

Local Standards: **THE OFFER**



Local Standards: The Offer

Dear Tenant,

Welcome to Ipswich Borough Council's Housing Services Local Standards.

Local offers (standards) were introduced in 2010 by the Tenant Services Authority, the regulatory body for social housing. The offers are standards agreed between Ipswich Borough Council as a landlord and their tenants on issues that matter on a local level. They are a way to tailor the services that Ipswich Borough Council provides based on what tenants want.

The annual report will be used to provide feedback to all tenants on whether these standards have been met. If these standards have not been met then we will be working with tenant representatives to look at how we can improve our services to meet these standards in the future.

April Dale

Tenant Participation Officer





Local Standards: The Offer

Ipswich Borough Council's Housing Services will be assessed by tenant representatives against five standards that cover any services that we offer that affect you as a tenant.

These standards are:

- Tenant involvement and empowerment
- Home
- Tenancy
- Neighbourhood and community
- Value for money

This document will provide a breakdown of services that you will receive under each of the five standards shown above.

Tenant involvement and empowerment

INVOLVEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT

There are different ways for tenants to be involved and have their say. Training and support is available and there is a Volunteer Policy in place.

We will:

- ensure all Ipswich Borough Council tenants have access to tenant groups;
- offer different levels of involvement and flexible ways of becoming involved in order to provide a choice appropriate for each individual tenant;
- offer support and training to those tenants who get involved as volunteers with us;
- keep you informed on housing related matters through Tenants' Times and our website;
- respond to your feedback and suggestions;
- provide a response to all registered volunteer tenants within five working days;
- continue to support recognised tenant and residents groups; and
- provide support for independent tenant scrutiny of our services.

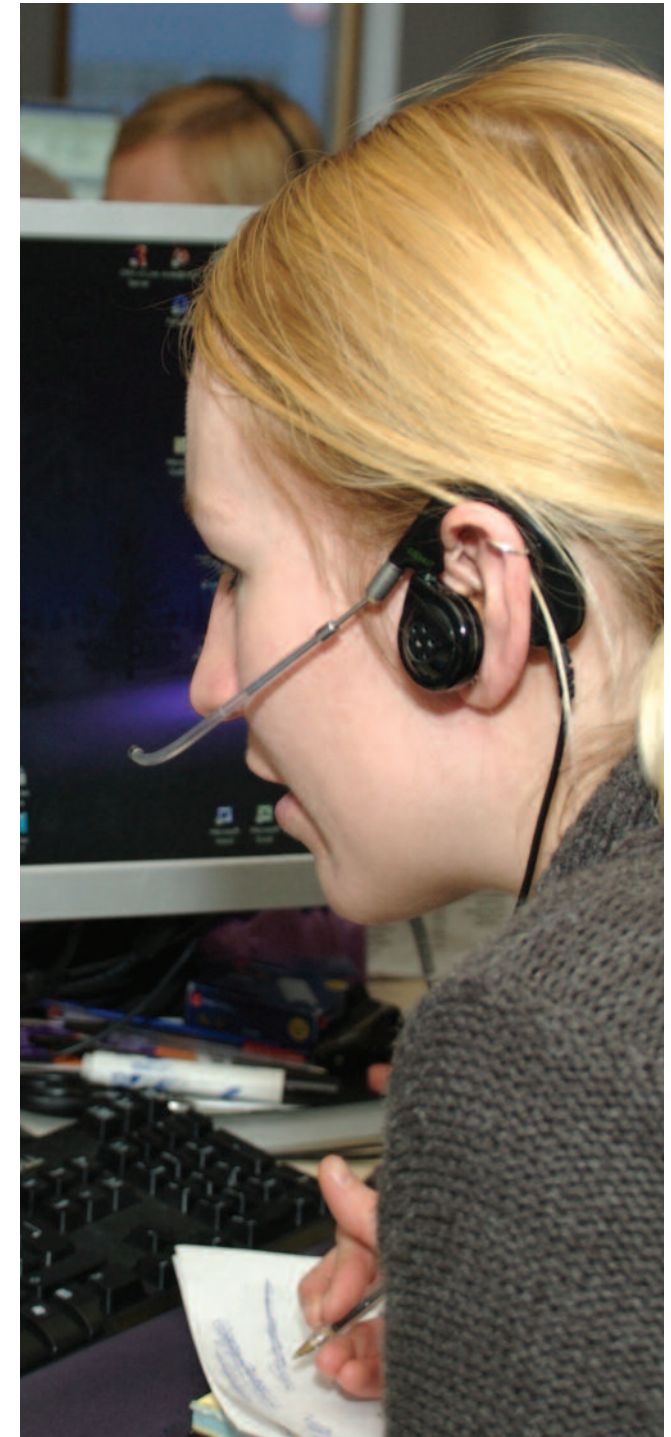
CHOICE

We aim to give people the choice about where they live and the general look of their home. We will:

- give customers the choice about where they live through Gateway to Homechoice;
- offer choice of style and colour of new front doors under the planned maintenance scheme;
- offer choice of colour of render under the planned maintenance scheme, except where properties are being externally insulated;
- offer choice of colour and style of kitchens under the kitchen and bathroom programme;
- offer choice of colour of walls and floor tiles in their bathroom under the kitchen and bathroom programme.

We aim to give a choice to tenants in how we contact them by:

- providing larger print correspondence when requested;
- giving different options for preferred contact (where it is not something we must legally provide in printed form); and
- give options for appointment times wherever possible.



CUSTOMER SERVICE

The aim is to provide Council tenants with services that are accessible, efficiently and effectively managed and show tenants they are at heart of what we do. We will:

- provide a Customer Contact Centre for your telephone calls 8.30am-5pm Monday to Friday;
- answer at least 90% of housing calls received in our Customer Contact Centre;
- deal with calls within three minutes enabling you to speak to an adviser/automated service;
- provide a Customer Services Centre with someone available to talk to you face to face - 8.30am-5pm Monday to Friday;
- provide a website giving 24/7 access to making payments online for your rent and Council Tax, complete forms or report a problem. Access our website at www.ipswich.gov.uk/housing;
- tell you what we will do to resolve a problem when you report it and how soon we will do it;
- provide feedback if you request it for a problem that is ongoing;
- train our staff in customer service;
- ensure a Housing Officer/Scheme Manager is available;
- wear identification and tell you our name when we call or visit you;
- aim to contact you at least one hour before an appointment if we are unable to make it on time or need to cancel and rearrange;
- leave a contact card with our details if you are not at home when we visit; and
- write to you using language that is clear and easy to understand.

UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO DIVERSE NEEDS OF TENANTS

We recognise people have different needs and aim to tailor our services to meet these. To help us we will ask for personal information about you. We will:

- think about accessibility, provision of public transport in the area, timings and the number of people assisting when organising events and/or meetings;
- use translation and interpretation services when necessary;
- use a neighbourhood approach to support people to address the needs in their communities;
- ensure our communication with tenants is accessible and appropriate to their needs; and
- that tenants individual needs are considered when planning works and services.

FORMAL COMPLAINTS

If you are not satisfied with part of our service and have not been able to resolve your issue informally you may want to put in a formal complaint. The easiest way to do this is at www.ipswich.gov.uk. We will:

- acknowledge your formal complaint within three working days;
- provide you with a reference number for the complaint should you wish to follow it up;
- provide a full response within 20 working days which will tell you:
 - whether the complaint is upheld;
 - what we will do to address your complaint;
 - and
 - by when
- you will be contacted in writing by the officer dealing with your complaint to provide you with reasons should the investigation take longer to carry out; and
- if your complaint is not upheld because the responsibility is not ours we will try to inform you which agency or service deals with the issue and direct you to their complaint process.

To put in a formal complaint to us either:

- fill out an online complaint form at www.ipswich.gov.uk
- or telephone the Customer Contact Centre on **01473 433370** and tell them what your complaint is about;
- or visit the Customer Service Centre at the Ipswich Town Hall and tell them what your complaint is about; or write a letter to Housing Services, Ipswich Borough Council, Grafton House, 15-17 Russell Road Ipswich IP1 2DE.

Home

QUALITY OF ACCOMMODATION

We want to provide all tenants with a decent home that is in a good condition, safe, dry and warm. We will:

- ensure all our homes meet the Ipswich Standard which we will review regularly;
- complete a property condition survey of 10% of all our homes each year;
- inspect electrical wiring at least every five years;
- redecorate the outside of your home and any shared areas at least every seven years where needed;
- ensure the average energy efficiency of our properties overall is Band C or higher; and
- that all sheltered accommodation has an emergency service every day of the year through the warden call system.

EMPTY PROPERTY STANDARD

We will ensure all properties meet the Empty Property Standard and are in a good condition when new tenants move in. We will:

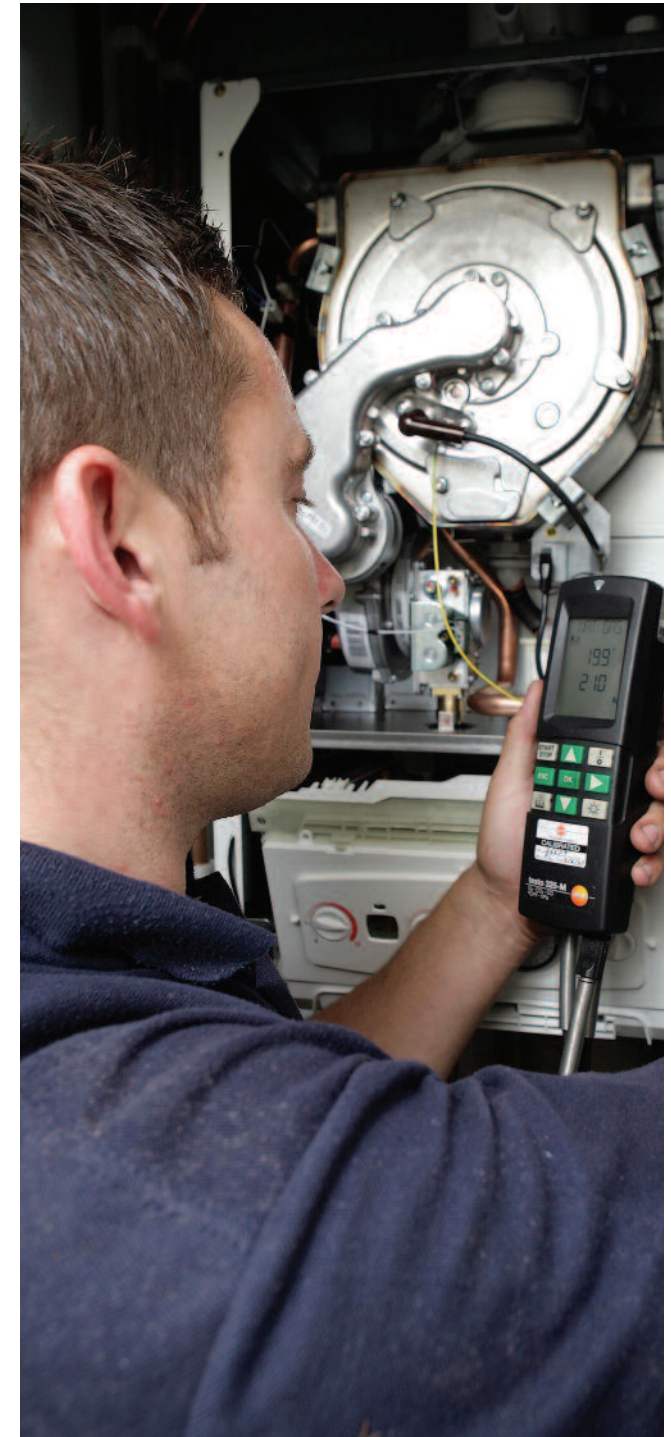
- provide a hygienic, safe, secure property;
- where the property has its own garden, that it is tidily maintainable before occupation;
- make sure there is no damage to the fabric of the property;
- remove any sub-standard alterations carried out by the previous tenants;

- remove or repair fitted units in a property;
- complete any necessary works that will cause major disruption before the new tenant moves in; and
- complete any outstanding minor repairs once the new tenant has moved into the property.

RESPONSIVE REPAIRS

We will:

- take repair requests via our Customer Contact Centre Monday to Friday 8.30am-5pm;
- provide out-of-hours Emergency Repairs service;
- offer a choice of appointment for all non-emergency repairs and complete them within agreed timescales
- publish the priorities and timescales for repairs online or by request;
- offer a text notification reminder before and on the day of your appointment if you provide us with a mobile telephone number;
- respect your home, making sure we clean up after the works have finished;
- aim to get the job right first time at least 90% of the time. If we cannot do this we will agree a new appointment with you to complete the work and provide information about what further work is required and when it will be completed;
- let you know at least an hour before if an appointment cannot be kept and arrange an alternative;
- ensure all contractors working on our behalf follow our standards; and
- make sure there is an opportunity to give feedback on work carried out by us and/or our contractors.





GAS SERVICING

We have a statutory duty to carry out an annual inspection and safety check on gas installations including pipework. We will:

- carry out smoke alarm battery check and check hot water and heating controls;
- complete a visual check on gas appliances you own;
- ask our contractor to make an appointment directly with you;
- if inconvenient, you can contact them to change the date (sometimes we need to specify an end date when this inspection must be carried out by);
- take enforcement action through the Court when necessary if tenants do not provide access to our contractor;
- update our records and provide you with a copy of the inspection certificate within 28 days; and
- we will ask for feedback about our contractor. We aim for 99% satisfaction.

GAS MAINTENANCE

We undertake repairs and maintenance of boilers and associated pipework. We will:

- provide you with telephone numbers to report faults/leaks to our contractor directly;
- check that our contractor is prioritising/scheduling any necessary works;
- ensure parts are ordered/sourced locally as soon as reasonably practicable;
- offer temporary heating via electric fan heaters to any household if the heating system cannot be fixed; and
- ensure our contractor leaves information on what work is required if the repair cannot be completed at the first visit.

CENTRAL HEATING INSTALLATION

New and replacement installations are prioritised depending on a criteria of tenant circumstances.

New or replacement installations are installed within timescales based on category;

- Category 1: within seven working days;
- Category 2: within 28 working days; and
- Category 3: within three months

Tenancy

ALLOCATIONS

We aim to:

- process all applications for housing within 28 days;
- take up references in order to establish if there is a history of anti-social behaviour or rent arrears;
- advise you on your priority band, your bedroom allocation and property type once you are registered and verified;
- advise on how to bid on available properties;
- advise you of your right to appeal decisions and give access to the Allocations Policy at gatewaytohomechoice.org.uk;
- contact shortlisted applicants within 24 hours of the advertisement closing in order to arrange a viewing of the property; and
- give the successful shortlisted applicants 24 hours to accept the property.

Shortlisted applicants have access to the Council's Complaints Procedure.

RENTS

We want to provide tenants with a fair and supportive rents service so they are able to maintain rent payments and rental income is maximised. We will:

- set rents having regard to the Government's guidance;

- give you at least 28 days' notice of any change in rent;
- offer you a choice of ways to pay your rent;
- provide you with the ability to view your rent balance online; and
- follow the pre court protocol before applying to the Court for possession of your home.

We aim to:

- contact you within two weeks should your rent account fall into arrears;
- take prompt action in line with our procedure against tenants who do not pay their rent;
- make sure repayment arrangements made with you are fair and affordable;
- signpost you to other agencies if you need money, debt or budgeting advice;
- serve a Notice of Seeking Possession/Notice of Possession Proceedings personally on the property and discuss how this could affect you; and
- use evictions as a last resort and give opportunity to speak to housing options and tenancy services managers to review your case before applying for a warrant to evict you.

PROPERTY VISITS

We want to ensure all properties are looked after and have a structured programme of property inspections to check that there are no concerns. The frequency of the visits usually depends on the standard reported at the previous visit.

Previous visit grade

Good

Fair

Poor

Minimum visit schedule

Once in 24 months

Once in 12 months

Four times a year

The tenant will be involved in the inspection and it could be the Housing Officer will make some suggestions and give advice on how to improve how the property is used. We appreciate that this can be seen by some as being an unnecessary intrusion and there will only be formal follow-up action if it is believed that there is a risk to the property and/or the tenant.

We will tell you what you need to do if your property is considered 'fair' or 'poor' and at the next visit the Housing Officer will be checking to see if changes have been made to improve the standard.

These visits are also helpful to check on the welfare of the tenant. If the Housing Officer believes that some help is needed they can make a referral to the Tenancy Support Officers or another agency. Where a property has been identified as a cluttered home or in poor condition, the aim will be to provide support through the same routes depending on what the need is.

TENURE

We will fully explain the Tenancy Agreement when a tenant signs up for the property. We aim to give tenants help and support to maintain their tenancy and will only repossess a property as a last resort.

We will:

- offer a secure tenancy to tenants that have moved directly from a previous secure tenancy;
- offer an introductory tenancy to tenants who have not held a secure tenancy for their previous property. This will last for 12 months and only become secure if the tenant has adhered to the tenancy conditions. If an introductory tenant does not adhere to these it may be extended for six months and may be ended.
- we will aim to carry out four visits to introductory tenants during their first year;
- visit new tenants within six weeks of them moving into the property, to check that they understand their rights and responsibilities and make sure they are settling into their new home;
- provide support to tenants or refer them to specialist agencies to help them sustain their tenancy;
- only take action to repossess your home or demote your tenancy if you do not adhere to your tenancy conditions. This would mean taking court action and will be as a last resort; and
- offer advice to any remaining tenant or persons in the property following the death of the tenant.



Neighbourhood and Community

NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT

We aim to continuously improve and manage your local area, gardens, communal areas and open spaces. We will:

- arrange for offensive graffiti to be removed within one working day;
- ensure communal areas are clean and tidy by:
 - litter picking as appropriate for the area;
 - stopping use of communal areas for storage;
 - cutting grass regularly, keeping it to an even tidy length;
 - trimming hedges regularly, keeping them tidy; and
- cleaning ground floor windows in communal areas.

Tenants have the opportunity to participate in estate walkabouts with housing staff/councillors. Dates of these will be published in advance. We work with other local partners in the community to resolve problems we cannot deal with ourselves and attend the Neighbourhood Partnership Group meetings to make sure we focus on priority community issues/activities.

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Anti-social behaviour takes many forms, what is anti-social to one tenant may not be so to another. All reports are taken seriously. We always aim to work with victims and perpetrators to resolve problems quickly. We will:

- provide you with the ability to report any anti-social behaviour via our website;
- investigate all reported cases of anti-social behaviour;
- advise you of the steps we can take and what you can expect to happen next; and agree with you how often we update you. This will be at least fortnightly at key stages of the process. We will;
- use a variety of methods to tackle anti-social behaviour, including enforcement through the Court when appropriate; and
- work with Environmental Health, Suffolk County Council and the Police, as well as any other relevant agencies available to help resolve cases.

COMMUNITY CARETAKERS

Community Caretakers work on our estates to ensure they are safe and clean. The aim is to:

- complete 95% of minor repairs in communal areas within target time depending on the nature of the repair;
- achieve 95% tenant feedback satisfaction following pledge visits ;
- investigate all reports of fly-tipping on housing land;
- provide regular planned visits to ensure communal areas are clean and safe;
- ensure communal bin stores are maintained, clean, accessible and kept clear;
- work with tenant panels on identifying and providing area improvements; and
- assist with environmental and improvement projects.



Value for Money

VALUE FOR MONEY

Ipswich Borough Councils' Housing Services will always aim to offer its tenants value for money.

We will:

- compare the cost and quality of products and services when purchasing supplies and services;
- include tenants within the process of tendering services that are for tenants;
- involve tenants in comparing the cost and quality of services;
- make best use of our properties by aiming to re-let them as quickly as possible;
- aim to collect all of the rent due with no more than 2% of the year's total rent outstanding at the end of the year; and
- pursue former tenants for outstanding rent so there is fairness to current tenants.



