

Service Standards – Housing Solution Service

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Service Standards – Housing Solution Service

We have thousands of people contacting us every year and we assess several thousand housing applications. And although we cannot provide homes for everyone who contacts the service, we are committed to treating everyone well.

This leaflet outlines our customer care principles and service standards. It tells you how we should treat you and what remedies are available to you if we fall short of our promise.

Equality

Our services are designed for and delivered locally to Westminster's residents who form culturally rich and varied communities. We are committed to:

- eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- advancing equality of opportunity; and
- promote good relations between people

Our promise

We will:

- Be fair and treat all our clients with courtesy and respect
- Prevent homelessness whenever we can
- Help clients to find a housing solution
- Give accurate, relevant, housing advice
- Offer the same level of service to all Westminster's communities
- Be open about what we do
- Keep our clients informed and up-to-date
- Advise our clients of our policies and legal duties



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When you register for housing advice online

If you register for housing advice online at: www.westminster.gov.uk/contact-housing-solutions-service we will respond by the within the next working day.

When you visit our service

If you have an appointment:

We will see you within 10 minutes of your appointment time.

If you don't have an appointment:

Our receptionist will see you within 10 minutes of your arrival.

After you see our receptionist, we will interview you in private within 30 minutes of seeing reception.

The officer who interviews you will tell you their name, explain their role and the purpose of the interview.

If we refer you to another section

If an officer needs to refer you to someone else, they will say what the person's role is and why you are being referred.

When you write to us

We will reply in plain language, and not use jargon or technical language. If you send a letter we will respond in writing and post our reply to you within ten working days.



If you email we will acknowledge your email within one working day and reply within five working days. Where we don't meet these promises, please let us know and we will respond to you, within one working day.

When you phone us

Answering your call

We will answer promptly and try to deal with your enquiry during the call.

Transferring your call

Before transferring your call, our officer will tell you who they are transferring you to and why.

Calling you back

Where we cannot help you straight away, we will offer to call you back. We will normally phone the same day but if you call late in the day it may be the next working day before we can get back to you.

When you apply to be included on our housing register

Within fifteen working days of receiving your application form, we will decide whether to place you on our housing register—please allow a few days for our decision to reach you.

If the actual date of registration is delayed due to our error or failure to process your application in a timely fashion, we will backdate your application to the date we should have registered you.



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If you apply for housing for medical reasons

If we need to refer your application to our Medical Adviser, we will do so within three working days of receiving your medical assessment form.

If we miss this target and this results in an award of medical priority being delayed, we will backdate the granting of medical priority to the date it would have been granted had we referred your application within three days.

If we need to visit you

If the information we have indicates that you might qualify to bid for properties, we may need to visit you to confirm that the information we have about your household circumstances and your current accommodation is correct. If you do, we will visit you within ten working days of our decision.

Appointments

If you want to discuss your case in person, we will offer you an appointment. Appointments can be carried out over the phone as well as in the office.

If we register you to bid for properties

We will write to you explaining how Choice Based Lettings works. We will tell you what priority group you are in, how many points you have and how to bid for properties. Should we not do this, please let us know and we will email the information or put it in the post within one working day.



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If your circumstances change

If you tell us your circumstances have changed, we will update our records within five working days. If we find we have not met this target we will update our records within one working day of discovering our error.

If we change the way our housing register works

We will write to you to tell you how the changes affect you.

If we don't register you to bid for properties

We will make you an appointment with a Housing Solutions Adviser to discuss alternative ways of finding another home. You will also have the right to ask us to review our decision not to let you bid (see below)

If you are homeless or in danger of becoming homeless

Preventing homelessness

If you are in danger of becoming homeless, we will produce a personalised housing plan that sets out the steps you should take and the steps we will take to try to ensure you have a home for the next six months or longer.

Visiting you to prevent homelessness

Should we need to visit your home to prevent you becoming homeless, we will offer to do so within three working days. If we don't keep to this timeframe please let us know and we will visit your home within one working day.



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Where you are homeless

If you are connected to another local authority but not Westminster, we may refer you to that authority. Otherwise, we will explore your housing options with you and try to help you find somewhere to live. We will produce a personalised housing plan that sets out the steps you should take plus the steps we will take to find you a home within the next 56 days. (This is our homelessness relief duty.).

Where you have a priority need for housing, will provide you with emergency (interim) accommodation while we help you find accommodation (relieve homelessness).

If we cannot relieve homelessness within 56 days, we will decide whether we have a legal duty to offer you a home. We will make our decision within 15 working days and give it to you in writing.

If we have a legal duty to find you a home

Where we decide we have a legal duty to find you a home, we will register you for a council or housing association property or offer you a tenancy with a private landlord. While you are waiting, we will offer you temporary accommodation. At first this is likely to be bed and breakfast accommodation.

If we place you in temporary accommodation, we will make sure:

- adequate cooking facilities including cutlery and crockery are provided
- the manager or landlord deals with repairs
- that it meets with current health and safety standards which includes having:
 - smoke detectors installed
 - a current gas and electric safety certificates
 - Carbon monoxide detectors installed



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If we offer you an alternative to bed and breakfast accommodation, we will make sure:

- the property we offer is suitable for your household
- it is clean and adequately furnished
- repairs are dealt with in a timely manner and to a required standard and we will visit if necessary
- that it meets with current health and safety standards which includes having:
 - smoke detectors installed
 - a current gas and electric safety certificates
 - Carbon monoxide detectors installed
- that it is inspected by the managing agents every three months.

If you have children or a pregnant woman in your household

Where you have children or you or someone in your household or are pregnant, we will aim to offer you an alternative to bed and breakfast accommodation within six weeks. Should we be unable to do this, we will explain why and tell you what plans we have to find more suitable temporary accommodation for you.

If there is a delay registering you for a home

If there is a delay in placing you on our housing register, we will backdate your registration to the date we made our decision to offer you a home. Where we are unable to provide you with suitable temporary accommodation we will explain why and tell you what plans we have to find a suitable temporary home for you.



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You have the right to ask us to reconsider any formal decision we make.

You have 21 days from the date you receive our decision to ask us to review it, we will do so within eight weeks (56 days) unless you agree to give us more time. Please contact us if we have not met this target and we will either agree an extension with you or issue our decision within two working days.

Complaints

Don't be afraid to tell us if we do not meet the standards we have set. We will not discriminate against you if complain: we will acknowledge your complaint within one working day, investigate the matter and reply to you within ten working days — if we do not meet this target, please tell us and we will respond the next working day.

Getting your views

As well as telling us when we have not done well, please let us know if you are happy with the way we treat you. Your views are important: they help us provide the service you want. As part of our commitment to improving the service, we conduct regular customer satisfaction surveys and hold service improvement group meetings to get your views. ii



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