

Complaints Policy

1. 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 compliments are valuable feedback. They give us a chance to put things right, learn and most importantly an opportunity to improve services.

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

The policy will be published on our website and can be obtained in different languages by request.

The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code became statutory on the 1 April 2024, meaning that landlords are obliged by law to follow the requirements of the code. SCH have developed this policy to support adherence to the Complaint Handling Code.

2. Scope of Policy

This policy applies to all customers of Solihull Community Housing and any individual or group affected by the services provided by Solihull Community Housing.

It is applicable to all Solihull Community Housing staff including those on temporary or fixed contracts and is intended for publication.

It does not apply to

- Internal complaints about services or other employees
- Complaints about Elected Members or Members of the Board.

Policies that are considered alongside this complaint policy are

- Reasonable adjustment
- Unreasonable communications
- Compensation Policy
- Building Safety Guidelines

3. Definitions

3.1 Complaints

For clarity, we define a complaint as

an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the Landlord 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.

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

3.2 Exclusions

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

- First time reporting issues of Anti-social Behaviour
- First time request for service
- A specific 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 e.g. joining the housing waiting list
- Issues /incidents over 12 months old and not reported previously
- First time reports of an issue which falls under the Building Safety Guidelines
- Statutory Disrepair Claims

In the above circumstances a complaint will not be accepted, where this is the case, we will write to the customer outlining the reasons for the decision and provide contact details of the relevant Ombudsman.

Solihull Community Housing will review each request for a complaint based on its individual merit and at times may deviate from the above guidance.

3.3 Building Safety

If a complaint relates to a Building Safety concern the complaint will be processed as set out in this policy. When SCH refer customers to governing bodies as per the complaints policy, it may be necessary for both the Housing Ombudsman and Building Safety Regulator information to be shared.

4. Feedback & Support

4.1 Customers can give us feedback 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

4.2 Where a customer may have difficulty in making a complaint or pursuing a complaint, they are entitled to appoint an advocate to act on their behalf. We will require notification from the customer to confirm that we have permission for full disclosure of all relevant information in respect of the complaint being shared with their advocate. SCH will not accept costs incurred as a result of a customer using a third-party advocate.

4.3 Should a customer need support making or pursuing a complaint and they would like Solihull Community Housing to help find them support they can make the request for support via the Contact Centre 01217171515

5. Complaints Process

5.1 Stage 1

When a complaint is received, it will be logged and acknowledged within 5 working days, an investigating officer will be assigned. An acknowledgement letter will be sent to the complainant, it will confirm:

- The name of the investigating officer
- The target date for completion
- The complaint reference number
- Details of how vulnerable customer may seek reasonable adjustments
- Details of the relevant ombudsman

The Investigating officer will investigate the complaint within a target of **10 working days**. The 10 working days will commence from the date the complaint is acknowledged. Wherever possible personal contact (e.g., visit, telephone call or interview) will be made with the complainant to obtain full details of the service failure and to allow for a complete investigation to take place

Within the 10 working days the investigating officer should provide a full response to the complainant or give an update on progress, should the complaint be complex we may require additional time to carry out our investigations, we will advise the customer of our intention to extend the due date. The complaint may only be extended by a further 10 working days and only in exceptional circumstances. The investigating officer will agree a timescale for updates with the customer.

When a complaint investigation has been completed the full findings will 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. We ask that they do this within 10 working days of receiving the final notification of findings at stage 1.

The customer has the right to request that the matter be escalated through to stage 2 of the complaints process.

Appropriate remedies will be considered during the complaint investigation and will be linked to our compensation policy.

5.2 Stage 2 – Independent Review of the Complaint

When an escalation to Stage 2 is received, it will be logged within 5 working days. The Stage 2 complaint will then be acknowledged within 5 working days and an investigating officer will be assigned. An acknowledgement letter will be sent to the complainant, it will confirm

- The name of the investigating officer
- The target date for completion
- The complaint reference number
- Details of how vulnerable customer may seek reasonable adjustments
- Details of the relevant ombudsman

In most cases the Senior Investigating officer at stage 2 will be from the Customer Feedback Team, but it can be any Head of Service/ Senior Manager, usually from a different service area to the service area originally complained about. Where a request to move the complaint to Stage 2 is declined, the customer will receive a letter setting out the reasons for that and contact details for the relevant Ombudsman.

The 20 days for the independent investigation will commence from the date of the acknowledgement letter. The investigating officer will contact the complainant (wherever possible) and relevant staff to gather details regarding the complaint and confirm the understanding of any unresolved issues. The investigating officer will write a detailed report of their findings including recommendations to avoid similar situations arising in the future.

The investigating officer will share the findings with the relevant Head of Service to agree any remedial actions /changes in working practices or learning from the complaint

The investigating officer will aim to conclude the investigation and advise the complainant of the findings and recommendations within **20 working days**

If the complaint cannot be dealt with within the time limit, the customer will be contacted to explain the reason for the delay and advise of the new target date. The complaint investigation may only be extended for a further 20 working days and only in exceptional circumstances.

Appropriate remedies will be considered at Stage 2 of the complaints policy and will be linked to our Compensation policy.

This would end our complaints procedure.

6. Governing Bodies:

Housing Ombudsman

At the end of the stage 2 investigation the customer will 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

Housing Ombudsman Service
PO Box 1484
Unit D
Preston
PR2 0ET

Tel: 0300 111 3000

www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

It may not always be that the Housing Ombudsman Service is the appropriate Governing Body for SCH to refer a customer to, therefore the Investigating officer may confirm a different governing body, such as:

- Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

www.lgo.org.uk

Telephone: 0300 061 0614

- Building Safety Regulator

www.hse.gov.uk/building-safety

7. Unreasonable Communication

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.

8. 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	5
Effective from	1 April 2024
Policy author	Complaints Manager
Policy Owner	Head of Customer Experience
Review Date	April 2026 (or earlier where there is a change in Legislation or Service Review)
Policy Links	Unreasonable Communication Policy Remedies Policy Reasonable Adjustment Policy