



Customer Service Policy

Introduction

Irwell Valley Homes is committed to providing good, easy to access services to all customers and ensuring they are fair and inclusive by understanding and meeting the different needs of our customers.

This Policy sets out the customer service standards when customers access our services.

Customer Service Principles

We have five customer service principles

We are:

1. Understanding – we listen and show that we understand
2. Relevant – we tailor our approach
3. Clear and consistent – so there's no room for doubt
4. Effortless – we are easy to deal with
5. Reliable– we do what we say

We aim to do this by:

- Providing a wide choice of contact methods.
- Getting customers to the person who can help them as quickly as possible.
- Being personable and treating customers with respect.
- Understanding our customer individual needs and tailoring our approach.
- Listening to customers and showing empathy.
- Being clear on what we can and cannot help with.
- Explaining anything we may need customers to do to help us resolve their query.
- Keeping customers updated and informed about their queries.
- Providing clear, accessible information, so customers know what to expect and can hold us to account.
- Gathering customer feedback to help us to continuously improve services.
- Meeting the standards set out by the Regulator for Social Housing and all relevant legislation including Equalities Act 2010.

1. Customer access

- 1.1 We have a dedicated Customer Service Team and provide a wide range of contact options so customers have a choice and can choose the best way that suits them. This includes:
- Telephone
 - Via our website – by Live Chat, customer's own on-line accounts, or our web forms.
 - Social media
 - In writing – by email or post
 - By attending meetings
 - Visiting our offices
 - Visiting them at home.
- 1.2 The customer service team is the first point of contact for all customers. The team aim to answer all enquiries at the first point of contact, but where customers need specialist or technical support, queries are passed to the relevant members of staff who will then contact customers within set timescales (see below).
- 1.3 We can arrange to meet with customers at their home, at our main office, or one of our community hubs in Sale West, Haughton Green, Bury and Bolton. As our colleagues work across Greater Manchester, making an appointment ensuring the right person is there to help the customer with their query. We understand customers are busy, so we will always try to agree a convenient time with the customer when arranging to meet with them.
- 1.4 When we need to make an appointment to visit a customer for any property or tenancy matter, we will offer an appointment based on the urgency of the visit. Morning (8 am to 12.30pm) and afternoon (12.30 pm to 4.30pm) appointments will be offered. We also offer appointments to avoid school drop off & collection times (9.30am to 2.30pm). Saturday morning appointments are also offered for gas servicing.
- 1.5 We visit customers to carry out a tenancy review to ensure all customers are offered the opportunity to speak to colleagues in person. The frequency of this is based on information we hold about their needs and the needs of their property.
- 1.6 All our office, hubs, and community spaces are accessible in accordance with Equality Act 2010. Site specific risk assessments have been carried out to ensure accessibility, health and safety and fire safety requirements are met.

2 Supporting customers' individual needs

- 2.1 We aim to understand our customers individual needs and tailor our approach to serving them.
- 2.2 We know people's circumstances change, so every year we will contact customer and ask them to update the information we hold about them to ensure we have the most up to date information to be able to respond to their needs. Every time a customer contacts our

Customer Service Team, we will always check if they have any additional needs that we need to consider when dealing with their request.

2.3 Where customers have additional needs, we use a range of support tools to help us. This includes:

- Providing an online accessibility tool that lets customers access information in a way that works for them. The tool can combine support to meet multiple needs for example, providing large font at the same time as language translation.
- Using a telephone translation service when speaking to customers in person or over the phone where the customer speak a different language to English.
- Offering sign language service.
- Providing customers with information in a specific format to meet their needs such as large print, audio, Braille or in another language.
- Using notes on our system to alert colleagues visiting customers of any specific requirements to ensure they meet their needs while visiting their home.
- Providing 121 support for customers who may need it to complete forms and paperwork.
- Allowing customers to be supported by advocates or other representatives. Where we do this, we always ensure we have the expressed permission of the customer before discussing any of their affairs with their chosen advocate.
- Training colleagues to ensure they are supported to respond to customer's needs. This includes:
 - Mary Gobar International customer service training.
 - Training on equality and diversity and cultural awareness
 - Professional boundaries training.
 - Safeguarding training.
- Allowing customers to be supported by advocates or other representatives should they require.
- Issuing all contractors with an equality and diversity code of conduct which they must sign up to and ensure that they comply.

3 Service timescales

3.1 Our Customer Service Standards have been set by, and are monitored by, our Customer Standards Group. These are detailed below:

Action	Timescale	Comments
Telephone calls into our customer service team	Same day	We aim to answer calls as quickly as possible. We provide a call back service so if the lines are busy customers have the option to request a call back. All call backs are completed on the same day by 6pm.
Live Chat	90 seconds	We aim to answer live chats in 90 seconds.

Action	Timescale	Comments
Emails into our customer service team	Up to 5 working days	Contacts are triaged and responded to in order of priority. All emails are responded to within 5 working days,
Social media direct messages	Up to 2 working days	This includes Facebook and X.
Website contact (forms and customers on-line account)	Up to 5 working days	Contacts are triaged and responded to in order of priority. All emails are responded to within 5 working days,
Callback requests for Neighbourhood Officers, Property Managers, Sustainment Coaches and Rent Officers.	Up to 3 working days	You will be contacted within 3 working days, if you then need a visit, this will be arranged.
Requested home visit	Up to 10 working days	Appointment will be made in 3 working days
By post	Up to 5 working days	All post is responded to within 5 working days.

3.2 Timescales for specific services

Service	Timescale	Comments
Dealing with a complaint	Acknowledgement within 5 working days. Stage 1- response within 10 working days plus 10-day extension if agreed. Stage 2- response within 20 working days plus 10-day extension if agreed.	Customers can report complaints 24 hours per day, every day of the year.
Responding to serious (Cat A) antisocial behaviour	Within 1 working day.	
Responding to lower level (Cat B and C) antisocial behaviour	Up to 5 working days.	
Responding to and emergency repair	Within 24 hours	We will attend within 24 hours and make the property safe. We will complete any further repairs required by appointment.

Service	Timescale	Comments
Responding to a routine repair	Within 28 working days.	
Responding to non urgent and major repairs	Within in 60 working days	
Responding to requests for aids and adaptations	Acknowledged within 10 working days.	Aids and adaptations will be categorised as either minor or major adaptations and will be dealt on a case-by-case basis

4 Helping us to help you

- 4.1 There may be times when we need customers to support us by taking action to help us deal with their request. i.e. moving furniture to allow work to take place, recording ASB incidents, sharing photographs of issues etc. Where we need customers help to resolve issues, we will be clear on what we are asking the customer to do, and the possibilities of resolving the issue without their support.
- 4.2 There may be times when we can't support a customer with an issue, if this happens, we will be honest about this and explain any other options the customer may have to access help.
- 4.3 Our relationship with our customers is a two-way process built on mutual trust and respect. We aim to be personable and treat customers with respect and we ask that our customers to treat us the same. All colleagues have the right to end calls or visits if they feel a customer is acting inappropriately. Before doing this the colleague will inform the customer that they are not prepared to continue if the customer continues to be aggressive or abusive. If a customer is abusive, aggressive or offensive, we may restrict contact to only one point of contact. See our Unacceptable Behaviour Policy.

5 Being honest and accountable

We will provide transparent performance information to help customer understand how we are performing and how they can hold us to account. We will do this by:

- We publish clear service standards on our website and the Consumer Standards we adhere to.
- Working with customers on our Consumer Standards Group to agree performance targets and standards to ensure consistent levels of service to all users.
- Monitoring performance against these standards and publishing this on our website quarterly
- Sending an annual report to all customers which includes performance information.

6 Learning and improving

- 6.1 To continuously improve our services we work with customers and listen to them to gather their feedback. This then helps to drive improvement plans. We will do this by:
- Working with the Resident Scrutiny Panel in reviewing our services and implementing recommendations.
 - Having customers represented at board level. The RSP and Consumer Standards Group also report to the Board and is part of our approach to co-regulation.
 - Working with the Consumer Standards Group to review our performance in relation to the consumer standards and meet Heads of Service to dig deeper into our performance.
 - Analysing complaint trends and themes to identify key learnings and action points through our Business Improvement Team.
 - Conducting annual Tenant Satisfaction Measures to understand how satisfied customers are with our services.
 - Carrying out transactional surveys that are sent to customers after they receive services from us. This includes responsive repairs, gas repairs, gas servicing, complaints, anti-social behaviour (ASB), planned improvement works, tenancy sustainment support, letting of homes and new build homes.

7 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 7.1 Irwell Valley will treat people with honesty, dignity, respect, and trust. This applies to colleagues, customers, and board members; all of whom undertake not to discriminate directly or indirectly or victimise because of race, gender, gender reassignment, disability, sexual orientation, age or religion and belief.
- 7.2 Irwell Valley will make reasonable adjustments to the policy to recognise, accommodate and support customers' individual needs, where needed.
- 7.3 To be read in conjunction with the complaints policy EIA.

Associated Documents and Good Practice

- Customer Complaints Policy
- Compensation Policy
- Equality and Diversity Framework
- Equality and Diversity Code of Conduct for Contractors
- Dealing with Violence and Aggression Policy and Procedure
- Unacceptable behaviour Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Aids and Adaptations Policy
- Equality Impact Assessment
- Tenancy Policy
- Tenancy Agreements
- Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Standard
- ASB policy

Version Control

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Policy Author:	Ross Powell – Head of Customer and Communities
Policy Owner:	Ceris Esplen – Executive Director Customer
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EIA (Equality Impact Assessment) Date and Link to EIA	May 2024
Safeguarding Impact	This does not apply to this policy
Lead Team	Communities Team

The latest version of this policy should be viewed online from The Hub area of the IVH intranet. Any printed version cannot be relied on as the most current version