing, and will give you a named point of contact within the Leasehold team who you can speak to about any queries or concerns about your service charges.

If you fall into arrears with your service charges we will write to you within the first month that your payment is overdue requesting that you contact us to discuss your account. If you are experiencing difficulty in paying your service charges or any of your household bills, we can refer you to independent free debt advice services.

If we need to take any action for outstanding service charge arrears, we will always attempt to visit you first to discuss the matter and will write to you before we take legal action. We will always write to you to tell you the outcome.

If you disagree with the cost or quality of the services provided you should raise a 'dispute' with the Leasehold Services Team. We will acknowledge your dispute and respond within 10 working days. If you don't agree with the Company's response, you may want to have your case heard by the Leasehold Valuation Tribunal. The Leasehold Valuation Tribunal acts as an independent arbitrator to decide whether service charges are reasonable. Full details of how to apply to Leasehold Valuation Tribunal can be found in the Leasehold Handbook.

Our Service Standards are....

- We will send you an annual estimated service charge bill, which will include details of how the charge has been calculated, in February.
- We will send you a service charge certificate and balance of your account, detailing expenditure incurred in June.
- We will send you a statement of your service charge account, including all income received and adjustments made, on a quarterly basis.
- We will respond to all 'disputes' within 10 working days and ensure that all decisions made are referred back to individual departments to ensure continuous improvement of service provision.
- We will monitor service charge payments on a monthly basis to ensure early intervention and provide support when accounts fall into arrears.

We will measure how we are performing by....

- Checking that accounts are issued and monitored within timescales
- Asking our customers if they are satisfied with account information
- Monitoring service charge collection rates

- Monitoring disputes to ensure they are responded to within timescales and feedback on the improvements made through reviewing the disputes.

...and we will report results back to our customers through our Service Improvement Group, in our newspaper and via our website.

If you would like further information about your service charge, billing or collection please contact the Leasehold Team

(6) Repairs to external and communal areas

Being able to report repairs quickly and easy is important to customers and is also a key priority for us in providing well maintained homes.

You can report any repairs to the external and communal areas of your property or block by:

- Phoning us on FREEPHONE 0800 4086008 or
- Visiting the website on www.gatesheadhousing.co.uk or
- Emailing us at: repairs@gatesheadhousing.co.uk
- Texting us Mobile: 0762 4804167 (text REPAIR followed by your message and the first line of your address)

The service takes calls until 7pm Monday to Friday and noon on Saturdays. You can report an emergency repair any time day or night by phoning the Home Repairs Service on FREEPHONE 0800 4086008.

When you report your repair we aim to offer an appointment for all urgent and routine repairs at a time that is convenient to you. If your repair requires an inspection an appointment will be arranged.

You are responsible for repairs to the inside of your flat and the glass in your windows. You should make your own arrangements to get someone to do the repairs for you; these should not be reported to us. We are responsible for keeping the 'common parts' of your block in good repair. This means that we will look after the structure of the building and the landing and hallways, including lighting and controlled door-entry systems. You will have to pay a share of the cost of these repairs. You should report any repairs required to the common parts of the block or structure of the building as detailed above.

You will receive a quarterly repairs and maintenance statement which will include details of all repairs carried out the external structure of the building and internal common areas. Your contribution towards the cost of this work will be clearly shown.

To help you with minor repairs around your home that would normally be your responsibility, we provide a free Small Task service for customers over the age of 50 years of age who have no support from friends or family. You can request a job by contacting the Sheltered Housing Team or HomeRepairs.

We will acknowledge your request to join the small task service within 24 hours and if approved we will contact you within 10 working days to arrange a suitable appointment date and time.

Our service standards are...

- We will tell you the maximum time we will take to complete the repairs
- We will offer you an appointment for all urgent and routine repairs at a time that is convenient to you
- We will take care to protect your furnishings while doing repairs
- We will clear away rubbish from the repair that has been left outside within two working days of completing
- We will acknowledge your request for small tasks within 24 hours and if approved contact you within 10 working days to arrange a suitable appointment date and time
- We will provide you with a repairs and maintenance statement within six weeks of the end of each quarter

We will measure how we are performing by...

- Asking how satisfied you are with the repairs service
- Monitoring repair appointments to ensure they have been made and kept
- Measuring the number of repairs that are completed within target times
- Inspecting 10% of completed repairs to check the quality of work
- Asking you if you are satisfied with the service of the Small Task team
- Checking that we have responded and delivered the Small Tasks service on time
- Involving you in monitoring the satisfaction levels of communal repairs
- Monitoring Enquiry Forms we receive in relation to repairs to communal areas to identify trends.

....and we will report results back to our customers through our Service Improvement Group, in our newspaper and via our website.

(7) Alterations and Improvements to your home and block

In addition to day to day responsive repairs there will be occasions where we need to carry out improvement work to the exterior of your home or your block. These improvements could involve work to the walls or roof. Where improvements are going to cost more than £250 per leasehold flat, you have a legal right to be consulted about the work before it begins. You would be expected to contribute towards the cost of any works carried out to the external structure or internal common areas of the block, in keeping with the requirement of your lease.

We will contact you if your home is included in an improvement scheme and explain how the work will be delivered and when it is likely to commence. We will give a minimum of 30 days notice but will contact you an earlier stage

wherever possible. We will also provide you with an estimate of your likely contribution towards the scheme and when you will be invoiced for the work.

We appreciate that it is not always easy to pay for major works bills all at once therefore we have developed, in partnership with Gateshead Council and customers, a package of payment options to suit your circumstances.

Improvement work will be delivered, onsite, by one of our Capital Investment Partners. They will treat your home with respect and courtesy at all times and will clear up at the end of each working day.

We will have a Technical Team managing the work to ensure that all the improvements are delivered safely and to a high standard. We will also appoint a Tenant Liaison Assistant to work with you and be a named point of contact who you can speak to about any queries or concerns about the improvements.

At the end of the work we will inspect your home to ensure all the improvements have been completed correctly. If any minor unfinished work is found we will tell you about it and complete within 5 working days.

At the end of the improvements we will contact you to complete a satisfaction survey. We will ask you about your experience of the work and ask you to score the services that you have received from us and our Capital Investment Partners. Once work is completed on an estate will publish the overall satisfaction results so you can see how we have performed.

Leasehold properties are excluded from the internal Investment Programme (kitchens, bathrooms etc) however, you can buy-in to the improvements by contacting Leasehold Service who will provide you with a quote for the works.

Our Service Standards are...

- We will treat your home with respect and courtesy at all times
- We will work with our partners to minimise the disruption to your home and keep you informed of progress during the work
- We will consult you at least 30 days before we carry out any major works to your home and will provide you with details of financial assistance available.
- We will provide you with information about the works and how it will affect you
- You will receive at least 14 days notice before work starts on your home and we will nominate a Tenant Liaison Assistance to support you
- We will ensure we clear up following the work
- Any minor items of work will be completed within 5 working days of the work being completed on your home
- We will collect major works charges within 21 days of the date of the invoice, or in line with any agreed repayment package.
- We will provide you with a Homestyle Discount Card on completion of the works

We will measure how we are performing by...

- Asking how satisfied you are with the improvement works
- Conducting mystery shopping exercises with customers
- Monitoring cash collection rates

....and we will report back to customers through our Service Improvement Group, in our newspaper and via our website

(8) When you make improvements to your home

You have the right to improve your home, but for some improvements you will need written permission from us. This is because, as your Landlord, we have an investment in the block and a responsibility to the other residents.

We will not refuse permission unless we have a good reason.

We do not need to know about minor work such as decorating, but we do need to know about any alterations that affect walls, windows, doorframes, aerials or satellite dishes, plumbing and electrical services. You will also need our permission to carry out external decoration; this is because the type of paint may need approving so that it is compatible with future paints we may use.

Your request for permission must be made to either your local housing office or Leasehold Services. On receipt of a request we may visit you to discuss your plans or seek more details from you.

Some improvement work may require Building Regulation Approval or Planning permission. We will advise you where this may be necessary and you will be responsible for getting the required approvals.

If we have information about the presence of asbestos in your home we will provide you with a copy of the details when we respond to your request.

If you make improvements to your home without our permission we may ask you to remove them and return the property to its original condition.

We will not charge you for permission before you carry out the work, but you will be charged if retrospective permission is required.

Our Service Standards are...

- We will acknowledge requests to carry out improvements within 10 working days
- Improvements will be inspected within 10 days of you notifying us that they are complete

We will measure how we are performing by...

- Monitoring the length of time taken to acknowledge requests for and post inspect completed customers own improvements.

....and we will report back to customers through our Service Improvement Group, in our newspaper and via our website

(9) Gas Servicing

If you purchased your property after October 2007 your lease states that you must have your gas appliances serviced every year and send us a copy of the gas service certificate. If a certificate is not supplied, we have the right to carry out the service and recover any costs from you.

We would recommend that all customers have their appliances serviced once a year and to make it easier for you, we will service your appliances at a competitive rate so you can be safe in the knowledge that it has been done by a qualified tradesman.

Our service standards are...

- We will carry out an annual service, on request
- Take care to protect your furnishings while carrying out the gas service
- Give you a personal copy of the CP12 gas certificate
- Show you how to use your gas appliances in a safe and efficient way

We will measure how we are performing by...

- Asking you if you were satisfied with your gas service

....and we will report back to customers through our Service Improvement Group, in our newspaper and via our website

(10) On your estate

We want to ensure the wider environment you live in is clean, safe and well maintained. As a customer you have the opportunity to be involved in monitoring the general standards of your estate and in helping us to identify any environmental improvements that are needed. You can do this by attending an Estate Tour with your local Estate Officer, the dates and times of which are advertised through the quarterly Company newspaper and on the website.

On an Estate Tour, you can walk around with the Estate Officer and other customers to identify areas that need attention. Alternatively if you cannot attend an Estate Tour you can report issues online on our website or directly to your Estate Officer. As part of the estate tour we will work with you to grade your estate, including sheltered housing and multi storey blocks at least every three months. The Estate Grading enables you to measure and monitor

the standards of service delivered and work with us to improve the appearance of your estate. The feedback on the outcomes of estate grading will be published to customers through the quarterly newspaper and website and discussed at local Tenants and Residents groups.

Following an Estate Tour we will provide written feedback to the customers who attend within 10 days on any actions that will be taken. To support this approach we provide a Handyperson service to enable a rapid response to environmental issues. In addition we will ask for your views on a range of other initiatives that you may want to be involved in, to develop Neighbourhood Pride, Designing Out Crime, and Problems Solving schemes to help improve your estate.

We also carry out inspections of communal areas within multi-storey blocks and sheltered accommodation to ensure that they meet with the cleaning standards. The feedback on these is published on the notice boards within 10 working days.

The majority of customers keep their gardens tidy and free from rubbish, however where gardens are not maintained we will contact you and discuss what action you need to take to improve it. However we do recognise that some customers are unable to maintain their own garden and recommend using the Registered Trader Scheme with Gateshead Council to find a gardener who has been approved by Trading Standards.

If you do not make the necessary improvements to maintain your garden we will take formal action against you.

Our service standards are...

- We will carry out a published programme of Estate Tours that includes grading of all estate, at least every three months.
- We will provide written feedback to customers who attend the estate tour within 10 working days
- We will remove any racist or offensive graffiti within 1 working day
- In partnership with Local Environmental Services we will ensure grass cutting is undertaken every 5-10 working days between April and October

We will measure how we are performing by...

- Checking that we have delivered on the published programme of estate tours and how many have involved customers.
- Asking customers if they are satisfied with the appearance of their estate and how it is maintained.

...and we will report results back to our customers in our newspaper and via our website.

(11) Communal Areas and multi storey blocks

We provide a Concierge or Caretaker service in all multi-storey blocks. Both services provide customers with a friendly, safe and secure environment to live in. In addition, caretakers provide a cleaning service to communal areas of the multi-storey block.

In concierge multi-storey blocks, sheltered schemes and some low rise flats with communal areas, the cleaning is carried out by the Council's Building Cleaning service. All cleaning in communal areas is carried out to a published standard.

Our service standards are...

- We will ensure communal areas are cleaned to the published standard
- We will undertake a monthly inspection of each multi-storey block and publish the results on the notice board in each block within ten working

We will measure how we are performing by...

- Checking that cleaning is carried out to the published standard and feedback has been provided
- Measuring the number of multi-storey blocks that meet the published cleaning standard
- Asking customers if they are satisfied with the cleaning standards
- Asking customers if they are satisfied with the caretaking and concierge services

...and we will report results back to our customers in our newspaper and via our website.

(12) Anti-Social Behaviour

The vast majority of our customers may not experience anti social behaviour. However, if you do experience anti social behaviour or problems with your neighbours we will take swift appropriate action to resolve matters as soon as possible. You can report any incidents to us either at your local housing office, via the website or by telephoning us. We also accept anonymous complaints and deal with all cases in a sensitive and confidential manner.

We have a dedicated neighbourhood relations team working alongside local estate officer, who provide support and advice as well as taking appropriate enforcement action to resolve tenancy and neighbourhood issues within the community.

We work in partnership with other agencies such as Police, Neighbourhood Wardens, Victim Support and Probation to provide tailored support to individuals. We also have access to specialist services, including Mental

Health, Alcohol Support and Parenting and Young person's officers, to ensure appropriate support is offered.

Our service standards are...

When you report an incident of anti-social behaviour:

- We will provide you with a case reference number, and advise you of the name of the investigating officer.
- We will begin investigating and acknowledge your complaint within
 - Twenty four hours for high priority cases (for example racial harassment, domestic abuse, physical assaults)
 - Five working days for other cases (for example neighbour disputes)
 - We will agree what actions will be taken and how we will feedback to you
 - We will talk to you before closing your case and we will follow this up in writing

We will measure how we are performing by...

- Asking if you were satisfied with the way your ASB complaint was dealt with
- Asking you if you were satisfied with the outcome of your ASB complaint
- Checking that we have responded and started investigating case on time
- Measuring the number of ASB cases that were resolved

...and we will report results back to our customers in our newspaper and via our website.

(13) Aids and Adaptations

Adaptations are changes to a home that help disabled or older people to live independently and maintain a good quality of life. We work closely with Gateshead Council to assist customers to access adaptations that are needed to meet their essential needs.

When you request an adaptation we will arrange for an assessment to highlight your essential needs and make recommendations about how to meet them.

Our service standards are...

- We will work with Gateshead Council to provide you with a coordinated high quality of service

- Gateshead Councils Occupational Therapist and Adaptations service will contact you within three days of your initial request for major adaptations

Ending your Leasehold tenure...

(14) Selling your Lease

If you choose to sell your flat or maisonette you may wish to approach an estate agent of your choice to advertise it on your behalf. When the sale has been agreed, the buyer's solicitors will generally request information from us about:

- Your service charges
- Whether any major works are planned or have been consulted
- Your account balance in relation to outstanding charges on service charges or major works

If you sell your lease, or leave it to someone else, you must make sure it's done legally to protect your interests and the interests of the person you are selling/leaving it to. Unless there is a proper legal document to show that someone else is now the leaseholder, you will still be liable in law for any charges for the flat or maisonette.

Under Right to Buy legislation, there is a discount repayment period of five years. If you sell your home within this period, you will have to pay back some or all of the discount you received from the Council. If you would like to know how much discount you would be liable to pay contact Gateshead Council's Home Ownership Team on 0191 4332606.

Our Service Standards are...

- When you sell your flat or maisonette we will send your legal representative a solicitor enquiry packet within seven days of receipt of the enquiry

We will measure how we are performing by...

- Checking that we respond to enquiries within timescale

...and we will report results back to customers in our newspaper and website.

What we ask in return

We value your views and suggestions about the services we provide and we want to work with you to improve the service you receive from us. If you feel you

have not received an excellent service, please tell us and let us know your ideas about how we can get better.

To help us give you the best possible service, we ask that you:

Treat us with respect

- Be considerate and polite to our employees and other customers
- Be on time for appointments or let us know if you are unable to attend

You can also help us by:

- Giving us all the information we need to help you
- Letting us know if you have any individual requirements
- Telling us how we can improve our service or if there was anything we did particularly well
- Asking us to explain anything you're not sure about
- Being patient. We are very busy at times but will always do our best to keep waiting times to a minimum

Your responsibilities:

- Keep up to date with your service charge payments and let us know if you are having trouble paying
- Ensure that you follow the requirements within your lease
- Avoid behaviour that may cause nuisance to your neighbours
- Report any repairs to us as soon as possible