

COMPLAINTS POLICY

WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO DO?

This policy sets out:

- how customers can complain about services provided; and
- how we will deal with and learn from complaints.

At SARH we aim to get things right first time. If we fail we want to know so we can put it right, apologise and learn from it. Comments, compliments and complaints are viewed as a positive source of customer feedback and as an opportunity for us to develop our services to reflect customers' needs

WHAT IS A COMPLAINT?

The Association defines a complaint as:

“An expression of dissatisfaction, however made (either verbally or in writing), about the standards of service, action or lack of action by the Association or its staff, affecting an individual customer or group of customers”

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction from:

- A customer
- Someone applying for housing with us;
- Any other person or organisation affected badly by our service;
- Anyone acting on behalf of the above.

It can be about:

- Our failure to do something we should have done;
- Something we have done wrong, or to a poor standard;
- Our staff being unhelpful.

What is the difference between a complaint and a request for service?

If a customer asks for a repair to be carried out, it is a **request** for a service (a repair). However, if we then don't carry out the repair when we said we would, or if the standard of work is poor, it becomes a **complaint**.

HOW WILL CUSTOMERS KNOW ABOUT OUR COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE?

A leaflet is available through our offices, shops and website, setting out how to Comment, Compliment or Complain. The leaflet tells customers:

- how they can make a complaint (or comment or compliment)
- the stages in our procedure for dealing with complaints
- our target response times for dealing with complaints.

HOW WILL WE KNOW IF IT IS WORKING?

By:

- monitoring and reporting our performance, including the number of complaints received and our performance against our target response times;
- evaluating customer feedback – through a customer satisfaction survey.

HOW CAN CUSTOMERS CONTACT US TO USE THIS SERVICE?

Customers can comment, compliment or make a complaint:

- by filling in the form in the “How to make a complaint” leaflet
- by telephone
- in person, by visiting our offices or shops, or through any other direct contact with our staff, eg when we visit to carry out work or on neighbourhood walkabouts
- by letter
- by email or through the website link
- by fax
- through the Tenants Associations or Federation.

HOW DO WE DEAL WITH COMPLAINTS?

All complaints, including the complainants details, the nature of the complaint, action taken, response times and any lessons learnt are logged in accordance with a detailed procure guide and performance is monitored.

Our complaints procedure has four stages:

Stage 1

When a customer first contacts us to make a complaint we will try to deal with it immediately. If this is not possible we will:

- acknowledge the complaint and explain that we will look into the complaint; and once we have done this, we will
- contact the customer in a way that suits them, to provide a full response, within 5 working days of the complaint being made. If the customer has phoned us or provided a phone number he or she may prefer us to phone back. Or we will write to, or email the customer. This will be done by someone from the team who delivers the service the customer is complaining about.

What if the customer is not satisfied?

Stage 2

If the customer tells us he/she is not satisfied with the way that we have dealt the complaint we will progress the complaint to Stage 2. We will send to the customer an acknowledgement within 2 working days of the customer telling us he / she is not satisfied with the way we dealt with Stage 1 or the outcome.

A manager who was not involved in the first response will investigate the complaint and send a reply to the customer within 10 working days. If this is not possible we will write to the customer explaining why and indicating when

they can expect to receive a reply.

Stage 3

If the customer remains dissatisfied the complaint will progress to Stage 3. We will send an acknowledgement within 2 working days of the customer telling us he / she is not satisfied with the way we dealt with Stage 2 or the outcome.

A Director of SARH will then review the case. We will send a full reply to the customer within 10 working days of the customer contacting us to say that he/she was dissatisfied with our previous reply. If this is not possible we will write to the customer explaining why and indicating when they can expect to receive a reply.

Stage 4 – appeal

If the customer remains dissatisfied with the way the complaint has been dealt it will be referred to a panel to consider. The panel will comprise the chief executive and two board members, at least one of whom will be a tenant board member.

We will write to the customer within 2 working days of the customer telling us he / she is dissatisfied with the way that we dealt with Stage 3 or the outcome, explaining the procedure and giving them the opportunity to attend the panel hearing and / or provide any additional information. We will aim to hold the panel hearing within 20 working days of the customer notifying us that they remain dissatisfied following Stage 3 (subject to the customer being available to attend if he /she wishes to). We will write to the customer with the outcome of the panel hearing within 5 working days of it being held. If this is not possible we will write to the customer explaining why and indicating when they can expect to receive a reply.

Housing Ombudsman

If the customer remains dissatisfied following the panel hearing we will provide information about the Housing Ombudsman.

HOW WILL WE LEARN FROM COMPLAINTS?

We will analyse and assess complaints and the way that they have been dealt with to identify any changes we can make to the way that we deliver our service to improve our performance.

WILL WE PAY COMPENSATION?

We will consider a claim for compensation if a customer:

- can show that he / she has incurred actual financial loss as a result of our action; or
- has spent a considerable amount of time pursuing the matter before

<p>resolution; or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• has experienced exceptional distress by events.
<p>The following principles underpin the policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Association believes that all customers should receive high quality services irrespective of their race, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability or religious beliefs;• All customers will be treated with respect and dignity;• Staff should be treated with respect by customers;• The Comments, Compliments and Complaints policy will be well advertised and easy to use;• Help and assistance will be given, where necessary, to enable customers to access the procedure;• Complaints will be dealt with in confidence;• Investigations will be thorough, fair, systematic and carried out in line with published timescales;• Customers will be kept informed of progress and the outcome of any investigation;• Complaints will be recorded, monitored and acknowledged;• Customers will have the right, at their own cost, to have a friend or advocate present at any interview;• The Association will use the complaints system to learn from its mistakes and to raise the level of customer satisfaction;• The Association will advise all dissatisfied customers about what can be done to help resolve their issues;• Where mistakes have occurred and the Association is at fault, the Association will take reasonable steps to put the customer in the position he or she enjoyed before the situation arose;• Where a mistake has been made the Association will always offer an apology;• The Association will publish information about its performance against standards and targets in handling complaints;• All staff and board members likely to be involved in handling complaints will receive training.
<p>WHO TO CONTACT TO COMMENT ON THIS POLICY:</p> <p>Karen Marshall, Head of Business Services. Tel: 01785 216742</p>
<p>DATE DOCUMENT PRODUCED: May 2008</p> <p>NEXT REVIEW DATE: Subject to periodic review</p>