

CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Aims

The aims of the Complaints Procedure are:

- To ensure that when a complaint is made it is dealt with consistently and fairly within the agreed timescales and in an impartial, objective and professional manner
- To reassure customers that no adverse treatment will arise because they have made a complaint
- To ensure that complaints are recorded centrally and that this information is used to track performance and to improve services

Introduction

We believe that excellent customer service is critical to our success and will improve our reputation with our customers. We treat complaints seriously and we are committed to learning from complaints and identified service failures. We aim to get things right the first time. If we do not, we need to understand why.

This procedure sets out the way a complaint will be dealt with, by who, in what timescale, and what we will do as a result of your complaint.

We will now treat all complaints from you as a learning opportunity and use it to improve services. We will continue to develop this complaints procedure to our customers' satisfaction.

What is a Complaint?

The Local Government Ombudsman describes a complaint as, "*an expression of dissatisfaction about an action or lack of action or about the standard of a service.*"

If you tell us that you are not happy with something that we have done or not done, and we have not put things right we will regard this as a complaint.

A complaint can be made in person at any of Herefordshire Housing's offices, by phone, e-mail, website, letter or by completing the Complaints Form.

Where a complaint is being made by a third party on behalf of the complainant, we will ask for the complainant to confirm this is correct.

Reports relating to Anti-Social Behaviour and Hate Incidents will be responded to in accordance with our Anti-Social Behaviour and Hate Incidents Policies and

Procedures. If there is a failure of service under these policies we will deal with this under our Complaints Policy.

Herefordshire Housing reserves the right to refuse to deal with any complaint that is pursued in an unreasonable manner. This decision will be made by the appropriate Director.

Once a complaint has been made, it will be investigated and progressed through the following procedure:

Initial Contact

HHL expects a large proportion of complaints to be resolved at the initial contact stage when a customer makes contact with us. This 'contact' provides the opportunity to give a clear explanation, to state how the matter will be resolved and to offer an apology where necessary.

Sometimes a customer may only give us feedback on a job done, a call not returned or a lack of information. We will capture this feedback and call it a 'complaint'.

- All front line colleagues are responsible for resolving complaints.
- All colleagues will attempt to deal with complaints on the day they receive them. If that is not possible they will acknowledge the complaint verbally and attempt to resolve it within 15 working days or in a mutually agreed timescale. There is no need to respond formally in writing at this stage unless the customer requests this.
- All complaints will be recorded on the Complaints database and the customer's comments noted. This will be completed by the first point of contact within 1 day of the complaint being made.
- Each complaint will be allocated to a Responsible Officer.
- If a complaint cannot be resolved by the first point of contact they will pass the complaint to a colleague who can resolve it.
- Line Managers will receive a weekly report produced by the IT system, of all complaints within their area summarising details of each complaint, including unresolved complaints and those beyond target date.
- All complaints resolved at the Initial Stage must show a Resolution on the database.
- Heads of Service will receive a monthly report showing all the complaints in their section.

- If we are unable to resolve a complaint at the Initial Contact stage the complaint will be referred to an appropriate colleague (usually a Head of Service) as a formal Stage 1 complaint via the Complaints Coordinator.

Note: When a complaint is made by a customer who is not a tenant or leaseholder the Complaints Coordinator will record the complaint on a separate database and pass it to the relevant colleague and record the outcome.

Stage1 -

The Complaints Coordinator will:

- Record all details on a central complaints database
- Aim to acknowledge the complaint in writing, within 3 working days, enclosing a copy of the Complaints Policy and Procedure
- Pass the complaint to the relevant Head of Service for investigation with any details from the Initial Contact stage
- The Head of Service will investigate the complaint and will aim to:
- Write to the complainant within 15 working days, providing a copy of the letter to the Complaints Coordinator.

The letter will advise the customer that if they are still not satisfied they have 15 working days in which to advise the Complaints Coordinator and request that the complaint be reviewed by a Director. No new complaint can be added at this stage.

Stage 2 – Review by a Director

The Complaints Coordinator will:

- Aim to acknowledge in writing, within 3 working days, that the complaint has now passed to Stage 2 of the procedure
- Pass the complaint to an appropriate Director for investigation (either Director of Resources or Director of Customer Services)

The Director will carry out a Review and will examine all the correspondence and file notes(including entries on the Database) relating to the complaint to ensure that it has been dealt with fairly.

- The Director will aim to provide a formal written response within 15 working days of the review request being received. A copy of this will be provided to the Complaints Coordinator

- The letter will advise the customer that if they are still not satisfied they have 15 working days in which to advise the Complaints Coordinator and request an Appeal. It will also provide information on the Appeals process.

Stage 3 – Appeal

Complaints that go to an Appeal will be heard by a Panel which will be made up to three members of the Company's Board of Management.

- The appeals panel will aim to meet within 20 working days of the complainant's request.
- The Complaints Coordinator will send copies of all correspondence relating to the complaint to the members of the appeals Panel and to the complainant in advance of the panel meeting.
- The panel will consider all the facts relating to the complaint and decide whether the decision should be changed, upheld or re-investigated
- A written response will normally be sent within 10 working days of the panel meeting. This will set out the decision of the Panel and the reasons why the decision has been reached. The correspondence will also provide details of the right to complain to the Housing Ombudsman Service should the complainant still remain dissatisfied.

Stage 4 – Housing Ombudsman Service

If a customer remains dissatisfied they have a right to complain to the Housing Ombudsman Service. The Ombudsman will only consider a complaint after it has been through stages 1 and 3 of the internal complaints procedure.

The Ombudsman can be contacted at:

The Housing Ombudsman Service
81 Aldwych
London WC2B 4HN

Telephone: 020 7421 3800
Tel: 020 7421 3800
Lo-Call: 0845 7125 973
MiniCom: 020 7404 7092
Fax: 020 7831 1942
Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk
Website www.ihos.org.uk

If you require this information in Braille, large print or audio format please call 01432 384011

Management Responsibilities

- Line Managers will receive weekly system generated reports of all complaints within their area summarising the details of each complaint . this includes unresolved, ongoing and out of target complaints. It is their responsibility to ensure that these complaints are monitored and responded to within the agreed time limits.
- Responsible Officers will receive an email when the complaint has been outstanding for 10 days. The email will notify the Responsible Officer that they have 5 working days to resolve the complaint. It is their responsibility to ensure that these complaints are responded to immediately; to ensure that the customer is offered an apology and is informed of the reasons for the delay in response.
- At the end of each month, Heads of Service will receive a report that details all complaints within their area. Heads of Service will use this report to analyse complaints and provide lessons learned. By the 30th of the following month, each Head of Service will provide to the Executive Support Manager a summary of the lessons learnt and the changes in service delivery that have been or will be put in place.
- The Executive Support Manager will collate these summaries as part of the Complaints Performance Report that will be presented to Wider Management Team and to the Customer Services Committee on a quarterly basis. This report will also include an analysis of the numbers and types of complaint received and of the response times achieved.
- The Executive Support Manager will ensure that the next tenant and leaseholder newsletters include an article highlighting the lessons learnt and the subsequent changes made to procedures from the complaints received in the preceding quarter. The Intranet and Website will be updated with the same information.
- On a 6 monthly basis, the Complaints Coordinator will instigate a Customer Satisfaction Survey for all those complaints recorded in the previous 6 months. The outcome of the survey will be included in the following quarter's Performance Management Report to the Customer Services Committee.
- On an annual basis, a report will be provided to the Customer Services Committee and the Board on the Association's performance in managing complaints over the previous 12 months. As well as including a summary of the information provided quarterly, the report will also include feedback from the two customer satisfaction surveys completed during the year and will review performance against the agreed diversity indicators.