

Southwark's Housing Solutions Service Standards

At the heart of Housing Solutions is our commitment to help to improve the quality of life for local people. We strive to get our decisions right first time, every time.

Our mission is to prevent homelessness where possible by working with you and our partners.

We believe that customers have the right to know what level of service they can expect from us all the time – even when we fall short of the very high standards we have set ourselves.

Housing Solutions Telephone Advice Line

Our Telephone Advice Line, 0207 525 5950, operates from 9 am to 5pm Monday to Friday and 10 am to 5pm on Wednesdays.

There is a 24 hour service (outside of office hours) available for any person or household who is homeless and this can be accessed out of hours by dialling 0207 525 5000.

When you call the Housing Solutions Telephone Advice Line, we will:

- Offer you housing advice over the telephone.
- Treat you with dignity, respect and be fair at all times.
- Offer a service which has due regard for Southwark's diverse community.
- Ensure that your queries are dealt with during normal working hours. There will be an emergency service available at all other times.
- Work to ensure you are able to remain in your own home wherever possible and appropriate.
- Be open about what we do/are doing.
- Train our officers in the latest legislation changes to ensure we are able to provide you the most comprehensive housing advice.
- Aim to answer telephone calls promptly and deliver excellent customer service. When answering the telephone, staff will clearly state their first name and the name of their service.
- Aim to answer your enquiry there and then. If we cannot answer your enquiry or transfer you to the right person straight away, we will take your details and ask someone to contact you as soon as possible.
- When returning your calls, staff will clearly state their first name, the name of their service and reason for calling.
- When returning your calls, the caller identification on mobiles will show as 'Private number' and a message will be left where possible if you are unavailable.

Housing Solutions email contact - housing.options@southwark.gov.uk

Customers are welcome to email us any general queries that they may have relating to their housing issue or if they need further information.

We will aim to respond within 24 hours.

Housing Solutions Front Facing Services

The Housing Solutions Homesearch Centre is located at 25 Bournemouth Road, Peckham, London, SE15 4UJ.

When you visit the Homesearch Centre in person, we will:

- Aim to verify the reason for your visit within 10 minutes of your arrival
- Provide our service in a professional and efficient manner with due regard to customer service standards
- Give you clear and relevant advice and information in reply to any query.
- Provide induction loops, sign language facilities and an interpretation service if you need them.
- Use written and spoken language that is clear.
- Provide a private area for confidential enquiries
- Provide an emergency service outside office hours, 365 days of the year
- Collect and monitor information about customer satisfaction and customer profiles and use this information to improve our services and report findings annually. We appreciate and will act on your comments.

If you are threatened with homelessness we will:

- Work with you where possible to offer advice and assistance to prevent your homelessness
- Provide you with the offer of an interview in our offices or over the telephone
- Give you the contact details for the officer dealing with your case
- Following your full housing solution interview, your Housing Solutions Officer will write to you within 48 hours to confirm the advice / information given to you along with the actions both you and the council have agreed to take to assist you to prevent your homelessness. This will be your Personal Housing Plan.
- Keep you informed about the progress of the actions we have agreed to carry out in order to assist in preventing you becoming homeless
- Work with other internal and partner organisations where appropriate and refer you to them when necessary to assist in preventing your homelessness

If you are homeless we will:

- Assess your homeless applications in line with our statutory duties

- Arrange temporary accommodation in line with our statutory duties and continue to work with you to assist you in seeking a longer term housing solution.
- Keep you informed of the progress of your application
- Aim to write to you within 33 days from the date of your application with the decision and explaining the council's legal duty. We will let you know if it will take longer.
- Advise you on how to ask us to review your homelessness application if you disagree with our decision
- Provide temporary accommodation that is safe and clean and meets the requirements of the Housing Act 1996

Home visits

Where appropriate, mediation through home visits will be carried out to help our clients prevent their homelessness and will be prioritised by the Housing Solutions teams depending on the needs at the time.

If we visit you at home we will:

- Contact you within 2 working days to make an appointment where we deem that a home visit is urgent
- Contact you within 5 working days where the visit is not urgent to make an appointment
- Arrive at the agreed time and let you know in advance if we will be delayed by more than 15 minutes
- Advise you as soon as possible if we need to cancel an appointment. We will apologise and arrange another meeting wherever possible there and then
- Show you photo identification

Your responsibilities:

- We expect you to tell us truthfully everything we need to know to prevent you becoming homeless or to assess your homelessness application properly
- We expect you to co-operate with the Housing Solutions Service while we are assessing your housing options and taking any actions that has been agreed with you or that we are legally obliged to do.
- We expect you to inform us immediately if your circumstances change
- We expect you to provide us with all documents we ask you for to enable us to assist you and assess your application/s
- We expect you to keep to the rules of any temporary accommodation that we may arrange for you.
- Speak to us politely and courteously, without being abusive, intimidating, threatening or violent.

Housing Solutions Applications & Allocations team

We will:

- Tell you about the limited availability of council and housing association housing in the borough and how we allocate these homes to vulnerable people and other applicants.
- Provide a simple and straightforward online housing application form for applicants to use.
- Process online applications within 28 days on receipt of all required documentation.
- Send a letter to applicants giving information about their applications within 5 days of registration. On this letter we will give the name and location of the officer dealing with the application.
- Give advice and information about the application on the applicant's request.
- Acknowledge change of circumstance forms submitted online within 14 working days.
- Assist the Housing Solutions Advice Line to provide advice over the telephone.
- Ensure that applicants are provided with clear and concise information.
- Assess applications in accordance with the Councils allocation scheme.
- Review Southwark's Housing Register each year.
- On receipt of notification of a void property, (Council owned stock and Registered Providers) we will aim to advertise the majority of properties on the Homesearch Website within 10 working days.
- Ensure the housing allocated will be suitable to meet the housing and housing-associated needs of the applicant.
- Conduct an internal assessment on the applicant before allocating housing.
- Notify the applicant in a clear and concise manner if their bid is successful and provide relevant details of the accommodation.
- Ensure that property adverts provided on the Homesearch Website are clear and correct.
- Allocate properties in accordance with the Council's allocation scheme.

Financial Inclusion Team

We will:

- Award DHP in accordance with Southwark Council's DHP policy and DWP discretionary housing payment guidance notes.
- Assess all DHP and Rent arrears fund applications being consistent and fair at all times.
- Offer the same level of service to all of Southwark's diverse community
- Review Southwark Council's DHP and RAF policy every year
- Do our utmost to make the process of applying for DHP and RAF the simplest possible for Southwark tenants.
- Be committed to Southwark Councils digital inclusion by making available online all of our services
- Tell you about the availability of the DHP fund at all times
- Provide a simple and straightforward DHP application form.
- Process all DHP applications within 28 days on receipt of form in DHP team in-tray.
- Ensure that all applicants are notified in writing of the assessment decision.

- Work closely with you in order to help you find long term solutions to your housing situation i.e employment advise, downsizing etc.
- Do our utmost in order to prevent homelessness wherever this is possible.
- Organise Welfare Reform events with other agencies in order for tenants to access our services.

Tenancy Relations Service

We will:

- Provide specialist tenancy law advice to you via the most effective means.
- Be committed to ensure you are aware of your rights and responsibilities.
- Promote and protect your rights whenever needed.
- Use our specialist knowledge and skills to mediate on your behalf to resolve tenancy disputes.
- Be contactable 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to provide this support by phone or email.
- Provide you with the next available duty appointment and to ensure you have written notification of the date, time and location.
- Ensure our interview advice and agreed course of action is clear and conveyed in your first language via an interpreter if necessary.
- Correspond on your behalf to your landlord, or their agent / legal representative within 5 working days of your appointment.
- Keep you updated of your case through regular contact and support.
- Seek to prevent your homelessness wherever possible through mediation / negotiation or enforcement if necessary.
- Resolve any threats of illegal eviction and harassment.
- Conduct visits to your home to ensure your rights are protected.
- Assist you to regain entry to your home wherever possible or appropriate.
- Look at any wider support that can be offered by Southwark Council or partner agencies and to refer or signpost as appropriate.
- Continue to build and strengthen our partnership work with other agencies for your benefit.
- Work with landlords and agencies in the Borough to improve conditions the private rented sector for tenants and management of tenancies.

Reviews

We will:

- We will notify you of the procedures on review and who will be the case handler reviewing your decision
- We will endeavour to reach a decision on your case within the statutory guidelines, unless you request an extension or we require an extension to complete the review.
- We will notify of the decision and provide detailed reasons if the decision is not in your favour

- We will endeavour to respond to your queries within 48 hours of you making contact with the review team
- We will offer you a face to face interview, if we think that there is information that was not properly considered or was not available at the time of Councils first decision not to house you
- We will inform other services of our decision, if the review does not go in your favour.
- We will follow the council principles and ensure that we put you at the heart of any decision made.

Complaints

Southwark Council is committed to listening to its customers. The Council welcomes complaints, comments and compliments from its customers and service users and will use this feedback to improve our services.

Definition of a complaint

The Council will use the following definition of a complaint: “A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, action or lack of action by Southwark Council; in connection with any services it has responsibility for, which affects an individual customer or group of customers.”

A complaint may be generally defined as an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to a council service, which requires a response.

In all cases it is best to contact the manager of the team or service in the first instance to resolve the complaint except in cases where they are the subject of the complaint.

How to submit a complaint

Complaints to Southwark Council can be submitted in the following ways:

- Write to the manager of the team or service. This is often the quickest way to resolve the complaint.
- Online via the complaints web form - http://www.southwark.gov.uk/info/200025/comments_and_complaints (recommended)
- E-mail: complaints@southwark.gov.uk
- Phone: 020 7525 0042
- In writing – by sending a letter to the council at the following address:

**Complaints Team
Southwark Council
PO BOX 64529
London
SE1P 5LX**

When you can expect a response to a complaint

You can expect a response to your complaint within 15 working days. Where this is not possible we will contact you within 10 working days to inform you of the reasons for the delay and when you can expect a full response.

If you require information in a different language or in another format such as audio or large print please call: 020 7525 5000.

E-Mail: housingoptionsinbox@southwark.gov.uk

E-mail: housinglist@southwark.gov.uk

E-mail: financial.inclusion@southwark.gov.uk

E-mail: tenancy.relations@southwark.gov.uk

E-mail: review.team@southwark.gov.uk

Telephone: 020 7525 5950

Website: www.southwark.gov.uk or www.southwarkhomesearch.org.uk