

Complaints policy

Review: January 2022

Complaints policy

Why we have this policy

Sometimes things go wrong and customers don't get the service they expect or we fall short of the standards we've promised.

We use the Housing Ombudsman definition of a complaint:

"An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents."

Building and maintaining our customers' trust is at the heart of our approach and we'll make sure customers feel we're taking their issues seriously.

This policy explains how we'll make it easy for customers to tell us when things have gone wrong and how we'll try to resolve them.

Our approach when something goes wrong...

We hope that a customer never has to let us know something hasn't gone well or that they've been let down by us.

But if it happens, we need to make it right.

- When a customer tells us about an issue, we'll try to sort it out there and then.
- We'll be reasonable and try to make sure it doesn't end in a complaint.
- We expect, and empower, everyone to do what they can to prioritise the issues our customers face and to fix them as quickly as possible.
- We won't close a complaint until we've tried everything that we believe we could reasonably have done to resolve it.
- We'll also look at the cause of the issue so we can stop it happening again.
- If we receive a complaint relating to safeguarding, we'll follow the steps set out in our safeguarding policy to address it.

Resolving complaints as quickly as we can

When we first receive a complaint, we aim to agree a solution with our customer within ten working days. If this isn't possible (for example, if the complaint is complicated), we may need a further ten days. These are referred to as 'stage 1' complaints.

If a customer is unhappy with the decision they've received at stage 1, they have a right to review (this is explained later in this document).

When a complaint is reviewed, it's known as a 'stage 2' complaint.

We aim to have a decision on these complaints within 20 working days. As with stage 1 complaints, we sometimes need extra time to make the right decision, so we may not be able to respond for a further 30 days.

The availability of employees and customers, the nature and complexity of the case, and the number of agencies involved will all affect the speed at which a complaint can be resolved. So, while we aim to respond in these timescales, it may not always be possible. The most important thing is to reach a resolution that's satisfactory and fair to everyone involved.

Building trust with our customers is important to us

If we can't agree on a solution, we'll be very clear and honest about what we can and will do – and what we won't do.

Being accessible

If the complainant needs complaints information in another format or language, we can arrange this.

When someone makes a complaint

We'll encourage customers to provide their contact details, so we can investigate and follow up on their complaint.

Anonymous complaints

If a customer makes a complaint in confidence, their identity will only be known to the person who received the complaint and to a member of the Resolution team.

If it's not possible to fully investigate a complaint without disclosing the identity of the complainant, we'll ask their permission to do this. Whilst we respect our customers' right to anonymity, if they don't give us permission, we may not be able to investigate fully.

However, we'll still record and monitor anonymous complaints.

How we'll try to put things right

We'll always try to put things right and that usually means getting the customer back to where they should have been before they had a problem.

For most problems, a genuine apology and putting things right straight away is where it ends.

Sometimes, if it's taken us longer than it should have to get something sorted out or if the problem keeps happening, we may offer a small gesture of goodwill.

As a charitable organisation, we rarely offer compensation unless the customer has suffered financial loss, like damage to their personal belongings or paying for a service they didn't have.

The things we'll look at will be:

- how much the customer has been disrupted
- how long it's taken to put right
- if there's been significant distress.

These are our customer commitments:

- We make it easy
- We take responsibility
- We get it done
- We keep in touch

This is how we apply our customer commitments if a service goes wrong

- We'll make it easy to tell us when something's gone wrong.
- We'll make sure that we understand what's happened from the customer's viewpoint, and look for a solution that works for them.
- We'll be clear about what we can and will do, and then do it.
- We'll tell the customer who will help them if the issue is complex.
- We'll keep in touch until everything is sorted out.

Right to ask for a review

If a customer isn't happy with our response or how we've dealt with a problem, we'll:

- review it to check we've been reasonable
- make sure we've focused on getting a reasonable solution.

We'll also look at how we handled things and how long it took to reply to the customer.

We're accountable

When we carry out reviews, these will be overseen by the Director responsible for the service.

Working with our involved residents to shape our services

Complaints highlight to us which services are working well and which need a closer look. The residents in our Scrutiny Coordination Group play an important role in this. They:

- consider feedback from our customers
- help us learn from what's gone wrong
- complete a scrutiny activity
- make sure that we put measures in place to fix things
- check that we act on recommendations that come out of the scrutiny.

Working with residents in the scrutiny groups allows us to hear first-hand about our customers' experiences. As a result, our residents' views are the starting point for any changes we make.

Working this closely with our residents makes sure the way we handle complaints is fair and transparent to all.

When we can't reach an agreement

When we've done all we reasonably can to resolve a complaint but a customer is still unhappy, they can ask a 'designated person' (MP or a local councillor) to get involved, or wait eight weeks and ask the Housing Ombudsman Service to look at their complaint.

The ombudsman service is a free and independent dispute resolution service. The ombudsman will contact us to get the facts of the case from our point of view.

The ombudsman will then make a final decision and inform us and the customer.

Housing Ombudsman Service

- Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool L33 7WQ
- Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk
- Phone: 0300 111 3000

First Tier Tribunal (property Chamber) Southern region

For shared owners and long leaseholders who have complaints about service charges and the terms of their leases

- Residential Property, Havant Justice Centre, The Court House, Elmleigh Road, Havant, Hampshire PO9 2AL
- Email: rpsouthern@hmcts.gsi.gov.uk
- Phone: 01243 779394

Financial Ombudsman Service

Complaints over debt advice for 3rd party creditors only

- Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool L33 7WQ
- Email: complaint.info@financial-ombudsman.org.uk
- Phone: 020 7964 10000

When the same complaint is continually raised

Sometimes customers keep contacting us about the same thing, even when we've come up with a resolution and carried out a review.

We have to make a decision about how to handle these.

Unreasonable customer behaviour

We welcome complaints and we don't normally restrict the number of complaints or level of contact made by any of our customers.

However, we may occasionally receive complaints from customers whose behaviour and/or frequent contact stop us resolving the complaint, or may affect the ability of our teams to help other customers.

In these cases, we'll speak with them to understand why they keep contacting us. We'll also liaise with external agencies to find out if they need support.

We'll explain clearly what we've done to resolve the complaint and make a decision about what we'll do the next time they contact us about the same issue.

This could be to:

- acknowledge the contact but not offer any other responses
- ask them to only contact one named employee
- ask them to only contact us using a channel of our choice.

We'll review customers we manage this way each year. But, if a customer wants to challenge the way they're managed, they can ask us to review it.

The Head of Customer Feedback will do this review and we will only do this once.

Our commitment to residents and employees

We'll be transparent about our responsibilities around equality.

We'll treat everyone fairly and respectfully, regardless of their:

- age
- gender
- marital status
- sexual orientation
- disability
- religion
- race
- nationality
- ethnicity or national origin.

We'll make sure our services and workplaces are as inclusive and accessible as possible.

We'll take seriously any concerns that we've not acted in a fair way, dealing with them as quickly as we can.