

Policy Number: P1004
Policy Owner: Head of Customer Insight and Communications
Approved: October 2022
Review due: October 2025

Complaints and Compliments Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 We are committed to providing a high-quality service for our customers and working in an open and accountable way that builds trust and respect. We strive to deliver excellent services but know that sometimes things go wrong.
- 1.2 We will listen to what has happened and aim to respond positively and effectively to complaints. We will apologise for our mistakes, put things right when they have gone wrong and ensure we learn from these situations to improve our services.

2. Scope

- 2.1 We have adopted the Housing Ombudsman's definition of a complaint
A complaint shall be defined as 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.' (Code 1.2)
- 2.2 Customers do not have to use the word 'complaint' in order for us to treat it as such. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative will still be handled in line with our Complaints Policy.
- 2.3 Anonymous complaints will be considered but our ability to respond will be impaired and we strongly encourage customers to feel they can make complaints in strict confidence and without fear of repercussions.
- 2.4 The complaints process should not be used for, nor will a complaint be escalated through all stages when the customer is:
 - Making a first request for a service or making initial contact to report a fault
 - Requesting information about or a clearer explanation of our services, policies, or procedures
 - Reporting neighbours or anti-social behaviour. A complaint about the way in which we responded to an ASB issue should be dealt with as a complaint.
 - Making contact about decisions taken or services provided by other organisations, over which we have no control.

- 2.5 If we decide not to accept a complaint, a detailed explanation will be provided to the customer setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman.

3. Principles

- 3.1 We will cooperate and comply with the Housing Ombudsman, the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and any Ombudsman's Orders.
- 3.2 We will adopt a customer-focused process that makes it easy to make a complaint.
- 3.3 Our complaints policy is based on the following principles:
- a) We will promote our policy and procedures in leaflets and on our web site
 - b) We will accept a complaint in the format the customer prefers to make it from individual customers or groups of customers where they all have the same complaint.
 - c) We will deal with complaints promptly, courteously, systematically and fairly.
 - d) Complaints will be recorded and acknowledged and our progress in dealing with them will be monitored.
 - e) Customers can ask a friend or advocate to represent them in their complaint and be present at any interview or meeting.
 - f) We will keep customers informed of progress in resolving their complaint and the outcome of our investigation.
 - g) During our investigation of a complaint we will explain what we have found and the decision we are likely to make before we finally reach that decision. This is to give our customer the opportunity to correct any misinformation, to provide further information, and explain their point of view before a decision is reached.
 - h) Where any complaint is upheld we will apologise and will seek to put the customer in the position they should have been in if the reason for the complaint had not occurred.
 - i) We will ensure any remedy offered reflects the extent of any and all service failures, and the level of detriment caused to the customer as a result, including, as appropriate:
 - acknowledging where things have gone wrong
 - providing an explanation, assistance or reasons
 - apologising
 - taking action if there has been a delay
 - reconsidering or changing a decision
 - amending a record
 - providing a financial remedy (see compensation policy for guidance)
 - changing policies, procedures or practice
 - j) We will use complaints received and the action we take to put things right, to learn from any mistakes and we will set up ways in which to share learning

amongst our staff with monthly performance updates to our Senior Management Team to identify ways to improve our systems and services.

- k) We will publish information on our website about performance and in our customer newsletter to customers and the Ombudsman about our performance against standards and targets in handling complaints.
- l) Staff likely to be involved in handling complaints will receive appropriate training in customer service and complaints handling

3.4 Reasonable adjustments

3.4.1 We will make reasonable adjustments to our complaints service where necessary, ensuring customers with a disability are not at a disadvantage when accessing the service.

3.4.2 Examples of the reasonable adjustments we will make are:

- Using the customer's communication preference throughout the duration of the complaint
- We will not request a complaint to be made in writing where this presents a barrier or disadvantage to the customer due to their disability or additional needs
- Extension of any time limits (where it is lawful to do so)
- Provide information in alternative formats eg. Braille, large print or on coloured paper

4. Policy Statement

4.1 This policy statement is an important declaration to our customers that we are open to receive complaints about our service. It sets out how we will investigate complaints and resolve things promptly, fairly and politely, saying sorry when we've got things wrong.

4.2 Complaints Stages

4.2.1 We will operate a two-stage complaints process and clearly signpost the customer to the next stage, including to the Ombudsman, should they not be satisfied with the outcome.

4.2.2 We will endeavour to resolve complaints as quickly as possible, but our maximum timescales for response to complaints are:

- Acknowledge receipt of a complaint – 5 working days
- Communicate a stage one decision to the customer – 10 working days
- Communicate the outcome of a stage two review to the customer – 20 working days

4.2.3 If unavoidable circumstances mean we cannot keep to these timescales we will contact the customer as soon as possible within the timescale to agree an extension with the customer. The extension for both stages will be in accordance with the Complaints Handling Code. If we cannot

reach an agreement over an extension period we will provide the Housing Ombudsman's contact details so the customer can challenge our plan for responding and/or the proposed timeliness of our response.

4.3 Agency Managed Services

- 4.3.1 Our Agency Managed Services (AMS) will investigate and respond to complaints about the service they provide.
- 4.3.2 We will investigate complaints that fall within our landlord responsibility within our complaints process.
- 4.3.3 We will monitor complaints responded to by our AMS.
- 4.3.4 We will require our AMS to operate a policy in line with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

4.4 Habitual or vexatious complaints

- 4.4.1 People may act out of character in times of trouble or distress. There may have been upsetting or distressing circumstances leading up to a complaint. We do not view behaviour as unacceptable just because someone is forceful or determined. In fact, we acknowledge that being persistent can be a positive advantage when pursuing a complaint.
- 4.4.2 We also recognise that some customers might complain on several occasions because of
 - repeated poor experience (justified)
 - high expectations
 - belief it's the right approach to resolving dissatisfaction and we will continue to respond to these complaints in line with our policy.
- 4.4.3 Complainants (and/or anyone acting on their behalf) may be deemed to be habitual or vexatious complainants where they meet two or more of the following criteria:
 - They persist in pursuing a complaint where our complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and exhausted and/or the Ombudsman has not upheld the complaint.
 - They change the substance of a complaint or continually raise new issues or seek to prolong contact by continually raising further concerns or questions upon receipt of a response whilst the complaint is being addressed. (Care will be taken not to discard new issues which are significantly different from the original complaint. These might need to be addressed as separate complaints.)
 - They are unwilling to accept documented evidence of action taken as being factual; deny receipt of an adequate response in spite of correspondence specifically answering their questions; do not accept that facts can sometimes be difficult to verify when a long period of time has elapsed; persistent refusal to accept a decision

made or accept explanations; and continuing to pursue a case without presenting any new information.

- They do not clearly identify the precise issues which they wish to be investigated, despite every effort of staff to help them specify their concerns, and/or where the concerns identified are not within our remit to investigate
- They display unreasonable demands or expectations and fail to accept that these may be unreasonable (e.g. insist on responses to complaints or enquiries being provided more urgently than is reasonable).

4.4.4 Any habitual or vexatious complaint will be referred to a senior manager (in line with stage 2 of our process for a final reply).

4.5 Compliments

4.5.1 We aim to provide the best possible service and are happy to receive and record compliments so that we can understand the quality of service our customers want.

4.5.2 Knowing about a service that is well-received and has been offered by one team or one member of staff can help us to improve across the whole of our business.

4.5.3 A compliment could be a simple “thank you” or an expression of delight. It might be made in writing, by email, verbally or by any other means.

4.5.4 We will record compliments on a central register. The person receiving the compliment at the time it is made will record it and ensure it is passed to the appropriate team manager.

4.5.5 Compliments will be discussed as a standard agenda item at team meetings, to identify opportunities for improvement generally.

4.5.6 Our Senior Management Team and Board will receive periodic reports on compliments received, the nature of them and their outcomes. This information will be used to improve services and as a learning tool for the organisation.

4.5.7 A summary of compliments and changes made as a result will be published each year in our annual report to residents.

4.5.8 Compliments may also be featured from time to time on notice boards, at meetings with residents’ associations and in newsletters. The name of the customer making the compliment will only be published with their consent

5. Data Protection and Equality Impact

In developing this policy we have carried out assessments to ensure that we have considered:

- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Privacy and Data Protection

To request a copy of these full assessments, please contact the Business Assurance Team at business.assurance@saha.org.uk.

6. Further information

If you have any questions regarding this policy, please contact your line manager or the Business Assurance Team at business.assurance@saha.org.uk, who will direct your query to the relevant Policy owner.

Legislative and Regulatory Framework

The following legislation, regulatory standards and documents can be relied upon to inform this policy.

Legal Framework	Regulatory Standard	Other documents
	Tenant Involvement and Empowerment	Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code April 2022
		Compensation Policy

Document History Log

Lead Reviewer	Date			Version	Approval	
	Created:	Revised:	Expiry		By	Date
S Bate	15/07/2009		July 2012	1.0	Monitoring Committee	15/07/2009
S Bate		21/04/2011	April 2011	1.1	Monitoring Committee	21/04/2011
P Latham		26/02/2014	June 2018	1.2	EMT	30/06/2015
S Bate		31/07/2015	January 2019	1.3	EMT	26/01/2016
S Haslam	For Merger	31.01.2017	January 2019	1.4		
HoCS		June 2018	June 2021	1.5	Gov & HR Committee	14/06/2018
BAO		August 2019	June 2021	1.6	Formatting changes	N/A
BAO		July 2020	June 2021	1.7	Review of job titles	n/a
TPAS	Full external review to align to CHC		June 2022	2.0	SMT	

HoCI&C	Alignment to CHC April 2022	July 2022	July 2025	2.1	EMT	Oct 2022
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Equality Impact Assessment Summary			
Protected characteristic	Impact (Positive, negative, neutral)	Protected characteristic	Impact (Positive, negative, neutral)
Age	Neutral	Disability	Neutral
Sex	Neutral	Race	Neutral
Religion of belief	Neutral	Sexual orientation	Neutral
Gender reassignment	Neutral	Pregnancy / maternity	Neutral
Marriage / civil partnership	Neutral		