

Why do we have a complaint and appeals policy We want to provide a customer centred culture in which we all work together to deliver excellent service at all times. We constantly seek to improve our services but recognise that sometimes things may go wrong or are thought to have gone wrong. When they do, we want to put them right. Our complaint policy and procedure tell our staff and customers what to do if a customer has a complaint about our service or wants to appeal about a decision we have taken.

We will not consider complaints which, in our opinion, are being pursued in an unreasonable manner or are frivolous.

Who can complain Anyone who receives a service from us can use the formal complaints and appeals procedure; this includes:

- Customers
- Residents
- Leaseholders
- Shared Owners
- Applicants
- Home Owners
- Home Owners in receipt of domiciliary care
- Home Improvement Service customers

Our complaints procedure is also open to anyone acting on a customer's behalf – with their written permission – for example tenants' associations, local councillors, Members of Parliament, Citizen's Advice Bureaux, Advocates.

What complaints can be about Our complaints policy plans to give a customer focused, open and prompt solution to any complaint. We encourage customers to ask us to reply to their concerns if, in their opinion, we have

- treated them unfairly, unreasonably, incompetently or in an inappropriate manner.
- not given any service or relevant Information or have not carried out a duty or kept a promise in line with our procedures.

Customers may also appeal against a decision, for example if we did not consider all relevant facts, or if we did not follow our own rules, policies or procedures.

What complaints cannot be about Our complaints policy does not treat the following as complaints:

- A first request for service, information or an explanation of our policies and procedures.
- An issue that is over one year old.
- Complaints from staff (covered by our grievance procedure).
- Disagreements between customers about nuisance or harassment (covered by our neighbour nuisance and harassment procedures), unless the complaint refers to our failure to deal with the disagreement appropriately.
- A claim being dealt with by our insurers.

In case of threat of legal action by the tenant or by the solicitors acting on his or her behalf) we will refer the matter to their

solicitors. Our solicitors will advise us if the complaint could prejudice our defence in any subsequent court proceedings. If that happens, the complaint will not be processed until after the court proceedings

When a problem first occurs

An informal complaint is a complaint that can be resolved by front line staff within five working days. If a customer is unhappy with any aspect of our service and wants to make an informal complaint, we ask that they first contact the member of our staff who usually deals with these services. A simple phone call to the right person can quickly sort many problems out.

If the complaint has not been resolved

If the first member of staff contacted does not resolve the problem to the customer's satisfaction within five working days, the customer can then make a formal complaint to us by any means of communication. In their communication, the customer should say that they want to make a formal complaint (see stage 1).

If the customer needs help to write down their complaint or an interpreter to explain the procedure, the customer needs to tell us and we will make the necessary arrangements. The customer will need to follow the stages set out. The complaint will normally be sent back to the person they should have contacted, if they miss out any of the stages.

The customer has two months at the end of every stage to request a move to the next stage. If they do not request this, after two months we will consider their complaint closed.

Stage 1

The customer makes a formal complaint to the Customer Relations Department. The Customer Relations staff will

- put the complaint on our complaints' database, as an official complaint at stage 1 of our complaints process
- make sure that the manager in charge of the relevant service investigates it
- make sure the customer receives a letter, within 3 working days to say that the complaint has been recorded.

The customer must receive a full written reply from the investigating manager, within 10 working days.

Stage 2

If the customer is not satisfied with the manager's reply, they must contact the Customer Relations Manager who will ensure that the appropriate Director or Head of Service deals with the complaint. The Director or Head of Service will look into the matter and if appropriate, will ask the customer to come to a meeting to review their complaint. The customer must receive a written response within 10 working days.

**Stage 3
Appeal to the Board**

If the matter has still not been resolved, the customer can appeal, we will give them a copy of the appeal procedure. A committee made up of members of our Board of Management can look at the complaint. The committee are independent of our staff, have a range of specialist skills and knowledge; they operate under the delegated authority of the full Board. If the complaint reaches stage 3, we will send the customer details about stage 3, together

with an invitation to attend the meeting with the complaints committee.

The customer may bring a colleague or a friend with them for support. If they do so, they must inform the Customer Relations Manager of the name of the person who will be coming with them. As this is not a legal procedure, the customer may NOT bring a solicitor or legal representative with them, as we will not have one present.

If the customer does not wish to attend the meeting, they have the option of sending a written explanation of their case to the committee. The committee will tell the customer what their decision is, within five working days.

The times given for replies at all stages of the complaints procedure are targets and are not absolute deadlines. There may be occasions when for a number of reasons, we are unable to meet those targets. If this is the case, we will write to the customer to let them know the reason for the delay and to give them a new date.

If the customer is awarded compensation at any stage, it will be used to first pay any outstanding debt with us.

In exceptional circumstances where the claimant owes us money, the Committee (Level 3), Managing Director or Director (Level 2), can decide whether to pay some or all of the payment directly to the claimant.

The Board of Management Appeals Committee work under the delegated authority of the Springboard Board of Management.