



POLICY DOCUMENT

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Service Area: Property Services

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This policy and Procedure relates to Westway Housing Association Limited's ("WHA") position on complaints, comments and compliments for services.
- 1.2 Although this Policy & Procedure is available to customers on request, the procedure should be communicated to them through the "How to make a Complaint" leaflet.

2. SCOPE OF THE POLICY

- 2.1 This policy does not apply to:
 - 2.1.1 Making a request for a service
 - 2.1.2 Making a complaint regarding neighbours (as this will be classed as nuisance or anti-social behaviour and dealt with under our ASB Policy and Procedure)
 - 2.1.3 Complaint about other organisations (except those employed or instructed by WHA to carry out a service to a customer)
 - 2.1.4 Disagreeing with our policies
- 2.2 Complaints about individual members of staff will not be dealt with in this policy, however if the complaint is about a service that the staff member has failed to provide, then this policy will cover it.

3. AIMS & OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 This policy aims to give all the information customers need to let us know when they believe we have not met our service standards, and to comment or make suggestions accordingly.
- 3.2 It further aims for us to:
 - 3.2.1 Be effective and efficient in handling complaints
 - 3.2.2 Empower front line officers to deal with and close complaints at first point of contact
 - 3.2.3 Ensure full and fair investigation in all cases
 - 3.2.4 Learn from customers and improve services
 - 3.2.5 Ensure that the policy is well publicised, accessible and easy to understand

3.3 WHA seeks to achieve this aim by implementing thorough and considered procedures detailed in the preceding paragraphs of this policy.

4. POLICY STATEMENTS

4.1 WHA aims to provide high quality services to all our customers. We work hard to achieve this and welcome feedback. We view feedback as an opportunity to learn and improve our services. We know that sometimes things can go wrong. If this happens, we welcome customers letting us know. Once we know, we can put things right, learn from mistakes and prevent similar things happening in the future.

4.2 We try to ensure that our customers are satisfied with our services and that these fit their requirements. In cases where our customers are dissatisfied with any aspect of our service, this policy explains our approach to resolving service complaints.

4.3 We will handle complaints in a positive way, welcoming them as opportunities to improve the way we work. We commit to giving our customers the highest standards of service at all times considering compensatory payments in some instances.

5. COMMENTS & COMPLIMENTS

5.1 Comments & Compliments

5.1.1 WHA is keen to involve all customers in shaping the services we provide. We welcome comments about the service we provide or suggestions about how we could improve.

5.1.2 WHA also wants to learn from the things we have done well. When customers have had an excellent experience of customer service, we would love to hear from them. Receiving praise for providing good customer service helps teams and individuals to improve and identify areas of best practice.

5.1.3 From compliments we will celebrate success and ensure that best practice is shared throughout the organisation.

5.2 Complaints

5.2.1 A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by WHA, its staff or contractors, affecting an individual customer or group of customers.

5.2.2 A complaint can be made when:

5.2.2.1 We have failed to provide a service that we should have

5.2.2.2 We have provided a poor standard of service

5.2.2.3 We have made a mistake in the way we have provided the service

5.2.2.4 We have failed to meet our existing service standards or complied with our policies

6. HOW TO MAKE A COMMENT, COMPLIMENT OR COMPLAINT

6.1 We will accept complaints, compliments and comments made in person, by telephone, letter/email/fax. Complaints can be made by advocates authorised to act on a customer's behalf. Our main contact details are communicated to customers at the outset of their occupancy agreements and can be found on our website.

6.2 Informal Complaints

6.2.1 Front line officers are empowered to deal with and resolve complaints wherever possible at the first point of contact. If the person taking the complaint can resolve the issues within one working day to the customer's satisfaction, we will log the case and class it as an "informal complaint".

6.2.2 For example, this would apply where we have missed an appointment but were able to make a new arrangement that suited the customer straight away.

6.2.3 If the customer is dissatisfied with the outcome, they can move onto the formal staged complaints process within 5 working days detailed further below.

6.3 Formal Complaints Procedure

6.3.1 Stage 1- When we are unable to log the case as an "informal complaint" we will move into our formal complaints process. We have the following service standards in place to ensure that the complaint is dealt with in a timely manner.

6.3.1.1 We will:

(a) Acknowledge formal complaints as soon as reasonably practicable from receipt

(b) Give a unique complaint reference number

(c) Let the customer know the name of the person who will try to resolve the problem or investigate the complaint. If necessary, we will invite the customer to provide further information.

- (d) Aim to write to the customer within 10 working days to let them know the outcome of any investigation and offer a decision or resolution
- (e) We will notify the customer in writing when this target will not be met, detailing the reasons why and let them know when to expect a full response (WHA will ensure any delay is no longer than reasonably necessary)

6.3.1.2 The response will include:

- (a) How the complaint was investigated
- (b) Whether there is agreement that the service did not meet required standards
- (c) Where possible, what will be done as a result of the complaint
- (d) How the customer can escalate the complaint if they are dissatisfied with the result of Stage 1.

6.3.2 Stage 2- If the customer is not satisfied with our response, or if the previous stage has not been met, they can request for the complaint to be reviewed by the Head of Service or Head of Housing who have previously been unconnected with the complaint. If both are connected, their respective Line Manager will review the complaint.

6.3.2.1 The Stage 2 review request must be made within 20 working days of the Stage 1 response, detailing why the customer remains dissatisfied with the response received at the first stage and what further action they would like us to take in response to their complaint.

6.3.2.2 The service standards concerning Stage 2 complaints are:

- (a) WHA acknowledgement of the request in writing as soon as reasonably practicable from receipt
- (b) Confirmation of whether the complaint is being considered at the second stage
- (c) Advising of the name and position of the person who will look into the complaint

- (d) We will aim to write to the customer within 10 working days of the acknowledgement to let them know whether the original action or response given is supported or outlining any new or additional proposals
- (e) We will notify the customer in writing when this target will not be met, detailing the reasons why and let them know when to expect a full response (WHA will ensure any delay is no longer than reasonably necessary)

6.3.2.3 The response will include (in writing):

- (a) How the complaint was investigated
- (b) Whether there is agreement that the service did not meet the required standards
- (c) What will be done as a result of your complaint
- (d) How the customer can escalate the complaint if they are dissatisfied with the result of Stage 2.

6.3.3 Final Stage- If after all of the previous stages, the customer is still dissatisfied with the response the customer may contact the Chief Executive within 20 working days of receiving the Stage 2 response and outline their reasons for continued dissatisfaction and why they believe we have not fulfilled our duties and the action they would like us to take. Further evidence to that already provided must be included in this correspondence.

6.3.3.1 The Chief Executive will arrange a review hearing with the panel or tell the customer that they have pursued the matter as far as they can with WHA as soon as reasonably practicable following receipt of the customer's request.

6.3.3.2 We will:

- (a) Aim to hold the review hearing within two months of receipt of the customer's request
- (b) Send written confirmation of the panel decision within 10 working days of that meeting

6.3.3.3 The role of the panel is to review the actions staff have taken throughout the complaints process, to make sure that we have

followed our policies & procedures, and that the complaint has been fairly and fully investigated.

6.3.3.4 The review hearing is not a 'legal' process and customers can bring with them support.

6.3.3.5 Once the procedure is completed the final response letter should be written in clear, plain language. If possible, it should stand alone, avoiding references to previous correspondence that may not be readily available to the customer. If there has to be a reference to previous correspondence there should be a copy attached. Final letters should include:

- (a) a summary of the complaint;
- (b) a summary of the outcome of WHA's own investigation;
- (c) whether WHA acknowledges that it has been at fault in some way; any offer made to settle the complaint and how long that offer will remain open; and
- (d) a clear statement that the letter is a final response and that customers who are dissatisfied with the final response may refer the matter either to the Ombudsman (ideally within twelve months to improve the likelihood of the Ombudsman investigating the matter) or, provided the customer is a tenant of WHA, to a 'designated person'. Both routes are further explained below:

Ombudsman

If after going through our complaints process, a customer is still dissatisfied with the outcome, they can contact:

*Housing Ombudsman Service
Exchange Tower
Harbour Exchange Square
Isle of Dogs
London
9GE*

Telephone: 0300 111 3000

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Designated Person

If the customer is unable to resolve their complaint through WHA's formal complaints procedure they can, if they are a tenant of WHA, contact a designated person who can also help find a solution. The designated person can be an MP, a local councillor or a Tenant Panel. Their role is to help resolve disputes between tenants and their landlords which they can do in whatever way they think is most likely to work. If the designated person cannot help they can refer a complaint to the Ombudsman. If the customer has decided not to contact a designated person you can come directly to the Ombudsman eight weeks after your landlord has given you its final response to your complaint.

7. UNREASONABLE COMPLAINANT BEHAVIOUR

7.1 The Housing Ombudsman definition of "unreasonable complainant behaviour" is as follows:

"The actions of users, who are angry, demanding, or persistent, may result in unreasonable demands on staff, or unacceptable behaviour. It is these actions that we consider unacceptable, unreasonable demands, unreasonable persistence and aggressive and abusive behaviour (including language)".

7.2 WHA must ensure that in using the complaints procedure, individuals who demonstrate unreasonable behaviour or are unreasonably persistent are still dealt with fairly, honestly and correctly. The resources of WHA to be used as effectively as possible and other service users or employees must not suffer any detriment because of the behaviour of others.

7.3 All reasonable measures will be taken to resolve complaints through the complaints procedure at section 6 above.

7.4 When someone repeatedly telephones, visits the office without appointment, sends irrelevant or duplicate documents, or raises the issues that have already been considered, WHA may decide to:

7.4.1 Only take telephone calls from the user at set times on set days, or put an arrangement in place for only one member of staff to deal with calls or correspondence from the complainant in the future

7.4.2 Require the person to make an appointment to see a named member of staff before visiting the office, or that the user only contact the office in writing

7.4.3 Return the documents to the person or, in extreme cases, advise them that further irrelevant documents will be destroyed

7.4.4 Take other action that we consider appropriate. We will, however, always say what action we are taking and why

8. MONITORING AND IMPROVING

8.1 There are a number of things WHA can do to put things right, if we have made a mistake. These include:

8.1.1 Issuing an apology (whether informally or formally depending on the circumstance)

8.1.2 Carry out work, such as a repair that has not been done

8.1.3 Providing financial compensation (please see our Compensation Policy for more information)

8.1.4 Make a change to our service to try to make sure the same mistake doesn't happen again

8.1.5 Review and improve our procedures

8.1.6 Improve the training of our staff to avoid such mistakes in the future.

8.2 WHA is committed to using complaints as positive feedback to improve performance and service delivery. We will carry out an analysis of complaints and use past complaints (anonymised if necessary) to prepare a 'Learning Action Plan.

8.3 The Board will receive annual reports on the lessons learnt and change made to improve systems and processes, and customers will also be advised through our various communication methods.

8.4 We will also look to see what improvements we can make in how we handle and manage complaints, through customer satisfaction surveys.

8.5 The Head of Housing will provide a regular report to the Board of Management of all claims for compensation and their outcome.