

**service
standards:
our promise
to you**



PROGRESS
HOUSING GROUP LTD.

This leaflet sets out our local service standards so that customers know what level of service that they can expect from us.

If you would like this leaflet in another language or format, or if you require the services of an interpreter, please phone Customer Services on 01772 450600

اردو (Urdu)

اس اشاعت کی نقل اگر آپ کو کسی دیگر زبان یا شکل (فارمیٹ) میں چاہئے، یا اگر آپ کو ترجمان (انٹرپرائز) کی خدمات درکار ہوں تو برائے مہربانی کسٹمر سروسز سے فون نمبر 01772 450600 پر رابطہ کریں۔

廣東話 (中文繁體字) (Cantonese)

如欲索取本刊物的另一語文或格式版本，或要求使用口譯員服務的話，請致電客戶服務處，電話：01772 450600

Polski (Polish)

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Introduction

Progress Housing Group aims to put our customers at the heart of everything we do. This means we are committed to delivering the highest levels of standards of service to our customers. Our vision and corporate values underpin our approach to customer service:

Group Vision

‘We aim to be the housing provider of choice.’

Corporate values

Our values reflect our style and our approach:

- Respecting and valuing people
- Being open, fair, ethical and accountable
- Leading by example and inspiring others
- Being innovative and inventive
- Having passion and commitment in all that we do
- Delivering quality and value in our services
- Being responsive to customers, neighbourhoods and communities
- Being operationally excellent and continually improving

Equality and diversity

We are committed to the equality of opportunity in all our activities and will treat all people (or groups of people) equally, irrespective of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marital status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, spent criminal convictions, physical or mental health (including HIV and AIDS), or economic status.

We offer equal opportunities both in the provision of housing and housing services, and in the employment of staff. We hold the Navajo Charter Mark in recognition of delivering a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender friendly service.

Service standards

We have worked with our customers to agree service standards that clearly state what our customers should expect from us across all of our services. These will be regularly monitored to ensure that we are working towards these standards.

We will review these standards annually to ensure they are kept up to date. We will involve customers in the reviews by asking them how they feel we are doing against the standards in this booklet.

Our choices policy

We recognise that tenants and customers are individuals and have different needs and aspirations in terms of their homes and the services that they receive. Therefore, we offer a variety of choices in areas such as repairs, lettings and support. These include:

Improvements and major repairs

Wherever practicable we offer at least three choices and possibly up to five, for any major repairs or improvements and any cyclical works carried out to your property.

New build developments

If you have been pre-allocated a new build property, we will wherever practicable offer at least three choices and possibly up to five, on design, finishes and environmental works.

Adaptations

You have the opportunity to request minor adaptations such as grab rails, lever taps, etc. to make your home more accessible.

Moving home

If you would like to move home, we offer a number of choices such as transfer, mutual exchange, under occupation incentives and Right to Buy as long as you meet the qualifying criteria.

Resident involvement

We offer lots of different ways for you to get involved with shaping our services. These include tenant inspectors, forums, focus groups, scrutiny panel, surveys, questionnaires, etc.

Contacts and communication

We offer a number of ways for you to communicate with us. You can get in touch either in person at our offices, by telephone, online or by requesting a home visit. You can also have the choice of same sex interviews, different formats such as large print or alternative languages, etc.

Lettings

Local lettings policies are operated in both New Progress and New Fylde. These offer prospective tenants a choice in the home that they would like to live in as long as they meet the letting criteria for the property.

At Progress Care, nominations to empty homes are received from local authority Adult Social Care teams. Nominations must meet the eligibility criteria for the scheme and be in need of the support that is on offer at the scheme as well as being compatible with existing tenants where the vacancy is at a shared scheme.

Collective choices

These refer to choices and decisions that are made collectively by groups of tenants through established panels or through wider consultation. This includes Community Investment Panel funding, environmental improvements and any changes in management.

Leaseholders and Shared Ownership

Staircasing (opting to purchase a greater share of the property) is offered to shared ownership customers to a maximum ownership level as determined by the lease.

Progress Plus domestic emergency cover plans are also offered to leaseholders and shared owners.

Repairs

We offer you appointments for repairs to your home that take into consideration your family circumstances and work commitments.

Tenancy matters

We offer a number of choices in the management of your tenancy agreement. These include the option to make improvements to your property, to receive

energy efficiency advice and to choose how your home is decorated.

Support

Support plans are discussed with individual tenants to take into account their own support needs. Tenants who require support are able to choose the frequency of visits, referrals to external agencies and the method of communication.

Payments methods

We offer a wide choice of ways to pay any rent or debts owed to us. You can pay by Direct Debit, securely online at www.progressgroup.org.uk, by telephone, by post or by swipe card at any Post Office, Pay Point or PayZone outlet.

Accessibility and communication

This section is about the way that you can contact us and how we will respond to your contact. It also covers the way in which we communicate with you and the information we will provide. We will:

- Make our offices easy to get into and move around in;
- Provide information in different languages and access to an interpreter service at all times;
- Publish useful information for tenants in our offices and on our website;
- See callers within 10 minutes in our office;
- Answer 85% of phone calls within 20 seconds;
- Reply to letters and emails within five working days;
- Offer home visits to vulnerable customers;
- Take account of, and keep up to date, any preferred communication needs customers may have;
- Publish regular newsletters;
- Make sure our tenancy agreements are clear and easy to understand;
- Provide a handbook for all new tenants;
- Look after your information, ensuring that it is secure, relevant and accurate;
- Only share your information with other organisations if deemed necessary;
- Always carry identification when visiting your property;
- Be considerate and respect your property when visiting.

Compliments, comments and complaints

This section is about how you can give us feedback about the services we provide, including complaints, and how we will respond to feedback. We will:

- Gather feedback from our customers using a range of methods such as feedback forms, surveys, via our website, tenants' panels and meetings;
- Have a formal process in place to deal with any complaints and allow customers to appeal against any decisions made;
- Respond to you within five working days if you make a formal complaint or write to you and give you a timescale for us to reply in full if we can't deal with a complaint within five days;
- Aim to achieve at least 95% satisfaction levels with our service;
- Ensure that at least 90% of work is carried out within timescale;
- Make it easy for customers to report concerns to us confidentially about any unethical practices within the Group.

Aids and adaptations

This section is about how we will respond to requests for aids and adaptations to be carried out to your property. An example of an aid would be the installation of a grab rail to help you get in and out of your home. We will:

- Provide clear guidance on where responsibilities lie, both internally and externally, for the delivery of disabled adaptations;
- Aim to carry out urgent adaptations within three months of receipt of an Occupational Therapist report;
- Aim to carry out non urgent adaptations within six months of receipt of an Occupational Therapist report;
- Achieve at least 95% satisfaction levels with our service;
- Ensure that at least 90% of work is carried out within timescales;
- Provide small aids within 28 days;
- Work with other agencies to assist applications for adaptations where our budgets do not allow works to be delivered directly;
- Carry out minor adaptations such as grab rails, key safes, lever taps, banister rails within 28 days.

Please note that a full review of our disabled adaptations is due in 2011/12.

Applying for a home

This section explains the ways in which you can access housing in our general needs properties and also our supported, homeless and refuge properties. We will:

- Join Choice Based Letting (CBL) schemes where possible and cost effective to do so;
- Deal with applications in line with relevant timescales detailed within individual CBL schemes;
- Provide information and advice so that our customers understand how we let our homes;
- Offer assistance with the application process for people who would like extra help;
- Carry out security checks to ensure we only give out information to applicants or their advocates (written permission to give out information to 3rd parties will be required);
- Give priority to people in housing need;

- Offer customers of New Fylde Housing and New Progress Housing Association the opportunity to join Homeswapper, the national mutual exchange scheme;
- Provide information on housing options for existing tenants who wish to move;
- Give priority to people who under occupy family accommodation to move to more appropriately sized accommodation;
- Operate appeals processes in accordance with the CBL schemes.

Where you are applying for supported, homeless or refuge properties, we will:

- Consider nominations from the Local Authority;
- Consider referrals from other agencies;
- Consider self referrals.

Empty properties

This standard explains how we will manage our empty properties and ensure that they are maintained to a suitable standard. It also explains the services you can expect to receive as a new tenant. We will:

- Set target timescales for re-letting properties quickly, which reflect national good practice and ensure that we strive to improve year on year;
- Ensure our properties meet our lettable standards* and include a copy of the standards with all offer letters;
- Ensure our properties are safe and secure whilst they are empty;
- Contact prospective tenants as soon as the property is ready to arrange for them to view it;
- Explain the tenancy agreement to new tenants and provide a tenants' handbook at the start of the tenancy;
- Arrange to carry out visits to all new tenants after they have been in their home for four or six weeks;
- Invite tenant inspectors to inspect our empty properties against our lettable standards;

- Take into account the needs of the individual when deciding how long is given to consider an offer of accommodation;
- Make an Energy Performance Certificate available at the viewing or before;
- Provide new tenants with a copy of the gas safety certificate;
- Provide new tenants with a copy of the electrical safety certificate.

*The lettable standard details the works that could be carried out to bring the property to the standard we expect when empty.

Major repairs and improvements: achieving Decent Homes

This explains how we will involve you if major works are required to be carried out to your home. We will:

- Publish our maintenance and improvement programme once a year listing the major repairs and improvements to be carried out (at street level);
- Provide the maximum amount of notice possible to tenants of inclusion in our inspection programme and subsequently any works programme;
- Tell you whether your home is included in a major repairs or improvement programme at least four weeks before the work is due to start;
- Visit you at least two weeks before works are due to commence to offer you a choice on fixtures and fittings e.g. kitchen units, work surfaces, tiles and flooring.
- Take into account individual needs, for example, we will install lever taps if the tenant would have difficulty using ordinary taps;
- Carry out satisfaction surveys following all major works.

Responsive repairs

This section explains how we will respond to reports of repairs at your property.* We will:

- Complete repairs within the following timescales:
 - Emergency repairs – within 24 hours
 - Urgent repairs – within 7 calendar days
 - Routine repairs – within 28 calendar days
- Tell you what the target timescale is for completing a repair;
- Offer an appointment to you for your repair (except where it is an emergency repair);
- Offer the facility to track your recent repairs on our website;
- Notify you of any changes with the completion of your repair;
- Specify the repairs we are responsible for and repairs that you are responsible for;
- Recharge you for repairs that are your responsibility;
- Complete repairs on a 'right first time basis';
- Comply with our contractor charter.

* There is an ongoing review and consultation being carried out in relation to responsive repairs throughout the year.

Your tenancy and where you live

This section explains what services you can receive once you become a tenant. This covers both your tenancy and the environment in which your property is located.

A. Tenancy issues

We will:

- Provide lots of information and advice about your tenancy and our services in leaflets, newsletters and handbooks;
- Consult on significant changes to management and services for example when there is a proposed change in landlord;
- Respect your right to see any information we keep on you. We require you to give us notice of this in writing;
- Tell you about your rights and responsibilities as a tenant, as well as our rights and responsibilities as a landlord;
- Be sympathetic and understanding if you are dealing with a bereavement which affects the tenancy;

- Give you an answer to any requests to take over a tenancy within 28 days;
- Hold a database of tenants wishing to swap (we call this carrying out a mutual exchange) and give you a decision on any request to swap within 42 days;
- Carry out a post tenancy visit within four weeks of your tenancy starting;
- Provide you with information about home contents insurance;
- Give you a starter tenancy which will convert after 12 months to an ordinary tenancy as long as there is no breach of tenancy within that time;
- Allow pets, in line with any special conditions in your tenancy agreement;
- Visit each scheme at least annually (Progress Care Housing Association only).

B. Environment

We will:

- Carry out regular estate inspections and publish the dates so that you can attend;
- Identify any area for improvement and take action to address it where possible;
- Consult with local residents about ideas for improvements to the area;
- Take a photo and then remove offensive graffiti within 24 hours;
- Ensure abandoned and untaxed vehicles are dealt with;
- Make sure empty properties are safe and secure;
- Support the work of other local agencies to improve the area where we can, particularly the police and local authorities;
- Have estate standards for each area, covering grounds maintenance and other issues;

- Consult regularly on the management of your area in the way that suits tenants best, usually through a local forum or panel;
- Have a written plan for each area showing all the things we are doing to help improve the area (we call this a 'Place Management Strategy').

Please note that the last three items do not apply to Progress Care because their homes are very widely dispersed and so the association rarely owns more than a few properties in each area.

Gas servicing

This section explains how we will ensure that gas appliances that we have provided are regularly serviced. We will:

- Service your gas appliances at no more than 12 monthly intervals;
- Provide you with at least one month's notice that servicing is due and offer a morning or afternoon appointment;
- Only service items that are the association's responsibility and not those appliances fitted by the tenant;
- Provide you with a copy of the copy of the service certificate within 14 days of service completion;
- Take legal action where tenants fail to provide us with access to the property to carry out the annual service and recharge the costs accordingly.

Sheltered housing

This section explains the services that are provided if you live in one of our sheltered properties. We will:

- Ensure access to a 24 hour emergency response call system 365 days per year;
- Offer daily or weekly contact with a Scheme Manager or Mobile Warden between Monday and Friday (except Bank Holidays);
- Offer an intercom call at the weekend by one of our Mobile Wardens or personal visit to vulnerable residents;
- Ensure access to an out-of-hours emergency response service at night, weekends and Bank Holidays;
- Complete a quarterly check on all emergency response pull cords to ensure that they are in working condition and hanging freely;
- Review annually all resident records including personal and next of kin details;
- Comply with Health and Safety Regulations by completing weekly inspections of all communal areas;
- Provide a support plan for every sheltered tenant;
- Work with other agencies to deliver services;

- Consult with you if the direct provision of this service needs to be changed and ensure a smooth transition to the new provider;
- Liaise with relatives and support agencies as appropriate;
- Facilitate social activities in consultation with tenants;
- Comply with our response to emergency call systems in line with Telecare Services Association standards;
- Offer Extra Care or Sheltered Plus as a service in partnership with other agencies where possible and appropriate.

Homeless accommodation

This section explains how we will support you and what services we will offer if you live in either New Progress or New Fylde interim accommodation.

Where support is provided, we will:

- Set up an initial support meeting with you within two working days;
- Complete a Support Plan within seven days;
- Hold weekly support meetings;
- Review your progress every three months;
- Source ways of improving your skills, employment and training;
- Provide advice on domestic tasks including meal planning and shopping;
- Advise and work with you on cleaning and maintaining your accommodation;
- Arrange for the Welfare Rights Manager to visit you at the onset of your tenancy;
- Hold a monthly arrears surgery to enable you to speak directly with an Arrears Manager in the event of rent difficulties;
- Create a payment plan with the help of a Support Worker taking into account a fixed low income;
- Offer an exit interview when you leave;
- Consult with you if the direct provision of this service needs to be changed and ensure a smooth transition to the new provider.

24 hour social alarms and telecare (emergency alarm systems in the home)

This section explains the service that you can expect to receive if you have a Lifeline or Helpline system in your home. We will:

- Provide an emergency response service 24 hours a day, 365 days a year;
- Aim to answer 98.5% of calls to the Control Centre within one minute;
- Aim to answer 99% of calls to the Control Centre within three minutes;
- Provide you with full details of how the Lifeline or Helpline service equipment works;
- Make an appointment for an installation or demonstration within 24 hours of you contacting us;
- Provide proof of identity before entering your home;
- Update changes to the information that we hold about you and your contacts within 24 hours;

- Respond to any reported equipment fault within one working day (24 hours) and we will replace or fix the fault;
- Aim to exceed the national association standard of a one hour response time if you have made an emergency call to us and require a Mobile Warden (only applicable to those who pay for this service);
- Carry out monthly quality checks of our call handling;
- Comply with the Telecare Services Association Code of Practice.

Tenant involvement and scrutiny

This section explains how you can get involved within the organisation and have an impact on the delivery of services offered.

We will:

- Actively promote community involvement and engage customers in improving services;
- Offer a range of options for involvement so that people can individually or collectively participate with us at a level of their own choice;
- Offer involvement opportunities to all members of the community and pro-actively encourage under-represented groups to have their say;
- Value diversity and strive to involve customers from all backgrounds, making sure everyone has an opportunity to be involved;

- Pay out of pocket expenses, including child care costs to residents attending meetings and seminars;
- Publicise the impact of involvement on our website;
- Operate a scrutiny panel and provide opportunities for people to become involved in this through an open recruitment process;
- Consult on our governance arrangement at least every three years.

Rent and service charges

This section explains the services that are available to support you to pay your rent and service charges. We will:

- Give you at least one month's notice in writing of any rent or service charge increase;
- Send rent statements out every three months;
- Offer a range of payment methods: Direct Debit; cheque; swipe card; telephone or on our website.
- Review service charges once a year;
- Contact you if you start to fall behind with your rent to agree a way of clearing the debt within a reasonable time;
- Offer you a home visit on request to discuss rent arrears;
- Work out realistic payments that will take into account your income and outgoings;
- Offer you a home visit on request to discuss welfare benefits that you may be entitled to;

- Help you to increase your income by maximising your benefit entitlement;
- Provide representation and advocacy services to tenants who need more comprehensive benefit help and advice;
- Put you in touch with specialist debt advice agencies if you are struggling with multiple debts;
- Signpost you to other agencies who can offer help and advice in relation to welfare and benefit matters;
- Publish information annually so that you can compare our rents and service charges with those charged by other similar providers in your area*;
- Comply with the government guidance on setting rents.

*This does not apply to Progress Care Housing Association.

Anti-social behaviour

This section explains how we will respond to complaints of anti-social behaviour (ASB) and the service you can expect to receive from us.*

We will:

- Respond to all reports of racial and homophobic harassment within 24 working hours of receiving the initial report;
- Respond to all reports of nuisance, where there is a risk of violence and/or damage to the property, within 24 working hours;
- Respond to all other reports of nuisance within 10 working days;
- Ensure that victims, witnesses and partner agencies, such as police, social services, schools, probation services, and floating support services, are kept informed about the progress of anti-social behaviour action plans on a regular and timely basis;
- Publicise details of successful injunctions, evictions and anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) as result of ASB action taken;

- Issue all complainants with a satisfaction survey to give us feedback on our performance;
- Provide witness support in all cases of anti-social behaviour and in accordance with our policy.

We will be consulting fully when this service is reviewed in September 2011 as stated in your 2009/10 annual report.

*This section is subject to further consultation and it should be noted that for New Progress Housing Association, these response times are different.

Hate crimes

This section sets out how we will respond to hate crimes reported to us. We will:

- In serious cases, arrange a face-to-face interview within 24 working hours and, if necessary, emergency accommodation will be made available;
- In less serious cases, arrange face-to-face interviews within five working days;
- Take a photo of and then remove offensive graffiti within one working day (if removal is not possible it will be painted over);
- Complete non-urgent repairs within five working days;
- Draw up a long-term action plan within 10 working days;
- Keep in regular contact, with communication at least every 14 days;
- We will consider all nine equality strands in responding to hate crimes (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage, civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation).

Tenancy support

This section explains what support we can offer you when you become a tenant.

We will:

- Offer appropriate support to you to sustain your tenancy;
- Offer benefits advice or refer you to external agencies who can support you;
- Comply with the pre- eviction protocol with the local authority;
- Refer to other support agencies, such as Developing Initiatives Supporting Communities (DISC).

Performance and monitoring services

This section explains how we look at how well we are doing and monitor our performance. We will:

- Provide regular information on key performance indicators;
- Monitor these standards;
- Refer to the scrutiny panel any reports of non-compliance with the standards and agree improvement plans and actions to address this;
- Produce an annual report on our delivery under these standards.

Value for money

This section explains how we ensure that the services we provide represent good value for money. We will:

- Compare our services with other similar providers (benchmark) to ensure value for money;
- Carry out periodic reviews of our services to ensure value for money;
- Consider suggestions made as to how we can save money;
- Communicate our findings with you.

Shared ownership

This section explains the services that are provided if you are a shared owner. We will:

- Provide annual service charge statements;
- Set rents in line with the provisions of your lease;
- Offer choices to you, for example to provide gas servicing and repairs (at cost);
- Take legal action if you fall into arrears;
- We will only carry out repairs and maintenance in accordance with what is stated in your lease.



PROGRESS
HOUSING GROUP LTD.



NEW PROGRESS
HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED



PROGRESS CARE
HOUSING ASSOCIATION LIMITED



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