

A handbook on respecting our customers



Introduction

This handbook has been designed for all staff, board members and contractors. It brings together our service standards, existing code of conduct for contractors as well as general communication guidelines for delivering an excellent service to a diverse customer-base.

In here you will find:

- What is equality and diversity?
- Our commitment to equality and diversity
- A summary of our One equality scheme and guide to its champions
- Cross Keys Homes' service standards relating to customer care and diversity
- General communication guidelines and guidelines for delivering services to:
 - Customers from a variety of cultural backgrounds
 - Customers with general disabilities
 - Customers with hearing impairments
 - Customers with visual impairments
 - Customers with learning difficulties
- A summary of Cross Keys Homes' accessible communication tools
- Links to further information and relevant documents

This handbook should be read in conjunction with our One equality scheme, which contains details of our commitment and intentions for equality and diversity. This and related documents are available on the *One equality* pages of the intranet.

Staff should also be familiar with Cross Keys Homes' code of conduct which covers staff behaviour and responsibilities at work in general. This can be found under the human resources' intranet pages under policies and procedures.

What is equality and diversity?

Equality is recognising that discrimination is unacceptable regardless of people's gender, race, nationality, religion or belief, ethnic or national origin, marital status, age, disablement, social background or sexuality.

Diversity is the many distinct characteristics that staff, service users, customers and residents bring to our communities. These characteristics bring variations of thinking, dialect, skills and experience which enrich our lives.

Our commitment to equality and diversity

Cross Keys Homes is committed to equality and diversity. We strive to provide homes and services fairly to Peterborough's diverse community and to employ a workforce that reflects the communities we serve.

At the heart of our equality and diversity policy is a commitment to valuing diversity, treating people with dignity and respect, eliminating discrimination and promoting community cohesion.

We value the individual contribution of people and are committed to eliminating discrimination on the grounds of:

- Race
- Ethnic origin
- Disability
- Nationality
- Gender
- Gender reassignment/identity
- Sexuality
- Or any other matters which cause a person to be treated with injustice
- Age
- Class
- Appearance
- Religion
- Caring responsibilities
- Unrelated criminal activities
- Being HIV positive or with AIDS

In addition to legislative requirements, we expect Cross Keys' employees and contractors undertaking work on our behalf, to promote the spirit of our equality and diversity policy and to recognise that they have a duty not to discriminate against anyone while carrying out their duties.

One equality scheme and action plan

In addition to addressing legislative changes our scheme and action plan make a corporate commitment to continue the work we have already undertaken to enable Cross Keys Homes to achieve the aspirations we have set with regards to equality and diversity. The work of the equality scheme action plan is delivered by the One equality work group and overseen by the One equality committee. The committee is chaired by the chief executive and includes board and external stakeholder membership.

Further information on Cross Keys Homes' equality and diversity framework can be found under the *One equality* pages of the intranet or from any of the champions.

One equality champions

Sponsor and chair

Mick Leggett, chief executive

Staff

Steve Ball, asset management
Natalie Barnett, finance
Stuart Brown, supported housing
Maggie Devine, Mears
Lisa Glendye, HR
Kelly Field (chair), CCI
Ali Manji, housing management
Linda Plumb, Lovell
Anne Richardson, development
Emma Robinson, ASB
Karen Simpson, asset management
Sarah Watkins-Groves, CCI
TBC, Involvement

Board champion

Audrey Chalmers, leaseholder

Service standards

Cross Keys Homes is committed to delivering excellence in customer service at all times. In order to achieve and maintain excellent customer service, we have developed a series of service standards with the help of our customers.

The standards act as a general guidance to staff and contractors and it is important to remember that each situation is different and should be treated as such. In most cases it is best to think about how you would like to be treated as a customer and to apply a common sense approach.

Conduct and behaviour

Employees, board members and contractors will treat customers with respect by adhering to the following standards:

- Be polite and courteous at all times
- Behave in a proper and professional manner at all times
- Respect customer's privacy and confidentiality and handle all data in accordance with data protection guidelines
- Respond quickly and clearly and try to avoid delays
- Be appropriately dressed and wear any designated uniform
- Show photo-identity cards whether requested or not, upon arrival and state name and place of work
- Always keep customers fully informed of any work required including timescales for follow up appointments/work needed
- Always check that the customer understands what is happening and is satisfied with the service. If the customer has any concerns or problems these can be identified quickly and action taken to resolve them
- Always provide customers with full contact details, including names, telephone numbers and email address where applicable
- Explain the nature and purpose of the visit, or telephone call
- We will not tolerate discrimination of any kind
- We expect customers to have respect for our employees and contractors

Answering the telephone

Staff and contractors must:

- Answer a call within 20 seconds
- Answer with good morning or good afternoon, their own name and the name of the organisation
- Deal with telephone requests immediately and arrange call backs if necessary
- Ring back where callers are telephoning long distance, calling in peak cost times or on a mobile phone
- End the call by asking if there is anything else you can help with

Responding to customer's correspondence

Staff and contractors must:

- Answer all correspondence within five-working days. Where a further investigation is required, this should be explained in the reply. Correspondence includes letters, email and faxes. If the issue is not resolved update at least every seven days or more often if necessary
- Ensure that all correspondence and written communication to customers is sent in the name of the member of staff dealing with the matter
- Address correspondence to the customer by name, wherever possible
- Provide written confirmation of any verbal information if requested

Appointments for visits

- Visits to customers' homes must be made at mutually convenient times and undertaken at reasonable times during the working day. However, it may be necessary to visit out of normal office hours. If so, a suitable time will be arranged with the customer prior to the visit
- Appointments will be notified in writing in advance where necessary, eg gas safety checks and surveys
- Staff and contractors must be punctual for appointments
- Keep appointments made with customers and where this is not possible; notify them in advance with reasons. If the appointment is for a repair, call and apologise if delayed and let the customer know when the operative will arrive
- Appointments for repair works will be inline with Cross Keys Homes' and Mears' appointment system. Works will not be carried out at other times, unless it is an emergency. No major works should be undertaken or left incomplete over weekends, Bank Holidays or Christmas periods (except where this has been agreed as part of planned improvement works)
- Visits to older, vulnerable customers will not be carried out after dark unless this has previously been arranged
- When a home visit is made and the customer is not at home, leave a calling card providing a name and contact details and follow any *no access procedure* in place
- Contact customers at least eight weeks in advance of any proposed start date to let them know that works are planned their property
- Contact customers at least four weeks in advance of any proposed start date to make a convenient appointment to carry out a survey before major work is carried out

Visits and works

Staff and contractors must:

- Not enter a customer's home or remain on their own where no adult is present (an adult is someone aged 18 years and over)
- Ask permission before entering a customer's home or garden/outside area
- Ensure that suitable protection is arranged for the customer's property, in particular furniture and carpets and that delicate or valuable items are removed from the work area
- Ensure that clean dust sheets are always used
- Use shoe protectors
- Ensure there is minimum disruption to the customer
- Only use own tools and equipment
- Not play music
- Not smoke or eat in a customer's home or garden
- Ensure that communal entrances and areas are left clean and tidy
- Never seek private work from the customer
- Ensure the customer is compensated if there is any failure of service, loss or damage to the customer's property as a result of negligence during work
- Avoid as far as possible damage to gardens, plants, trees, paths etc. If some damage is unavoidable, this should be discussed and agreed with the customer before any work starts and an agreement must be reached for reinstatement
- Not leave windows/doors open during works unless necessary
- Follow health and safety procedures at all times. Fire exits, lifts, staircases, corridors and doorways must be kept clear and not blocked by tools or materials. On completion of work all tools, debris, dust and waste materials must be cleared and tidied at the end of each day
- Keep any sharp implements, potentially dangerous tools or materials close to the immediate area of work. Agree with the customer where these items can be safely kept and how to keep children or pets away from the immediate works' vicinity
- Not park in the customer's parking space without permission or block access, footpaths, or gateways. All parking must be in accordance with the Highway Code. If necessary, tools and materials can be unloaded first
- Always reconnect electricity and water services and make sure they are working before leaving the home
- Always clear up at the end of each day
- Always leave a property in a safe condition
- Always provide information on how to use equipment including operating instructions and ensure the customer understands these

Communication guidelines

General advice

- Treat people as individuals respecting their beliefs and views even when they are different from your own
- Seek to treat work colleagues and customers with dignity and respect at all times
- Take into account your colleagues' and customers' religious, cultural and social needs
- Challenge questionable attitudes and behaviour if you feel someone is behaving inappropriately
- Report harassment of any kind towards anyone, to a manager
- Provide information that customers need in ways that they find easy to understand
- Be aware of issues that affect people with disabilities, older people and people from ethnic minorities
- Avoid using jargon and slang when dealing with customers – what you say may have a different meaning to the other person
- Don't make generalisations and assumptions about groups or individuals
- All dealings with customers are to be undertaken with a polite attitude and with strict observance of the requirements under relevant legislation
- Avoid using certain terms such as 'my love' and 'dear', as these may cause offence
- Women may feel nervous about having a male contractor/stranger in their home. It may be useful to discuss this at the time of making an appointment in order to provide an opportunity to arrange for a friend or relative to be there at the time of appointment
- It is not possible to anticipate every customer's needs but providing clear information about the work you will be undertaking will help the customer identify any potential concerns before the work commences

Communicating with customers from a variety of cultural backgrounds

Do..

- Avoid use of racial and ethnic terms (such as 'coloured', 'oriental' or 'half-caste') that are liable to give offence
- Be sensitive to the difficulties that may be caused by the use of jargon, slang and metaphors
- Be prepared to check out the precise meaning of words for family relationships (such as 'uncle', 'cousin' and 'aunt')
- Do take care to provide reassurance and support where difficulties may arise over accents and pronunciation
- Be careful how you use gestures or body language. Individuals may place different meanings on a gesture you may feel is quite inoffensive

- Be aware that in some communities a handshake is not always the custom, especially among women
- Be aware that in some communities, a woman will not be comfortable or wish to be in a room with a male who is not related
- Be aware that an act of comfort eg putting an arm around a person, may cause embarrassment or offence
- Be aware some religious practices involve participating in festivals throughout the year and undertaking prayer and related activities at certain times of the day. Consideration should be given to:
 - Storing all materials and tools to agreed areas. Particular attention should be paid to shrines and rooms set aside within the home for worship
 - Time of prayer and festival times vary so always ask for suitable times to call and stick to these times. A calendar of festival dates for some of the main religions can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/religion/tools/calendar/
 - Washing facilities – eg a Muslim customer may encounter difficulties if the water supply needs to be disconnected around times of prayer due to the need for ritual cleansing
 - Treating religious objects and symbols with respect. Do not move and/or touch without permission, eg holy books, rosary beads, prayer mats, statues
- You will need to be aware of the best method of communication and with who you can communicate. For example it is not advisable to communicate with the customer via their young children
- Prior to the visit identify certain needs or requirements
- Provide translations and use interpreters, alternative media such as Braille, audio tape and large print where requested, or in advance if and where possible customer's requirements are known
- Don't assume someone's language is the same as that of their country of origin. Ask the first language of the person you are dealing with and if necessary seek assistance of a translator
- Take care and be patient when an accent, language or understanding hinders communication

Don't...

- Assume that just because someone responds to questions in English that the person necessarily understands fully what has been said
- Assume that words for the time of day (such as 'afternoon' and 'evening') necessarily have precisely the same meaning when used by members of minority ethnic communities
- Make generalisations about the characteristics of particular groups unless these are clearly qualified
- Assume that looking away rather than maintaining eye contact is necessarily a sign of dishonesty or disrespect. In some communities, it may be the opposite
- Assume that just because voices are raised that a person is losing control or becoming aggressive

- Underestimate the influence of your own cultural background on your unconscious perceptions and behaviours
- Ask for a Christian name or surname. Ask for the personal or family name instead
- Forget that many people remove shoes before entering some rooms at home, as well as in a place of worship. If you offer to remove your shoes, you'll be told if it is necessary or not and won't inadvertently cause offence

The following link is a good source of information on the etiquettes of different countries <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/country-profiles.html>

Communicating with customers with disabilities

- It is important to recognise the rights of customers with disabilities to be treated equally and to have their individual needs recognised
- It is important to consider accessibility issues and if working in the home of a person with a mobility impairment, it is important not to restrict their movement
- Clear up rubbish/spillages as quickly as possible as they pose particular hazards for people with mobility impairments

Communicating with hearing impaired customers

- Make sure that you have attracted the customer's attention
- Face the person when you are talking to them, talk clearly and use your usual tone. Only raise your voice if the customer asks you to speak up
- Be prepared to write things down if this is appropriate
- Let the customer know if you have to leave the premises ie to get equipment from the van
- Let the customer know if you will be making excess noise eg drilling or hammering

Communicating with visually impaired or partially sighted customers

- When making appointments agree a password to be used. On arrival at the premises introduce yourself as usual and use the password
- Explain where you will be working and what you will be doing
- If you need to move items of furniture ask the customer where you should place them and ensure you replace them in exactly the same position on completion of the work
- Identify a place with the customer where you can safely leave work materials
- If you have to leave the premises for any reason let the customer know and where possible, give them an idea of when you will be returning and use the password each time to give reassurance

Communicating with customers with learning difficulties

- Communication is two-way and other people can contribute to an individual's difficulties. With training and support, many people with learning disabilities can learn to use alternatives to verbal communication, which suit them as individuals
- Check understanding and preferred method of communication when first contact is made and record this onto QL's contact management system
- Always use plain English and keep letters short in length and use simple language
- Use pictures and diagrams where possible to help explain technical issues

Cross Keys Homes' accessible communication tools

Cross Keys Homes offers a variety of communication methods to make our services more accessible to all. It is vital all board members, staff and contractors are familiar with these services to promote them to our customers and improve communication with them.

Standard translation straplines

All of Cross Keys Homes' literature includes six standard translation straplines which offer free translations in the following languages:

Arabic
Farsi
Kurdish
Polish
Portuguese
Urdu

The requests for translations will normally be directed to the relevant department's administration officer/team. If you are unsure who this is contact Katie Taylor on: 01733 385116.

Audio, large print and Braille translations

Cross Keys Homes also offers audio, large print and Braille versions of all its literature. Requests for audio and large print should be directed to Katie Taylor on: 01733 385116 or email: katie.taylor@crosskeyshomes.co.uk
Braille translations can be arranged direct through:

Transflexcommunications

Telephone: 01733 390959 and ask for Jina

Deafblind UK

Telephone: 01733 358100 (voice/text)

Fax: 01733 358356

Email: info@deafblind.org.uk

Website: www.deafblind.org.uk

Costs will need to be met from the relevant department's budget. Prices depend on documents and how many words are in the document.

Translation and interpreting services

Language Line and Cintra are two translation and interpreting agencies for front line staff to use when they are unable to communicate with a tenant.

Language Line is to be used for **telephone** interpreting only and can be used straight away without the need to raise a purchase order first. **Cintra** is to be used for **translations and face-to-face** interpreting only and you must first obtain a quote and purchase order.

Contacting Cintra

Translation Agency: Cintra, CPDC Foster Rd, Trumpington, Cambridge.

For general enquiries: tel 01223 346870 fax: 01223 309923

For interpreting: martina@cintra.org.uk or 01223 346870 (Martina Diver)

For written translations: translation@cintra.org.uk or 01223 346871

A step-by-step guide to using Language Line is at appendix one of this document.

Cross Keys Homes' HR department also keeps a log of staff who can speak a second language. To find out more visit the HR intranet page or contact them direct.

Typetalk and Readspeaker

Typetalk is a free telephone service which enables staff to receive and make calls to and from residents with speech or hearing impairments. A step-by-step guide is at appendix two.

Readspeaker is a piece of software which makes Cross Keys Homes' website available in audio format just at the click of a button - just visit the site www.crosskeyshomes.co.uk to see for yourself or for further information about readspeaker visit:

www.readspeaker.com

Free Google translation service

Google translator allows you to translate any text on our webpage into 23 different languages.

How to use this service:

All you have to do is highlight the text you would like to translate, click the right-hand mouse button over the text and press 'copy', click on the Google translate button on the right-hand side of the page and then paste your selected text into the box entitled 'original text' and choose your preferred language.

Or if you prefer, you can translate a whole page by copying our webpage address and then clicking on the Google translate button and pasting the address into the 'translate a webpage' section and choosing your preferred language.

Links to further information and relevant documents

Cross Keys Homes' One equality scheme and equality and diversity policy – visit *the One equality* intranet pages under *company news* for a full guide to our framework, policy, best practice and legislation

For a good overview of the etiquettes of different countries- and to help staff to understand and act upon different cultural observances visit:
<http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/country-profiles.html>

For further guidance on translation and interpreting services – visit the *translation and interpreting service* page under *useful information* on the intranet

For general communication guidelines and assistance – contact the communications team on: 01733 385116/385007

For information on Cross Keys Homes' service standards – visit the *CCI page* under the *departmental information* menu of the intranet

Improving communication to you

To comment on this document and or to suggest any additions contact Kelly Field on: 01733 385007 or email: kelly.field@crosskeyshomes.co.uk

Appendix one

Language Line – accessing a telephone interpreter

When your client is with you

1. Phone **0845 310 9900**
 2. The operator will ask you for:
 - Your ID Code
- (L)**
(Please note: this code is **confidential** to your organisation or dept.)
- Your organisation name (and department where appropriate)
 - Your initial and surname
 - The language you require (say if you need a specific interpreter*)
 - Your client's location, ie **with you**
3. Stay on line while the operator connects you to a trained interpreter (about 30 seconds)
 4. Note the interpreter's ID code, introduce yourself and brief the interpreter saying what phone you are using, eg single/dual handset, speaker phone or mobile
 5. Ask the interpreter to introduce you and themselves to your client and give the interpreter the first question or statement. Give the interpreter time to interpret between you and your client. Continue the conversation
 6. Let your client and the interpreter know when you have finished.
- *Whenever possible we meet specific requests, eg for a female interpreter

Making outgoing client calls

The operator will connect you to an interpreter, then conference your client into the call

1. Have your client's name and telephone number ready
 2. Follow steps 1 and 2 for '**When your client is with you**', but advise the operator your client is **NOT with you**
 3. Give the operator your client's name and telephone number
 4. Stay on line while the interpreter connects you to a trained interpreter (about 30 seconds)
 5. Note the interpreter's ID code
- Introduce yourself and brief the interpreter: explain the operator is phoning your client. Ask the interpreter to introduce you and themselves to your client and give the interpreter the first question or statement
6. The operator introduces your client into the call. The interpreter proceeds as you directed above
 7. Give the interpreter time to interpret between you and your client. Continue the conversation
 8. Let your client and the interpreter know when you have finished

Handling incoming client calls

If you have conferencing facilities:

1. Put your client on hold using your organisation's conference call facilities (try to obtain your client's telephone number in case they hang up while on hold)
2. Follow steps 1 and 2 for '**When your client is with you**', but advise the operator your client is **ON HOLD**
3. Brief the interpreter, then conference your client into the call

If you do not have conferencing facilities:

1. Note your client's telephone number, language and, ideally, name
2. Assure your client that you will call back shortly with an interpreter
3. Follow the procedures for '**making outgoing client calls**'

Useful numbers:

1. General enquiries, feedback and materials

Tel: 020 7520 1430

Fax: 020 7520 1450

Email: enquiries@languageline.co.uk

Website: www.languageline.co.uk

Post: 11-21 Northdown Street
London, N1 9BN

2. Document translations

Tel: 020 7520 1425

Fax: 020 7520 1450

Email: translations@languageline.co.uk

Appendix two

Typetalk

To use this service, the tenant must have a special typetalk phone. These are available from the RNID.

To contact a hearing impaired person:

1. To connect to the operator, dial: 9 18002 followed by the tenant's full telephone number including STD code
eg 9 18002 01733 385000
2. Wait for around 30 seconds for the line to connect (don't put the phone down, it just takes a while)
3. Once connected, the operator will talk you through placing your message
4. The operator then sends your message to the tenant, and confirms it has been received
5. The tenant's reply will then be relayed back to you by the operator

How a hearing impaired person (with a typetalk phone) can contact Cross Keys Homes:

1. Tenant dials 18001 followed by the staff members full telephone number (including STD code)
eg 18001 01733 385000
2. They are then connected to the operator, who will take their message and then call you to relay the message

The typetalk service is available 24/7

Useful contact details:

- For further information/advice about typetalk, contact the RNID customer service number: 0800 7311888. This is available Monday-Friday 9am-8pm and Saturday & Sunday 5am-5pm
- More information is available from the website:
<http://www.rnid-typetalk.org.uk/>
- The typetalk customer service number is: 0151 7076517