

Employee's guide to the complaints handling procedure



This guide provides a summary of the way we approach complaints and the basic steps in the complaints handling procedure (CHP). The full CHP has more detail on what to do, and has examples of how to deal with different types of complaints. This guide provides an overview, while the full CHP should be referred to when you are resolving a complaint.

Why do we have a CHP?

We are committed to providing high-quality services to our community. Occasionally things go wrong and when this happens it is important that we act quickly to resolve the situation. Complaints show us where we are not achieving what people expect of us, and where we are failing to meet our own standards. In other words, they give us a chance to improve our service. Listening to our customers helps us to:

- put things right
- improve our services, and
- learn from our mistakes.

Therefore, in line with other Scottish housing associations and cooperatives, we have introduced a standard complaints handling procedure. This leaflet gives you a guide to it.

What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about [*the RSL*]'s action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by us or on our behalf. For example:

- delays in responding to enquiries and requests
- failure to provide a service
- service standards
- refusal to give advice or answer questions
- dissatisfaction with our policy
- treatment by, or attitude of, a member of staff, a committee member or a contractor
- failure to follow the proper administrative process.

What is not a complaint?

The above complaint definition is broad, but not every concern raised with [*the RSL*] is a complaint. For example, a complaint is not:

- a first request for a service
- a request for information or an explanation of policy or practice.

There are also some other matters we can't deal with under the complaints procedure. These include:

- any policies and procedures that already have a separate route of appeal (e.g. housing application decisions)
- insurance claims
- a complaint we have already investigated and given a final decision on
- complaints that are in court or have already been heard by a court or a tribunal.

Further examples of what is and what is not a complaint are provided in appendices to the CHP.

Alternative ways of complaining

Complaints about care services can be directed to the **Care Inspectorate**, or can be resolved through our CHP.

If tenants are concerned about serious, persistent service failures, which affect several tenants across a number of properties, these should be dealt with through a separate internal process for **Significant Performance Failures**. If the tenant is dissatisfied with our response they can then report these issues directly to the **Scottish Housing Regulator**.

For more information about these options please see the full CHP.

Who can complain?

Anyone can make a complaint in person at [*any of our offices / our office*], by telephone, by email or in writing.

What should you do when someone complains?

You must try to resolve complaints on the spot to the satisfaction of the customer wherever this is possible. Alternatively, if you need to take other action you should always try to resolve complaints as quickly as possible.

Our complaints procedure has two stages. We expect the majority of complaints will be resolved at stage 1. If the customer remains dissatisfied after stage 1, they can request that we look at it again, at stage 2. If the complaint is complex enough to require an investigation, we will put the complaint into stage 2 straight away and skip stage 1.

Stage 1: frontline resolution

We aim to resolve complaints quickly and as close to the point of service delivery as possible. We aim to resolve complaints within **five** working days or less, unless there are exceptional circumstances. Generally these will be more straightforward complaints that you can resolve on the spot with an apology and action to put the matter right, or take other action to sort the problem quickly.

You do not always need to respond to the customer in writing. You'll be able to resolve many complaints orally, face to face or by telephone, and that is all that is needed. However, sometimes you will have to provide the decision in writing. Generally you should do so if the customer asks for this or if you think it will help to confirm or clarify the facts or outcome of the complaint for the customer or [the RSL].

You should always record on our complaints database details of the complaint, the action taken and the final outcome. We can then use this information to improve our service standards.

Stage 2: investigation

Complaints that reach this stage have not been resolved at stage 1 or are so complex that they require further investigation before we can provide a decision.

When dealing with complaints at this stage we should:

- record the complaint at stage 2
- acknowledge receipt of the complaint within **three** working days
- discuss the complaint with the customer to understand the reasons for it and what outcome they want – sometimes this will involve managing the customer's expectations by explaining how we might be able to resolve the complaint
- provide a full response to the complaint as soon as possible but no later than **20** working days.

If our investigations will take longer than 20 working days to complete, you need to agree revised time limits with the customer and keep them updated on progress.

Be sure to record details of the action taken and the outcome, as this helps us improve our service standards.

What if the customer is still dissatisfied?

If we have fully investigated the complaint and the customer is still dissatisfied with our response or the way we have dealt with the complaint, they can ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to consider it further. Please see the complaints handling procedure or the customer complaints leaflet for details of how to direct customers to the SPSO.

The SPSO cannot normally consider factoring complaints. From October 2012 these can be directed to the Homeowners Housing Panel.

When customers complain...

Do

- > be aware of your responsibility to try to resolve the complaint or seek help to resolve it
- > be aware of service procedures as this may help you to clarify matters for the customer
- > say who you are
- > ask for the customer's name, address and telephone number
- > be sensitive – making a complaint can be stressful, so respond with courtesy, tact and empathy
- > listen carefully to what the customer is saying without interrupting. This helps you to get the details right first time and shows you are taking the matter seriously. Take notes and read them back to the customer to check that you have understood the problem
- > ask open-ended questions to get more detailed information. This sometimes helps you to find a solution that will satisfy the customer
- > provide an apology and explanation if it is clear we have made a mistake
- > make sure you agree a course of action that is satisfactory to the customer and to the service. If in doubt, discuss the matter with your line manager
- > check that we did what we said we'd do, then follow up by contacting the customer to check that they agree it has been done
- > explain the next stage of the procedure if the problem hasn't been resolved to the customer's satisfaction. This will be:
 - an explanation of the investigation stage, or
 - details of how the customer may ask the SPSO to consider their complaint at the end of stage 2
- > record all the complaint details in line with the correct procedures
- > treat all information in confidence.

Don't

- > refuse to accept there is a problem. If the customer thinks there is a problem, you must help
- > be defensive or argue
- > jump to conclusions. Wait until you have the whole story
- > make promises you can't keep.

The complaints handling procedure

