

REPORT TO: Housing Committee 18 April 2005

REPORT ON: Owners' Charter

REPORT BY: Director of Housing

REPORT NO: 242-2005

1. **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

To seek Committee approval of the Owners' Charter.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Housing Committee:

- 2.1. Approve the details of the Owners' Charter (attached) as a statement of intent from Dundee City Council and Dundee Association of Council House Owners (DACHO) as a way forward to provide quality housing services.

3. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct financial implications of agreeing this report.

4. **SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

All sections of the community are empowered to participate in the decision making.

5. **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

All owners will be treated fairly and with respect.

6. **BACKGROUND**

The Convener of Housing has met on a quarterly basis with representatives from owners' organisation DACHO with the aim to improve services to owners of ex. Council house properties in the city. A key strand of this initiative was to develop an Owners' Charter to outline to owners the commitment from the Council to:

- provide quality housing services,
- deliver them fairly, courteously and responsibly by well informed employees who take care in what they do.

The Charter states that it is accepted that the people who use the Council's services have a right to be treated with dignity and respect and that staff will always do their best to meet owners' needs and expectations.

The Charter is very much a starting point for the way the representatives on the group wish to see the service developed. DACHO has confirmed their agreement to the Charter and a signing ceremony will be arranged if the Committee approves the Charter.

More recently the group representing owners in the Pentland area of the city (Pentland Homeowners Association) has joined the group and while there are still a few issues to discuss with them, they broadly agree the Charter.

7. **PROPOSAL**

The Owners' Charter covers similar areas to the Tenants' Charter that was developed many years ago. It also builds on other initiatives such as the Customer care standards which aim to improve customer service.

The key areas included in the Charter are:

- Working with DACHO and other organisations,
- Day to day services,
- Major improvements and repairs,
- Recharging for mutual works,
- Information to owners.

Each area lists a number of standards of service owners and owners' groups can expect.

Many of the items within the Charter already happen but they are now formalised. Others are things to aspire to and work towards. The Convener will continue to meet with DACHO and Pentland groups on a quarterly basis to discuss strategic issues and other aspects of the charter. The Convener's Group has already identified service charges as a priority issue they wish to examine in more detail. This will be one of the first issues for the group to investigate.

The Charter will be monitored and evaluated by the Convener's Policy group on improving services to owners, as well as customer satisfaction surveys that are currently carried out after major improvement work has been carried out.

8. **SUMMARY**

The aim of the Owners' Charter is to demonstrate through a range of statements and standards that the Council's Housing Department recognises ex. Council house owners as key stakeholders in the services it delivers and formalises their right to be informed, advised and involved in services and to achieve the same high standards of customer services expected by tenants.

9. **CONSULTATIONS**

The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Finance), Depute Chief Executive (Support Services), Dundee Association of Council House Owners (DACHO) and Pentland Homeowners Association group have been consulted regarding the contents of this report.

10. **BACKGROUND REPORTS**

None.

Elaine Zwirlein
Director of Housing
March 2005



EX-COUNCIL HOUSE OWNERS' CHARTER

CHARTER

The Housing Department is committed to providing you with quality services, delivered fairly, courteously and responsibly by well informed employees who take care in what they do.

We accept that people who use our services have a right to be treated with respect and dignity and will always do our best to meet your need/and expectations.

We will do our best:

- **To be fair, responsible and courteous in the delivery of quality services.**
- **To be professional and have well informed employees who take pride in what they do.**
- **To be positive and provide services which meet our customers' requirements.**
- **To specify what we will provide and to inform our customers what they can expect to receive.**
- **To get things right first time.**
- **To enable customers to tell us when we fail.**
- **To respond efficiently to customers' complaints and use customer feedback to ensure continuous improvement.**
- **To recognise that owners are key stakeholders in neighbourhoods throughout the City.**
- **To ensure that owners have the opportunity to play a full part in sustaining the neighbourhoods they live in.**
- **To be sensitive and discreet and maintain a professional manner at all times.**
- **To respect your privacy at all times.**
- **To achieve value for money at all times.**
- **To demonstrate active involvement with our customers in the spirit of the Charter's commitment.**

WORKING WITH DACHO AND OTHER OWNERS' ORGANISATIONS

- We will strive to meet with owners' organisations on a quarterly basis to discuss strategic issues and other aspects of the owners' charter.
- We will discuss forthcoming major repairs and improvements that affect owner occupiers.
- We will endeavour to participate in site visits to assess issues arising from the repair and improvement programme.
- We will monitor and evaluate the owners' charter on a regular basis with DACHO/other owners' organisations.
- We will consult on our Section Action Plan regarding issues that affect owner occupiers.
- When inviting Councillors/Officials to meetings, owners' groups should provide written details of the meeting ten days in advance of the meeting where possible. The Council will also comply with this timescale when inviting owners' groups to meetings.
- The provision of questions and information in advance of meetings will result in more information being provided at the meeting by both Councillors and Officials.
- If relevant Officials are not available an alternative date for meeting will be arranged.
- Owners' Groups can submit their priorities for repairs and improvements for consideration. These can be submitted to the Improvements & Maintenance Unit when the draft capital plan is under production in Autumn of each year.
- The Council will provide details of the standard of information and consultation for owners' groups on each type of project. Standards will be based on the resources available for this work.
- We will carry out annual surveys of customer satisfaction involving owners who have recently benefited from major repairs and improvements. We will discuss the format of the questionnaires and the results of the surveys with owners' organisations.

DAY TO DAY SERVICES

Day to day services as they relate to owner occupiers are delivered from Area Housing Offices, Neighbourhood Housing Offices, and from the Improvements & Maintenance Unit and Private Sector Services Unit in the City Centre. Owners' services delivered from these offices are likely to be:

- Major repairs and improvements.
- Day to day mutual repairs.
- Assistance with neighbour disputes and anti-social behaviour.
- Open plan maintenance.
- Repair grants.
- Sale of additional land.

Information on day to day services:

The Council produces a range of information for owners about day to day services. These will include information about:

- Office opening hours.
- The repairs services.
- Emergency contact numbers.
- The Council's complaints procedure.
- Details of repair and improvement grants.

It is planned to develop an owners' manual which will be issued to all new owners who purchase from the Council and other owners on request.

- Responsibilities for domestic maintenance to be clearly defined for both owners and tenants, e.g. stair cleaning etc..

MAJOR IMPROVEMENTS AND REPAIRS

This section recommends the level of participation and service which owners should expect when major repairs and improvements projects are planned for their areas. It intends to create projects which run smoothly and a successful working relationship for all involved.

- Individual owners should expect three years notice of major repair and improvement works to their homes. This would exclude urgent works to be carried out.
- Dates that we expect major projects to start.
- The amount of notice that will be given before work starts to their home/block.
- A guide to the amount of work that will take place including the level of disruption expected.
- A contact person in the Housing Department.
- An emergency contact number where necessary.
- If there is a demand for a public meeting from owners involved in a project then this will be held prior to a project starting.

Owners' groups should expect:

- To be notified in writing if a project is planned for their area in the coming year.
- To have an opportunity to comment on leaflets to be sent to individual owners.
- To receive a detailed briefing from the Housing Department before work goes on site.
- To receive details of how owners will be consulted on the project.
- To be briefed prior to any public meetings.
- To be given regular updates on the progress of projects involving owner occupiers.
- To be informed if there is to be a lengthy delay to the start of any project in the area.
- To be informed if a project originally planned for the area is withdrawn from the programme.

Where possible the Housing Department will offer choices to owners on particular projects. This will depend on resources available and legal restrictions. Any choices which are available will be discussed in advance with owners' groups and/or individual owners.

Training on aspects of capital programmes as they relate to owners will be given to staff and offered to owners' groups.

Major regeneration projects and demolitions

Sometimes the Council will propose projects which will mean big changes to an area. This could be a major regeneration project to improve an area or, where necessary the demolition of housing that is no longer needed. In both cases local owners and owners' groups will be consulted on the methods and timescales to be used.

Improvements

On some projects improvements to their blocks may be proposed. The Council will consult with all owners affected and give them the choice of whether to opt for improvements or not.

- Opportunities for the improvement of mutually owned property will be discussed with owners where appropriate, i.e. provision of solar power where grant funding may be available.
- The Council will share information with DACHO and owner occupiers on initiatives or funding that may also apply to owner occupiers.
- The Council will explore the possibility of contributing to owners' initiatives in blocks in which they live, i.e. controlled entry installation.
- Where available, guarantees for work carried out will be passed to owner occupiers.
- All works to be carried out to the highest standard and completion certificates copied to owner occupiers involved.
- The Council will respect owners' privacy and take all necessary steps to ensure the security of their homes and a safe working environment.
- All areas will be left clean and tidy at the end of the working day, and all rubbish removed at the end of the contract.

RECHARGING FOR MUTUAL WORKS

- Estimates of work to be carried out will be sent to all owners affected at least two weeks prior to work commencing.
- If estimates increase by more than £100 or 10% (whichever is the lesser) then owners will be informed.
- The Administration Team within the Improvements & Maintenance Unit will be available to answer any queries on procedural matters to do with mutual projects.
- Completion letters to be sent to all owners as projects complete but prior to billing.
- Invoices for major works carried out will include a detailed explanation in plain English of the work carried out.
- The Council will display an open policy of tendering and pricing as far as is possible with due regard to commercial confidentiality.
- Owners to have the right to commission private surveys subject to health and safety good practice, and with the prior agreement of the Council.
- The Council will provide assistance where necessary to owners in the completion of grant forms.

INFORMATION TO OWNERS

The Council will provide full and clear information on its housing services relating to owners and how the best use can be made of these services.

Information will be available to individual owners and owners' groups.

In addition:

- When an owner or owners' group writes to the Housing Department a full reply will be given within ten working days.
- If the information is not readily available an explanation and a likely date for a full reply will be given within five working days.
- All letters will name the person who is dealing with the enquiry.
- All written information to owners and owners' groups will be in clear everyday language. This will include standard letters and replies to any enquiries.
- The need for translations into other languages will be identified and acted upon.
- Local Councillors will receive:
 - Copies of any letters sent by the Housing Department to a number of owners in the area.
 - Copies of any correspondence about local issues sent to local owners' groups.
- Owners' groups will be given information on the Council, its Committees and Sub-Committees. This will explain what they do, who sits on them and when they meet.
- The Council will supply information about the business of its Committees. This will be subject to the requirement of confidentiality and the Council's standing orders.
- The Dundee Association of Council House Owners will receive:
 - Copies of the Agenda and minutes of the Housing Committee.
 - Copies of any background papers requested within ten working days.
- Individual owners' groups will receive:
 - Copies of Housing Committee reports relevant to their group.
 - Copies of all other Housing Committee Reports on request within ten working days.

DACHO will undertake to supply a copy of its minutes to the Housing Convener and Depute Housing Convener. Owners' groups can send copies of minutes to their local Area Housing Manager if they wish.

The Council will provide information on its complaints procedure and how to use it.

Meeting individual owners:

- Personal enquiries will be dealt with by reception staff at the time of enquiry, or they will offer to arrange an interview with an appropriate member of staff.
- When necessary, Housing staff will try to visit owner occupiers at a suitable time. If an owner is out a card will be left, giving the reason for the call, the name of the member of staff and details of how to contact them.
- If an owner cannot be in at the time of an agreed visit, they will inform the Housing Department if possible as will a member of staff if they cannot attend at the agreed time.