



**Gardeen Housing Association Ltd**  
**Building a Better Future**

## **GARDEEN HOUSING ASSOCIATION**

# **CUSTOMER SERVICE AND ENGAGEMENT CHARTER**

<b>Policy Implemented From</b>	<b>2023/24</b>
<b>Next Review</b>	<b>2026/27</b>

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this strategy is to confirm Gardeen Housing Association’s continuing commitment to customer engagement. We are further committed to providing a high quality and responsive service to anyone who receives or requests a service from the Association. We support this through training for staff and feedback from customers.

The Association aims to provide opportunities for all customers to play an active role in the management of their homes and the delivery of services. It also sets out a clear vision for the future and provides customers with a range of options to get involved both individually and collectively.

We consider a customer to be anyone who receives a service from us e.g. tenants, applicants, factoring owners but can be further broken down as detailed in the table below:

<b>External Customers</b>	Tenants, factored owners and housing applicants, members of the public or their representatives, seeking information and advice
<b>Internal Customers</b>	Management Committee and staff
<b>Stakeholders</b>	Partners, suppliers, contractors, consultants, lenders, Solicitors, Police Scotland, Citizen’s Advice Bureau, Scottish Government, Local Authority, other housing associations and the Scottish Housing Regulator

## 2. Charter Outcomes and Standards

1. Equalities – Social landlords perform all aspects of their housing services so that: They support the right to adequate housing. Every tenant and other customer has their individual needs and rights recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.
2. Communication - Social Landlords manage their businesses so that: Tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides.

### 3. Our Values

The Management Committee of Gardeen Housing Association has reviewed and agreed the following core values:

Empathy	Commitment	Honesty
Transparency	Positive	Respect
Pro-active	Dedicated	Quality
Inclusive	Caring	Responsive
Earning Trust	Respecting Confidentiality	

We are committed to upholding these values because they are focused on making the Association a continually improving organisation for customers who rely on the services we provide. We aim to:

- Be professional, honest, courteous and efficient at all times;
- Provide fair and equal service to all customers;
- Provide information that is relevant, accurate and up-to-date and easy to understand;
- Provide information in plain language that is easily understood. We will avoid the use of technical terms, abbreviations and jargons;
- Provide information in large print, on tape or in an alternative language or format on request;
- Respect customers' rights to privacy and confidentiality;
- Provide timely responses to all requests;
- Provide access to appropriate members of staff;
- Provide well-managed quality homes at affordable rents;
- Provide a prompt and efficient repairs and maintenance service, and set performance targets ensuring work is completed on time;
- Consult customers and consider opinions before making decisions that affect the services we provide and/or their home environment;
- Regularly seek feedback on the range and quality of services provided;
- Care about the customers experience in dealing with the Association by listening to comments, suggestions and complaints;
- Ensure that customers are clear about the response timescales for dealing with their enquiry.

Gardeen Housing Association is also committed to act promptly to rectify matters when made aware of any failure to adhere to this policy, and to advise the customer(s) concerned of the outcomes in this regard. Complaints will be taken seriously and responded to quickly and appropriately as detailed in the Association's Model Complaints Handling Procedure.

Tenants will also be advised of the opportunity to report a Significant Performance Failure to the Scottish Housing Regulator. Staff and Committee members also access a whistleblowing policy and are aware of this procedure. We will use complaints to say sorry, put things right and change or improve our service.

#### **4. Our Aims**

Our Customer Engagement Strategy is linked directly to the objectives in our Business Plan which is a formal statement setting out the goals of the Association and how we plan to reach those goals.

We will encourage positive and empowering relationships between customers and staff to allow for partnership working to scrutinise and improve services. We also want to gain greater value for the money we spend.

We accept that we need to understand our customers to be able to make sure we can be responsive to their needs.

#### **5. Options for Customer Involvement**

We aim to break down any barriers to engagement. Customers can engage online, through social media, over the phone or face to face – in either formal group meetings or at informal 1 to 1 meetings in their home. Customers need to know that, if they get involved, they can give as much or as little time as they can manage and that they can do this in a way that suits them.

We will use a variety of communication methods for providing information, initiating consultation and for providing feedback. These methods include (but are not limited to):

- Become a member of the Association
- Join the Management Committee
- Develop a Tenant Group
- Tenant Satisfaction Surveys
- Join the Consultation Register
- Estate Walkabouts/Close Meetings
- Social Media: Twitter (@gardeenh) and Facebook
- Rent Consultation
- Repair Satisfaction Surveys
- Quarterly Newsletter
- Review of Complaints
- Attend the Annual General Meeting
- Property Inspection/Tenancy Sustainment Home Visits
- Scrutiny of the Annual Return on the Charter
- Gardeen Housing Association's App
- Gardeen Housing Association's website [www.gardeen.org.uk](http://www.gardeen.org.uk)
- Tenant Portal (online portal which enables tenants to access details of their tenancy)
- Respond to individual letters, emails or texts
- Complete the feedback requests in our annual Performance Report or Tenant Handbook.

The level of service customers should expect when visiting our office and during home visits is detailed below:

### Office and Home Visits

Our opening hours are: Monday to Friday 9.30am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 4.30pm. Our office is closed every Thursday morning for staff training. Our office building will be open Tuesday to Thursday and on Monday and Fridays by prior appointment.

We have consulted on opening times and these are publicised in newsletters, our website, on social media and outside our office building.. All staff will wear name badges, carry identification and provide their name and job title if requested.

The office has a friendly and customer-focused atmosphere. The adapted office provides greater accessibility for visitors with accessibility issues. There is adequate and comfortable seating available in the reception area for those who need to wait for a short while.

Leaflets providing information and advice on a wide range of topics are available to take away from reception free of charge. There is also a suggestion box situation in reception where customers are encouraged to submit their views on any aspect of the Association.

The following procedure applies where a customer visits or telephones the office:

→ If the person they require to see/speak to is available, they will be dealt with straight away (if the member of staff is dealing with another customer, the likely waiting time will be advised).

**OR**

→ If the person they require to see/speak to is not available, they will be advised when they will be able to see them and another member of staff will offer to help.

Whatever the circumstances, customers will not be left without:

- (i) their enquiry being resolved, or
- (ii) being advised of a time and date by which the member of staff will get back to them.

Whenever our offices are closed, we will ensure that our answer-phone service provides clear instructions on who customers should contact in an emergency. Our website, social media and newsletter will also provide this information.

We also offer home visits where customers prefer this. Because Gardeen Housing Association is based within the community, home visits can be arranged for the vast majority of customers on the same or the following day. Where customers live outside the Gardeen area, they will be offered a virtual meeting via Zoom in the first instance. In exceptional circumstances separate arrangements will be made, but all reasonable efforts will be made to achieve this within one week.

All staff and contractors will be able to show identity badges when calling to a home. If you are not in, we will leave a card and tell you how to contact us. We can also visit you in the evening as required.

Staff will make all reasonable efforts to keep appointments that are made – in the unlikely event that this is not possible, the customer will be contacted in advance of the meeting, given the reason why it cannot be kept, and offered another suitable time.

### Responding to letters, emails or other written documentation

All letters or emails received will be either acknowledged or answered in writing within one week. Where it is only possible to provide an acknowledgement, a target timescale by which a full response is likely to be available will be provided. There are separate procedures for dealing with complaints. Details can be found in the Complaints Policy and Estate Management Policy.

Completed applications for housing will be pointed within 28 working days with the applicant being advised of their points total and how this is calculated.

## **6. Equalities Commitment**

We want to create an inclusive environment. The Association is committed to actively promoting diversity and equality of opportunity and rejects all forms of discrimination.

Under the Equality Act 2010, there are 9 protected characteristics. This means that we will never discriminate against anyone on the grounds of their: disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; marriage and civil partnership; age; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation.

## **7. Information and Communication**

The Association is committed to providing good quality, meaningful information to customers and will, cost permitting, provide that information in accessible formats that meet their needs.

Customers will be asked, through our general communications, to provide details of any communication requirements and will be encouraged to advise us if their needs change.

We will provide written information and publications in plain English and provide this information in other languages, audio, braille, and large print, on request. We can arrange interpreters for meetings on request. We can use a card system in meetings upon request. Anyone who has difficulty with speech can indicate when they want to speak or ask a question.

We are members of the Happy to Translate initiative (HTT), will publish the HTT logo and promote easy access to the information we provide.

Customers who access information through our website will also benefit from the Speak IT function which can simplify what is seen on screen, convert website text to speech and translate text into different languages.

## **8. Digital Communication**

Our Customer Service and Engagement Charter recognises the opportunities offered by digital communication.

We will develop digital communication to seek to engage with customers who would not normally get involved, ~~such as younger people.~~

We will connect with customers to seek feedback on service issues through email, our website and our social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. We offer virtual meetings via Zoom upon request.

~~We will explore the use of~~ technology to enable us to send information electronically ~~and have the software to request electronic signatures if requested.~~

## **9. Disruption to Service**

In exceptional circumstances, for example due to extremely poor weather conditions, staff may be unable to travel into the office. However, in such circumstances there will still be a service available.

All staff can work from home and services are provided as conditions allow. An announcement will also be made on Gardeen's website, Facebook page and Twitter to update on the services that we can provide. Details of how to request an emergency repair are also detailed on our website.

## **10. Resources**

The Association is committed to ensuring there are resources to make it successful. It has a dedicated budget for tenant participation which is reviewed annually by the Management Committee as part of the overall budget process.

The Association does not directly employ specialist staff to carry out customer engagement activities, but all staff have a remit to engage with customers. This is part of their day-to-day work as well as having scheduled activities which are carried out from time to time.

## **11. Data Protection and Freedom of Information**

There are three main reasons for measuring standards of customer care:

- To let all customer know how we are performing;
- To identify areas where we may be falling short and taking action to remedy these;
- To report accurate information as part of the Annual Return on the Charter to the Scottish Housing Regulator and to tenants via our Performance Report;

Personal information about tenants, owners, applicants and customers will only be kept on file, and/or disclosed to other agencies in line with our Openness & Accountability Policy and with data protection legislation.

If you wish to see the information we hold about you, we will make arrangements for you to be given access to your file upon request. When you give us information we shall treat this sensitively and in confidence. How we will do this is detailed in our Privacy Policy.

The Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 applies to registered social landlords (RSLs) in Scotland. This means:

- They must publish certain information about their activities;
- Members of the public are entitled to request information from them.

The Act covers any recorded information held by the RSL. Recorded information includes printed documents, computer files, letters, emails, photographs, and sound or video recordings.

The Act does not give people access to their own personal data. To obtain this a data protection subject access request must be submitted.

The Act does not give people access to the personal data of other persons. To obtain this, the other persons must consent.

## **12. Monitoring and Review**

The Customer Care and Engagement Charter will be reviewed at least every three years or sooner if legislative, regulatory or best practice changes require this. To measure and identify if the overall aims of this Charter have been successful, we will measure our success in partnership with our customers.

We will monitor the responses to the tenant satisfaction survey in relation to the Scottish Social Housing Charter outcomes relating to customer satisfaction, participation and communication. We will publish the outcome of this to Association customers and act upon the results of this survey and any suggestions arising from it.

We will consider the effectiveness of specific activities in light of the following:

- The number of customers who participated;
- The resources required to obtain feedback;
- The quality of the feedback obtained;
- Satisfaction with methods of participation;
- Whether the engagement activity successfully engaged a range of customers.

Complaints are monitored by staff at monthly staff meetings. The Management Committee discuss and review complaints on a quarterly basis (for anti-social behaviour) and on an annual basis (for service complaints) to monitor trends and thereby take any necessary action.

Repair satisfaction surveys are also issued with every tenant repair for tenants to complete and return. The Association will reply promptly if a satisfaction survey shows a tenant was not happy with our performance, with the contractor or the standard of the job. The Association will also ensure that our contractors adhere to our Code of Conduct. At the end of a tenancy, we will carry out a survey to find out how we can improve the service.



All customers are welcome to participate in policy reviews through a variety of methods including being on the Association's Consultation Register where a copy of any policy being reviewed will be sent out to that customer for their comments and/or suggestions to improve.

The Association also produces consultation leaflets and posters welcoming customer's views regarding policy reviews. Reviews are also publicised through the Association's quarterly Newsletter and website.