

Complaints Policy

Policy Statement

We are committed to providing the best service we can to our customers. We want to be told if there has been a problem with a service we have provided or when a customer is very happy with something we have done. Complaints, and comments are valuable feedback. It gives us a chance to learn and most importantly a chance to improve services.

To ensure we listen and improve we have a two stage Corporate Complaints and Customer Feedback process.

We want to empower our staff to resolve customer dissatisfaction as early in the process as possible and wherever possible without the need for a formal investigation.

Scope of Policy

This policy applies to all our employees including those on temporary or fixed contracts and is intended for publication.

It does not apply to

- Internal complaints about services or other employees.

Definition of a Complaint

The area of difficulty in dealing with complaints is defining a complaint. If we do not have a shared understanding across the organisation of what a complaint is, we run the risk of treating customers in an inconsistent way. For clarity our definition of a complaint is:

It is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents

In everyday terms this means that a complaint can be made where it refers to:

- Dissatisfaction in the way we have delivered or have failed to deliver a service
- Delay or not acting on a request for a service
- Dissatisfaction with the way we apply policies, decisions or procedures
- Refusal to answer reasonable questions or giving misleading or unsuitable advice
- Failure to follow our policies /procedures or legislation
- Impoliteness, rudeness, unfairness, bias or prejudice or poor staff attitude
- An inappropriate use of personal information.

The following are examples that do not fall within the scope of the complaints policy:

- Reporting issues around Anti-social Behaviour
- First time request for service
- Issue being dealt with by Insurance claim/ legal action
- Complaint that has already been through the SCH complaints process
- Dispute regarding lease or tenancy agreement content
- An appeal against a decision where there is an appeals process - e.g. homelessness decision, or right to review a decision regarding joining the housing waiting list
- Issues /incidents over 6 months old and not reported previously

Types of Feedback

- An **expression of dissatisfaction** is a comment or feedback from a service user about the way we deliver services but does not require a full investigation / written response (can be dealt with at the first point of contact). An example of an expression of dissatisfaction could be failure to arrive on time for an appointment where the person taking the information (Contact Centre Advisor or front-line member of staff) could look at why the appointment was not kept and arrange a new appointment.
- **A complaint** is an expression of dissatisfaction with an action or standard of service whether provided directly by SCH or by a person or contractor working on our behalf and requires a formal response. Some examples of complaints are delay in providing a service requested, poor attitude of staff or contractor, not following policy or failure of service. Customers can and may complain about a policy if they do not agree with them and although such complaints are unlikely to be upheld it is useful to know that customers are not satisfied with a policy as this may help us to shape future policies.

Giving us feedback

Customers can contact us in a variety of ways:

- Online Contact us page – Give us feedback
- Letter
- Telephone our Contact Centre (0121 717 1515)
- Personal contact with staff
- Via Social media

Informal Expressions of Dissatisfaction /Early Resolution

As far as possible we should be aiming to find a resolution to dissatisfaction at the **first point of contact** but there will be some circumstances this may not be possible, and a formal stage 1 complaint must be recorded.

Formal Complaints (Stage 1)

An officer will be allocated to investigate the complaint and will have 10 working days to do so from the date the complaint was raised. An acknowledgement letter will be sent by the Governance team within 3 working days. The acknowledgement letter will include the details of the investigating officer, the target date for resolution, the complaint reference number and details of how vulnerable customers may seek reasonable adjustments to help them with the complaints process.

Stage 1 – Investigating the Complaint (target 10 working days)

The relevant front-line manager will investigate the complaint within a target of **10 working days** (to investigate and reach a resolution with the customer). The 10 working days will commence from the next working day after the complaint is raised. Wherever possible personal contact (e.g., visit, telephone call or interview) will be made with the complainant in order to get full details of the service failure and reach a resolution that all parties are happy with.

Within the 10 working days the investigating officer should provide a full response to the complainant or give an update on progress and agree with the complainant a revised date for resolution of the complaint (e.g., if it is particularly complex or delays due to needing to speak to third parties).

When a complaint investigation has been completed the full findings must be confirmed in writing to the complainant.

If a customer is not satisfied with the response at stage 1 then they should contact the investigating officer in the first instance and discuss why they remain dissatisfied, they should do this within 10 working days of receiving the final notification of findings at stage 1.

The customer will be expected to explain why they are not satisfied with the outcome of the stage 1 investigation and what outcome they hope to achieve from an independent review at stage 2. If the customer wants further clarification of the stage 1 complaint, then the investigating officer will provide responses to outstanding queries.

Stage 2 – Independent Review of the Complaint (Target 20 working days)

In most cases the Senior Officer investigating at stage 2 will be from the Customer Feedback Team, but it can be any Head of Service/ Senior Manager from a different team to the team originally involved in the stage 1 investigation.

The Customer Feedback Team will send an acknowledgement. The acknowledgement letter will normally be sent within **5 working days** of receiving the request to move to stage 2. The letter sent to the customer will advise the name of the officer carrying out the investigation and target date for resolution. An independent review will only be declined in circumstances where SCH has already accepted responsibility at stage 1 and taken appropriate steps to address the issues raised so that an independent review is not going to achieve any further action or change the outcome of the stage 1 investigation.

The 20 days for the independent investigation will commence from the day the request is received or the following day if received after 4 pm.

The investigating manager will contact and meet with the complainant (wherever possible) and relevant staff to gather details regarding the complaint and confirm the understanding of any unresolved issues. The investigating manager will write a detailed report of their findings including recommendations to avoid similar situations arising in the future.

The investigating manager will share the findings with the relevant Service Head to agree any remedial actions /changes in working practices or learning from the complaint before writing to the customer to advise of the outcome of the independent review.

Two Board Members will also sign off the stage 2 response before it is sent to the customer.

The investigating manager will aim to conclude the investigation and advise the complainant of the findings and recommendations within **20 working days via letter**. If the complaint cannot be dealt with within the time limit, the customer should be contacted to explain the reason for the delay and agree a revised target date for resolution.

This would end our complaints procedure.

Housing Ombudsman

At the end of the stage 2 investigation the customer must be advised that they have reached the end of Solihull Community Housing's complaints policy and customers have the right if they remain dissatisfied with the outcome to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service at the following address:

Exchange Tower,
PO Box 152
Liverpool
L33 7WQ
Tel: 0300 111 3000

www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Repeat Complaints

On rare occasions customers may become unreasonable in the way they pursue their complaint. To ensure everyone is treated fairly we have developed a guide for staff and customers.

Please refer to our Unreasonable Communication Policy for guidance on dealing with customers who repeatedly make complaints about the same issue or act in an unreasonable manner.

Responsibilities

The Head of Customer Experience has responsibility for ensuring this policy is in place, up to date, relevant and being delivered.

The Executive Director of Customer Experience, Transformation and Business Support has overall responsibility for this policy.

Approval

Version number	1
Effective from	July 2023
Policy author	Service Support Lead (Customer Feedback)
Policy Owner	Executive Director of Customer Experience, Transformation and Business Support
Review Date	July 2025