

Complaints Policy

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Beyond Housing is committed to going beyond bricks and mortar and aims to provide excellent services that meet the needs of all of our customers. However, we recognise that on occasion our service delivery can fall short of both our own and our customers' expectations and we therefore actively develop a positive complaints culture where customer feedback is welcomed and is used to continually shape and enhance the quality of our services.

Our positive complaints culture is based on three key dispute resolution principles:

- **Be fair** - treat people fairly and follow fair process
- **Be proactive** in putting things right
- **Be willing** to learn from outcomes

2.0 Objective

2.1 A positive complaints culture

2.1.1 We welcome feedback from customers from a variety of sources. Our people will be supported and trained to recognise if a customer is expressing dissatisfaction with any aspect of our service and will have the knowledge on how to effectively deal with it and how to support the customer.

2.1.2 We are committed to achieving positive customer experiences by keeping the customer fully informed throughout the process and with information that is well publicised and easy to read.

2.1.3 Our aim is provide an early resolution to complaints wherever possible. Those involved in dealing with complaints will have the skills, ability and support to consider individual circumstances and reach a fair outcome at any stage.

2.1.4 We will use the outcomes from all complaints to learn from and improve our services.

2.2 Be fair - treat people fairly and follow a fair process

2.2.1 Every customer will receive the same standard of service regardless of their background, appearance, age, beliefs or lifestyle. We will focus on the individual by taking into account the person and their circumstances.

- 2.2.2 We will accept complaints on behalf of a customer from representative third parties and advocates where customer consent has been given.
- 2.2.3 We will balance consistency against flexibility of the application of policy, practice and process to ensure that individual needs are taken into account with impartial evidence based decisions that are free from bias and prejudice.
- 2.2.4 We have a clear and fair process for handling complaints with clear lines of responsibility for any action, including resolving disputes and progressing complaints to the next stage.
- 2.2.5 All decisions, including the final outcome, will be clear, setting out reasons for the decision/s and any further action to be taken.
- 2.2.6 We will give clear information on how customers can challenge the decisions made during the process including contact details of the Housing Ombudsman.
- 2.2.7 We will provide additional support to our customers when requested to enable them to access our complaints process as easily as possible.
- 2.2.8 We will always respect privacy and keep confidentiality.

2.3 **Be - proactive in putting things right**

- 2.3.1 We will aim to put customers back in the position they would have been in if there had been no service failure.
- 2.3.2 If appropriate or possible we will always aim to deal with any expression of dissatisfaction as an early resolution complaint (Stage 0) and will aim to provide a resolution within 3 working days.
- 2.3.3 We will look beyond the circumstances of the individual complainant and consider whether anything needs to be 'put right' in terms of wider process or systems recognising that this can contribute to efficiency outcomes as well as delivering an improved service for our customers.

2.4 **Be - willing to learn from outcomes**

- 2.4.1 We will record all 'lessons learned' from complaints, including early resolution Stage 0 complaints.
- 2.4.2 We are committed to learning lessons from customer complaints to improve the quality and focus of the services that we provide. We also believe that the learning process can be used as a mechanism for encouraging positive customer engagement.
- 2.4.3 The Tenant Complaints Panel acting in the capacity of "Designated Person" is made up of members of the Residents' Scrutiny Group and the Tenant Panel. The panel, recognised by the

Housing Ombudsman, reviews how complaints have been handled and identifies its own 'lessons learned' from the review.

3.0 Definitions

3.1 A complaint is an expression of a customer's dissatisfaction with a service that we have delivered, or have failed to deliver and has been brought to our attention within 3 months of the event.

Examples of matters that could be considered as complaints are:

- Failure to provide a service
- If we fall below our expected service standards
- Bias or inequality of treatment
- Our failure to follow Beyond Housing's policies and procedures.

3.2 Where we receive a complaint that is actually a service request, the request will be forwarded to the relevant section for action and will not be treated as a complaint.

3.3 Where a customer submits a complaint out of time, they can write and ask for a review of the decision based on exceptional circumstances.

3.4 Where we receive a complaint out of office hours, we count the next working day as the date received.

3.5 An early resolution complaint (Stage 0) is an initial expression of dissatisfaction that can be resolved at the first point of contact, or within 3 working days. The member of staff receiving the complaint is empowered to do everything that they can to resolve the complaint to a satisfactory conclusion. If the customer is not satisfied with this outcome; their complaint will then be logged as a formal Stage 1 complaint.

3.6 If a complaint is not an initial expression of dissatisfaction and is a repeat customer concern, is deemed complex and requiring further investigation or if the customer wishes to escalate an early resolution complaint, then the formal complaints process will be initiated.

3.7 In order to assist with route cause analysis and identify trends; formal complaints will be categorised as follows:

- Contractor Failure
- Customer Communication
- Customer Expectations
- Delays in undertaking works
- Internal communication
- Material/Product failure

- Missed Appointment
- Poor Workmanship
- Process Failure
- Staff Attitude.

3.8 Areas where individuals may express dissatisfaction which would not be regarded as complaints would relate to:

- The general law, unless wrongly applied
- Persons or bodies over which we have no control
- Our overall policies
- Matters which are, or could reasonably be expected to be the subject of court or tribunal proceedings or where a complainant has submitted a compensation or liability claim
- Matters which are being dealt with by the Ombudsman
- Our money advice service
- Anti-social behaviour
- Matters which will be dealt with through our petitions procedure.

3.9 Whilst customer views in relation to policy are welcomed, a complaint against policy cannot proceed as policy is agreed by the Board and the Exec team after a consultation process. Views on policy are therefore considered separately during the policy review process. In some circumstances, we may carry out an urgent review of a policy where it is having a detrimental impact on customers that was not foreseen during the policy development. Policy feedback will be collected and reported in line with the requirements of the feedback loop.

3.10 Complaints about our money advice service will be referred to the Financial Ombudsman.

4.0 Early Resolution Complaints

4.1 Early Resolution - Stage 0 complaint

- The person or team receiving an initial expression of dissatisfaction is empowered to do everything they can to resolve the complaint to a satisfactory conclusion. We aim to respond to the complainant within 3 working days using their preferred method of contact.

5.0 Formal Complaints Process

5.1 Formal process - Stage 1

- Formal complaints should be referred to the Customer Voice Advisor upon receipt and without delay.
- The complainant will receive an acknowledgement to their complaint from the Customer Voice Advisor within 2 days of logging, including details of the named responsible officer.

- c) The complaint will be investigated by a responsible officer from within the relevant service area who will:
- Investigate the complaint thoroughly
 - Provide a full response within the agreed timescales
 - Keep the complainant fully up to date with the progress of their complaint
 - If further investigation or information is required or the complaint involves an external investigation, then an extended timeline for full response will be agreed with the customer.
- d) Complainants will be asked to indicate within 10 working days of the date of the stage 1 full response whether they are satisfied with the outcome. If unsatisfied, the complaint will be escalated to Stage 2.
- e) If the complainant is satisfied with the outcome or does not respond within the agreed timescales, then the complaint will be deemed as resolved and the complainant will receive a closed complaint notification.

5.2 Formal Process - Stage 2

- a) Complainants who are not satisfied with the full response at Stage 1 have the right to have the complaint reviewed at Stage 2.
- b) Stage 2 complaints will be acknowledged in writing by the Customer Voice Advisor within 2 days of receipt.
- c) Stage 2 complaints will be reviewed by the Head of Service for the relevant service area.
- d) The Stage 2 review is a review of the process and investigation carried out at Stage 1 and is not a repeat investigation of the initial complaint.
- e) The complainant will receive a full response within 10 working days from the date of receipt of the notification of escalation to Stage 2.
- f) Complainants will be asked to indicate within 10 working days of the date of the stage 2 response whether they are satisfied with the outcome.
- g) If unsatisfied, the complainant will be notified how they can escalate their complaint further.
- h) If the complainant is satisfied with the outcome or does not respond within the agreed timescales, then the complaint will be deemed as resolved.

5.3 Escalation Stages

- a) Complainants who are still unsatisfied following a Stage 2 review can escalate their complaint further.
- b) The complaint can be referred to a tenant complaint panel acting in the capacity of “designated person” who will invite the complainant to a panel hearing and will independently review the evidence. If following the hearing the complainant is still not satisfied then they have the right for the complaint to be referred to the Housing Ombudsman.

- c) The complainant can appoint an MP or local councillor to act in the capacity as designated person. Information will be provided to the complainant on how to do this.
- d) Complainants have the right to refer the complaint straight to the Housing Ombudsman, but this must be done at least 8 weeks after the date of the Stage 2 final response.

5.4 Formal Complaints Process Summary

Stage	Process	Timeline
Acknowledgement	Acknowledgement of Stage 1 complaint (letter or email)	2 working days from receipt of complaint
Customer Contact	Initial customer contact to be made within 5 working days of receipt as part of investigation	5 working days from receipt of complaint
Stage 1	Initial stage of complaint investigation. Response within given time scale	10 working days from receipt of complaint (or additional time agreed with Head of Service and complainant)
Stage 1 satisfaction	Time given for complainant to respond if unsatisfied with resolution at Stage 1	10 working days
Stage 2	Complaint escalated from Stage 1. Response within given time scale	10 working days (or additional time agreed with Director and complainant)
Stage 2 satisfaction	Time given for complainant to respond if unsatisfied with resolution at Stage 2	10 working days
Designated person	Complainant to be referred to designated person within 10 working days of receipt of escalation notification if not satisfied with resolution at Stage 2	Timeline agreed with Head of Service and complainant

Housing Ombudsman	Complainant to be provided with details of how to complain to Housing Ombudsman if not satisfied with response from designated person or for direct escalation following 8 weeks from date of Stage 2 full response	No internal timeline advised
Satisfaction survey	Complainant to be contacted by Service Centre with complaint satisfaction survey at the end of any stage within the process where full resolution has been realised	Contact with complainant within 10 working days of complaint closure

6.0 Vexatious and/or habitual complainant

- 6.1 Complaints must be pursued in a reasonable manner. Where we believe that the complaint is being pursued in an unreasonable manner or there is a little or no evidence to support a complaint, then staff will refer to the vexatious/habitual complainant procedure. The complainant will be informed if a decision of this nature is made.
- 6.2 We will not view a complainant as being vexatious simply because they pursue a complaint in a forceful or determined manner. However, complainants who make unreasonable, frequent or trivial complaints to us may be regarded as vexatious.

7.0 Compensation

- 7.1 Compensation for out of target responses will be paid in line with the current rates as contained within the compensation and claim policy.
- 7.2 If the complaint has any element of potential liability and or compensation (outside of policy point 7.1); the relevant part will be dealt with separately by the business intelligence team and the complainant will be notified as such.

8.0 Feedback loop

- 8.1 The service centre will be responsible for collecting all customer satisfaction feedback within 10 working days of the closing the complaint.
- 8.2 The investigating officer and the Customer Voice Advisor have responsibility for completing a lessons learnt report following the closure of all complaints. The Customer Voice Advisor is responsible for collating all lessons learnt feedback and the recording of route cause analysis.

- 8.3 The Customer Voice Advisor is responsible for collating all complaint feedback, including feedback in relation policy decisions.
- 8.4 The Customer Insight Manager has responsibility to ensure that all complaint feedback is reported in line with key business reporting guidelines and is shared with all stakeholders, including customers, in a medium that is easy to understand.

9.0 Performance

- 9.1 We will produce quarterly reports on:
- The numbers of complaints received
 - Timescales within which each action was taken
 - Overall number of days for full resolution
 - Reasons for complaints
 - Numbers of complaints resolved at each stage
 - Satisfaction with complaint outcomes
 - Learning outcomes.
- 9.2 Complaints performance measured against local targets will be reported on the performance dashboard.
- 9.3 Complaints performance will be submitted quarterly and annually to Housemark against their reporting criteria in order to Benchmark with our peers in the social housing sector.
- 9.4 We will keep our regulatory framework compliance database up to date following the closure of each complaint.

10.0 Revision

- 10.1 This policy will be subject to review after three years or in response to changes in legislation or good practice, whichever is the sooner.