

Customer Compliments, Complaints & Feedback Policy

Policy ref: Customer Complaints

Policy author/holder: Executive Director of Neighbourhoods and Customer Services

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1 Introduction

We welcome complaints, compliments and comments as an opportunity to listen to what our customers say is important to them and improve our services.

Whilst we want to provide excellent customer services and always aim to get things right first time, we accept that sometimes things can go wrong. When that happens we will say 'sorry', and resolve customers' concerns as quickly as possible.

Our approach to complaints is therefore to:

- Listen and understand
- Say sorry when we've got it wrong
- Put things right
- Learn and improve

2 Compliments and feedback

All customers are encouraged to tell us when they feel that they have received outstanding service or when they have suggestions for how a service can be improved.

Compliments are recorded to help us understand what is important to customers and so that they can be used to further improve our services in the future.

Feedback on compliments is given to staff and publicised in recognition of the outstanding customer service delivered by our teams.

3 Complaints

A complaint is when a customer tells us that they are unhappy with the service we have provided, a decision we have made or the action or lack of action taken by us. Complaints can be from an individual or groups of customers.

Some complaints fall outside the scope of our policy including:

- Complaints about issues where more than 12 months has passed unless they form part of an on-going issue;
- Complaints where we have no responsibility, such as Police, NHS or Local Authority services;
- Complaints in which court or tribunal proceedings have been issued
- Complaints from one resident about another where customers should contact the neighbourhood housing team for advice on neighbour disputes;
- Liability, personal injury or other insurance claims;
- Complaints that have previously been considered through our internal complaints process and matters already being dealt with by the Ombudsman service.

Where we cannot consider a complaint within our policy, we will explain why and offer advice or support to customers to try and help them resolve the issue.

4 Complain to us

We will tell customers how to raise concerns with us, publicising and explaining our complaints policy and process.

We're happy to accept complaints, compliments and comments both verbally and in writing. We'll also accept a complaint made on a customer's behalf through an advocate, for example, from a friend, support worker, relative or MP. Where complaints are made through an advocate we will, where appropriate need to confirm this with the customer.

We recognise that some people may find it difficult to access our complaints process and/or explain their concerns. The team will offer advice and support on submitting a complaint where required.

We will treat complaints received through petitions in the same way as all other complaints. If it is helpful we are happy to meet the petitioners as a group. To manage the complaint effectively we will ask the group to nominate a single point of contact and we will work with this person to resolve the complaint. Where we provide a written response we will make this available to all petitioners.

All complaint information will be handled sensitively, telling only those who need to know and complying with relevant data protection requirements.

5 Complaint resolution

We recognise that sometimes we make mistakes and that great service is about putting things right as soon as we hear about them. When customers first raise an issue with us, we will take the time to listen to their concerns. Where we have made a mistake, we will say sorry and take the opportunity to quickly try and put things right.

When a complaint is received we will:

- Aim to resolve it at the first point of contact. If we're not able to resolve it immediately, we will agree with the customer a suitable response time
- Respond quickly, in a positive, understanding way
- Listen and treat all customers with respect and courtesy
- Investigate fully and ensure we address all relevant aspects
- Be clear about what we can and cannot do, managing expectations
- Learn from it and use it to improve our services to customer

All complaints, comments and feedback where a Health and Safety risk is identified will be formally recorded and immediately referred to a senior manager. The Health and Safety manager will be advised.

Stage 1

In most cases we will quickly be able to resolve customer concerns; in cases where we are not able to do this we will treat the issue as a complaint. The service improvement team will investigate, liaise with relevant staff, and communicate with the customer to try and reach an immediate resolution (24 hours). Where we cannot do this the service improvement team will work with the relevant manager/team leader to resolve the complaint and formally respond to the customer within 5 working days.

When trying to resolve complaints, the service improvement team will try and identify what went wrong and what we need to do to put things right. We will be open and acknowledge when and why we made a mistake. We will always aim to return the customer to the position they would have been in if there was no service failure. If we cannot do this or if our delay has caused difficulty for the customer then we will consider financial compensation in line with our compensation guidance.

We recognise that some complaints may require detailed investigations, where this is the case we will discuss this with the customer and agree the timescale in which we will respond.

There may be occasions during the complaints process when we are in disagreement with customers regarding their desired outcome. In these instances, mediation may be an appropriate way to move the complaint forwards towards a resolution and we will happily offer free mediation services to customers where appropriate.

When we receive a complaint we will agree with the customer how they would like us to respond. This may be by telephone, text, e-mail, face to face or in writing. Where complaints are made through social media chat forums we will agree an appropriate way to respond and send a private message to the customer.

Stage 2 Senior manager review

A customer who is not happy with our response can request a review of their complaint. A senior manager will look at and consider the decision made at stage 1. This could involve meeting with or speaking to the customer to discuss the complaint and the possible next steps in resolving it. The timescales to respond will be agreed directly between the manager and the customer but will normally be no more than 7 days. If it will take longer than 7 days, this must be agreed in advance with the customer and a full explanation provided.

5 Redress and compensation

All staff can agree small goodwill gestures and compensation payments in line with our compensation guidance as part of the complaints process.

Financial compensation will be considered where we are unable to take action to redress an adverse impact on the customer caused by a service failure, or where the customer has incurred financial loss, or where we are under a statutory or contractual obligation to compensate a customer.

We may seek specialist advice regarding appropriate compensation levels from solicitors or the Housing Ombudsman service.

Where a complaint involves personal injury, the complaint should be referred directly to our insurers.

6 Learning from complaints, compliments and feedback

We will have systems in place which enable us to record and analyse data from complaints, compliments and feedback.

We will use complaints, compliments and feedback as opportunities to learn and improve our services. We will identify the causes of service failure and use this insight to address the underlying issues and improve services. We will use the compliments and positive feedback we receive from customers to help us understand what is important and inform future service design.

Once a complaint is closed we will contact customers to ask for their views on the handling and outcome. We will use this insight to improve our complaints process.

7 Culture and behaviours

Our staff will be trained on our approach to managing complaints ensuring that we achieve a consistent, high quality, transparent, customer-focussed response across the organisation.

We will make staff aware of the importance of customer feedback in driving continuous improvement and the impact on customer service of a positive complaints culture.

We will always treat customers with respect and courtesy and we would expect customers to similarly treat our staff in the same way.

8 Monitoring and review

We will report to the Customer Services Committee at agreed intervals providing an overview of complaint handling and management. Information to be provided will include:

- Complaint themes
- Complaint outcomes and recommendations
- Numbers of complaints
- Customer satisfaction with complaint handling

We will publish details of the nature of complaints we receive and how we have learnt from them to our customers at least annually.

This policy will be reviewed every three years or more regularly as required.

9 Legal & regulatory considerations

This Policy meets the Regulator for Social Housing's Regulatory Framework requirement to have a clear, simple and accessible complaints process, which ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly.

This policy also meets the requirement of the Localism Act which provides that tenants can, when their landlords' complaints procedure has been exhausted, ask for their complaints to be considered by a 'designated person'; and the Housing Act 1996 requirement that social landlords are members of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme.

10 Linked/associated policies and other references

- Compensation Guidance
- Data protection policy and procedures
- Unacceptable customer behaviour guidance