HOUSING STRATEGY

Housing Customer Access Strategy

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

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1. Introduction

Our housing vision is “Working together to deliver affordable housing and a high-quality customer experience that puts the needs and wellbeing of residents first”.

Welcome to the Harrow Housing Access Strategy (2024). This strategy is designed to explain how we will make housing services more accessible and ensure that communication and information for residents is clear, accessible, relevant, timely and appropriate to the diverse needs of residents. We want residents to have the best possible experience when contacting us. Our aim is to be respectful when engaging with residents and we expect the same in return. We want to maintain good two-way communication and provide timely responses to queries.

We have tried to consider all aspects and consider the diversity of resident’s needs. We have focused on Harrow’s values, specifically in relation to putting residents first.

Our Council website and housing online account have been designed with this in mind. Residents can experience a seamless service where they are able to access the information they need in one place.

Consumer Standards (2024)

Transparency, influence and accountability standard

We aim for our information to be clear, accessible, relevant, timely and appropriate to the diverse needs of tenants. This includes supporting tenants and prospective tenants to use online landlord services via our face-to-face services at Greenhill library/ Gayton Road/ Conversation Café if required.

We appreciate that some information may be difficult to understand so we are happy to discuss matters with residents and prospective residents, who are supported by a representative or advocate in interactions about landlord services.

2. Housing contact directory

Service	How to access
Housing Online Account/ housing portal	To create a Housing Online Account visit www.harrow.gov.uk/housing You will need your tenancy reference number
Harrow website - housing home page	To view the housing page on the Harrow website visit www.harrow.gov.uk/housing
Home visits	Home visits can be booked by visiting www.harrow.gov.uk/housing *Under housing officer search for tenancy agreement*
Translation Services	360 Word can be used for language translations including British Sign Language. In order to use the service, create a Word Ski account https://www.wordskii.com/ and contact 360 Word for an appointment email: teamwork@word360.co.uk or call 0121 554 1981.
Social media	Visit www.harrow.gov.uk scroll to bottom of page, select contact us. On top right-hand side, you will find links for Linked in, Twitter and Facebook.
Face to face	Greenhill Library, Monday to Friday 10am -6pm, at 6 Gayton Road. Appointment service between 9am and 4pm Conversation Cafes
Monthly housing drop-in sessions	Monthly drop-ins are published in Homing In magazine www.harrow.gov.uk/homingin
Telephone	Contact Centre 020 8901 2630
Housing Matters webinars	The Housing Matters webinars are regular meetings open to all tenants and leaseholders. A signer can be provided with 5 days notice. Email – Rinvolve@harrow.gov.uk
Leaseholders	Phone: 020 8901 2630 Email: leaseholdandrtbservices@harrow.gov.uk Website: www.harrow.gov.uk/housing

3. Purpose and Commitments

Harrow is a diverse borough which offers a service to people who have many different cultural backgrounds and vulnerability needs. By making our services accessible, benefits are felt by all residents and stakeholders. We want to remove all access barriers in line with the Equality and Diversity Policy.

We are committed to putting residents first and to providing services that are built around resident's needs. To achieve this, residents need to inform us of any existing needs and changes to their circumstances.

We are committed to ensuring that our staff deliver a high-quality customer service whilst interacting with customers. Staff are being trained about the Council's customer first ethos.

If you have an appointment, we will aim to see you within 5 minutes of the appointment time. If this is not possible, we will apologise and explain why we will be late.

If we need to visit you, we will:

- Carry clear documentation that identifies us as Council employees or contractors.
- Aim to arrive within 15 minutes of any pre-arranged appointment.
- We will endeavour to let you know within 1 working day if we need to change the time and/or date of your appointment or visit.

The Housing Online Account is designed to provide speedy and personalised access to online housing services. You will need to have a MyHarrow account. By reporting and using the online account, this should help to reduce call waiting times for those who don't use the internet.

Our commitment is to adapt our communication style and understand the reasons for contact. We use a variety of communication tools so that we can deal with resident's queries efficiently.

4. Objectives

1. Make the Housing Online Account the channel of choice by ensuring self-service is simple to use and engaging. We will assist those needing support to access online services at our housing drop-in sessions, face-to-face services and Conversation Café.
2. Provide a positive experience across all of our customer channels.
3. Aim to resolve issues at the first point of contact wherever we can and if we can't, signpost to someone who can.
4. Engage customers in improving customer access, learn from feedback and monitor our performance.
5. Learn from our mistakes and put plans in place to prevent them happening again.
6. Remove all barriers to enable equal access to services.

5. Customer Access Channels

Housing Online Account

For council tenants and shared owners, you will need a “MyHarrow” account to access the Housing Online Account. This is an authenticated online account and will ensure that only you can access your details The MyHarrow Account enables residents to view personalised tenancy, rent and repairs information (and other services such as your Council Tax and Housing Benefits) 24 hours, 7 days a week.

The Online Account is linked to your resident’s “MyHarrow” account which only requires one sign-in for all Council related services. Through this service you can report and track your repair and check your rent balance and transactions. www.harrow.gov.uk/housing

Harrow website

Residents can access non-housing related services on the main council website by visiting www.harrow.gov.uk. If you have signed up for a MyHarrow account you can access council tax information, view school applications and view license applications. To register: www.harrow.gov uk. /mha.

For Homes for Harrow, housing strategies and policies, performance and regulation, private rented property rights, how to make a complaint or concerns about losing your home or other housing needs and leasehold enquiries, please visit www.harrow.gov.uk/housing

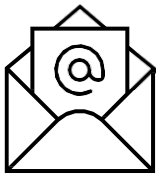
Phone contact

0208 901 2630 Tenants and leaseholders

0208 424 1093 opt 1 Housing applicants and private rent

Out of hours emergencies - after 5pm to 9am 7 days a week 0208 901 2630

- When you contact us by phone, we aim to resolve your query at first point of contact.
- Taking the time to fully address an enquiry does mean that wait times may be longer than usual and we appreciate your patience when calling.
- The Customer Service Advisor or officer will be courteous, polite, and professional and we expect residents to treat staff with the same respect.
- Where we are unable to resolve your issue at the first point of contact, we will let you know how it will be handled and who it has been passed onto.
- If you leave us a voicemail message, we will aim reply within one working day.



E-Form – www.harrow.gov.uk/housing

Email

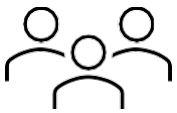
Letter – *see postal address below*

Postal address

London Borough of Harrow
Housing Services
PO Box 1367
Forward Drive
Harrow
HA3 3QT

Webforms are the quickest way to contact us as the information is added directly into our computer system and the relevant staff are notified immediately. When you send us an email or submit a form online, you will usually receive an automated reply to confirm we have received your query. We understand that some tenants prefer to send information by post but please remember that it can take several days for letters to received, sorted and redirected to the relevant staff/team.

We aim to respond to letters, emails, and online forms within 5 working days. Depending on the issue, it may take longer to resolve if it requires investigation which involves other areas. In such instances, you will be kept up to date accordingly.



Visits

General needs tenants

If residents cannot access services online, they can visit Greenhill library, Perceval Square, College Road, HA1 1GX.

- Monday to Friday between 10am – 6pm.
- For those who need in-person help to complete online forms and make payments, an assistance service is available.

- Our self-service computer area is open, so you can come in to access online services, no library membership is required. There are no bookable face-to-face appointments.

Complex and urgent homelessness queries

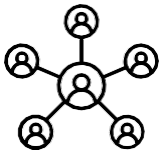
Applicants can visit 6 Gayton Road, HA1 2FB to make an appointment.
You can contact our Homeless Assessment team by completing the online form below. If you are homeless on the day or your enquiry is urgent, you can speak with a Housing Advice Officer between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday on 0208 424 1093. For emergencies outside these hours, including weekends - calls to this number will be diverted to the Emergency Social Services duty officer who will be able to assist you with your housing situation.

Homeless enquiry form
Telephone:0208 424 1093

Face to Face housing surgeries/drop-in sessions

Residents can talk to staff face to face at housing surgeries, with no appointment. Housing drop-in sessions occur monthly and are published in Homing In magazine and on the website.
www.harrow.gov.uk/homingin

- If you visit us, we aim to see you within 15 minutes of your arrival. If this is not possible, we will apologise and explain why.
- For an appointment, we will aim to see you within 5 minutes of the appointment time. If this is not possible, we will apologise and explain why we will be late. We will endeavour to let you know within 1 working day if we need to change the time of the appointment.
- If we need to visit you, we will:
    - Present clear documentation that identifies us as council employees or contractors.
    - Aim to arrive within 15 minutes of any pre-arranged appointment. ○ Inform you within 1 working day if we need to change the time or date of our visit.



Social Media

To access Linked In, Twitter and Facebook via www.harrow.gov.uk scroll to the bottom of the page and select “contact us”.

Sensory Services

The London Borough of Harrow has signed up with an external provider, Word360, to provide the following sensory services as and when needed. This service is accessed through council officers.

British Sign Language

Interpreting

Translation

Transcription

Audio Visual

Accessibility Services

6. Other relevant strategies and policies

This Access Strategy has taken into account Harrow's other strategies and policies which are outlined below:

Equality of Opportunity Policy

Cabinet Report

Resident Engagement Strategy

Harrow's Digital Infrastructure Strategy

People with Needs Policy

Reasonable Adjustments Policy

7. Equality impact assessment

The Equality impact assessment is due shortly.

Appendix 1

Free ways to translate, make text audible or make text larger

Assistance Dogs

If you have an assistance dog you know how invaluable they are when it comes to getting out and about safely and with greater confidence.

As an assistance dog owner, you may occasionally be refused access to a restaurant, shop, taxi, or other service. Being refused access can be difficult and distressing. Confusion and ignorance of the law may be the cause, and a simple explanation is often all that is needed. However, in some cases further action may need to be taken.

The law protects your right to access most services with your assistance dog. In exceptional circumstances where you can't be accompanied by your assistance dog, reasonable adjustments should be made to ensure you can access the service.

For more information about your rights under the Equality Act 2010, visit the Equality and Human Rights Commission website - Equality Human Rights Commission. If you experience an access refusal from a service provider, you can also seek advice from the organisation that provided your assistance dog - Assistance Dogs UK Members.

London Borough of Harrow fully supports the rights of assistance dog owners to access services when accompanied by their assistance dog.

Accessibility Options

Here are several ways that residents can access services to make text audible and larger font, British Sign Language and access translations.

AI

AI-powered tools such as Copilot and ChatGPT can play a valuable role in improving accessibility across the London Borough of Harrow's services. They can instantly translate written information into multiple languages, helping residents who speak English as an additional language engage more confidently with council communications. These tools can also read text aloud, simplify complex documents, or convert speech into written text, supporting people with visual impairments, low literacy, or other communication needs. By offering flexible, on-demand support, AI assistants help reduce barriers, promote independence, and ensure that information is accessible to a wider range of residents.

Device Settings

Most devices already include some assistive technology. Look for accessibility settings within your device to see your available options.

We have listed some free options below that you can access at any time online. Most devices already include some assistive technology. Look for accessibility settings within your device to see your available options.

Find accessibility settings in different devices:

- **Windows:** Start > Settings > Ease of Access
- **Apple Mac macOS:** System Preferences > Accessibility
- **iPhone iOS:** Settings > General > Accessibility
- **Android:** Settings > Accessibility

If you need to hear information:

You can use free built-in screen readers and text-to-speech software to hear information. Here are some of the most popular options available on different devices.

Microsoft Windows

- NVDA: To hear information on Windows devices you can use NVDA which is one of the most popular screen readers available. It's free but only available on devices using Microsoft Windows. It shares most of the same features as the most popular paid alternatives. Find out more about NVDA screen reader features and download

- Windows Narrator is the screen reader for people using a Windows device. It comes already installed with Windows version 10 and later. To find out more, go to Microsoft's complete guide to Windows Narrator

Apple

- To hear information on Apple devices you can use Apple VoiceOver and Speak Screen. VoiceOver is Apple's built-in screen reader on all their devices. Apple also has its Speak Screen feature, available on iPhone, iPad, and Mac. They both read text aloud. But VoiceOver also helps people with no vision to navigate pages more easily. Find out more about VoiceOver and Speak Screen on Apple's vision accessibility page.

Android

- TalkBack: To hear information on Android mobile devices you can use Android TalkBack which is the Google screen reader included on Android mobile devices. Find out more about TalkBack on Google's internet page. get started on Android TalkBack.

Read Aloud

- You can also hear information using Edge Read Aloud browser. The Edge browser has built-in text-to-speech functionality. Select the Read Aloud symbol in the browser's search bar to hear the web page read aloud.

Browser extension

Browser extensions are like apps that allow you to add extra features to web browsers. Browser extensions are also sometimes called add-ons. Read&Write is a free extension designed to help people with a wide range of vision impairments. Its features include text-tospeech and audio downloads of web page text. Read&Write is available on the following browsers and devices:

- Chrome Read&Write extension
- iPhone and iPad Read&Write app
- Firefox Read&Write plug-in
- Edge Read&Write extension

Large Text

If you need information in a larger size you can zoom web pages in and out:

- On Windows use the keyboard shortcut **Control - Plus sign** and **Control -Minus sign**

- On Apple Mac devices use the keyboard shortcut **- Plus sign** and **Command -**
- On a smartphone or tablet use the pinch to zoom finger gesture to make the page larger and smaller.

Find out how to change font size:

- Chrome font size settings
- Safari font size settings
- Edge font size settings
- Firefox font size settings
- iPhone and iPad font size settings
- Android font size settings

Screen Magnifier

Your device may have a built-in magnifier to make part of your screen easier to see. Check the accessibility settings in your device for your available options.

For more information on how to turn on magnification, go to:

- Microsoft's guide to using Magnifier for Windows users
- Apple's guide to zooming in and out on Mac
- Google's guide to using magnification on your Android screen • Apple's guide to iPhone Magnifier

Colour Contrast

You can make information easier to see by changing the amount of colour contrast on the screen.

Find out how to change:

- Windows colour contrast settings
- Apple Mac colour contrast settings
- Android colour contrast settings
- iPhone and iPad colour contrast settings

British Sign Language

If you require a British sign language interpreter, we will make a referral on your behalf to Word360 who can help with the following:

- Face to face interpreting (please ensure you provide a minimum of 48 hours notice)
- Telephone Interpreting
- Video Interpreting
- BSL interpreting
- Document translations
- Braille, Large print and other accessibility services

Translations

If you need information in a different language, browsers like Chrome and Safari can translate pages into over 100 languages. You can also use the Read&Write browser extension which has a built-in translator.
Find out more on how to Change Chrome languages and translate web pages
Find out more on how to Translate a web page in Safari on Mac
Find out how to download Read&Write
Find out how to set up Windows Speech Recognition
Find out how to turn on Voice Control on Mac

Request information in different formats

The fastest way to get information in different formats is to use one of the suggestions on this page. If none of these options work, contact the service directly to ask for information in the format you need. For example, braille, easy read, or more accessible PDFs.

Appendix 2

Customer Service Standards

Version control	V2
Author	Sabrina Sang
Changes made: Added 360 Word information into directory on page 3. Added AI option in Appendix 1	**16/12/2025**
Next review due date *(subject to changes in regulation or best practice)*	**N/A**
Date of Consultation with Residents' Board	**16/05/2024**
Date of Approval by Housing Senior Management Team	**14/10/2024**
Date of Consultation with Legal Department	**25/10/2024**
Equality Impact Assessment - *to be completed*	
Date of Implementation	**28/10/2024**
Updated by A Watkins	**3/02/2025**
Details of any changes or reviews should be added. Changed the phone number for Contact Centre to 0208 901 2630	**20/05/2025**