

Complaints Policy

Introduction

Grand Union Housing Group (GUHG) aims to ensure that its customers always come first by welcoming their complaints to help improve services and make the best use of resources. Sometimes we make mistakes, but we are committed to providing a positive and understanding approach when receiving and handling complaints. The aim of this policy is to set out our philosophy towards handling and resolving complaints as effectively as possible.

We aim to make the complaints process as simple as possible for our customers, and make sure they receive a consistent service. We will deal with matters from their perspective and make contact by their preferred method. We will take full ownership and attempt to achieve a resolution at the first point of contact, although we accept that this might not always be possible. Where actions are agreed, we will make follow up contact to ensure that these took place.

Our customers can make a complaint in a number of ways:

- website
- email
- web chat
- telephone
- face to face
- letter
- complaints form.

Examples of complaints can include where a customer believes we have:

- done something wrong
- failed to do something we should have done
- acted too slowly to resolve a matter
- not followed our policies.

It is also important to be clear about what would not be classed as a complaint, where a customer contacts us, for example:

- Asking for a window to be replaced, this would be treated as an enquiry.
- To say that their heating is not working, this would be treated as a request for a repair.

- Any matter that is, or becomes, the subject of legal action. This includes any on-going complaint that becomes subject to legal action.

Policy statement

When our customers express a level of dissatisfaction with any of the services we provide, we will welcome and value the opportunity to address their concerns and aim to resolve their complaint at the first point of contact.

We will assign a designated complaint owner, who will take responsibility for liaising with the customer to ensure the matter is dealt with appropriately and in a timely manner. This is Stage 1 of our process.

If our customer remains dissatisfied, it can be escalated to the relevant director. This is Stage 2 of our process.

We recognise that effective resolution of complaints will help us to:

- maintain credibility and reputation with customers
- learn from complaints to improve customer satisfaction and confidence
- identify strengths and weaknesses in areas of service delivery and help prevent repeat problems
- make better use of resources
- learn more about the impact that our processes and services have on our customers
- provide our customers with a real opportunity to influence change
- enhance awareness of our customers' needs.

All changes made to our services and/or policies as a result of complaints will be reported in our electronic customer' newsletter, Insight.

Objectives

The key objectives of this policy are to ensure:

- Complaints are dealt with in a timely manner with our customer's agreement of timeframe.
- This policy, and associated procedure, is easily accessible, well publicised, easy to use and that support is provided to help customers through the process.
- Where appropriate, compensation is considered in accordance with our Compensation procedure.
- Customers are kept fully informed of the progress of their complaint and that sufficient trained resources are in place to deal with them.
- Responsibilities are delegated so that front-line staff can make decisions and resolve issues as quickly and effectively as possible.

- All complaints are monitored and recorded to enable regular reporting on outcomes to our Residents' Voice panel, our Board and our Executive Management Team.
- Follow-up action is taken so we learn from customer complaints.
- Customer confidentiality is respected.
- Customers are treated fairly throughout the process and feel confident their complaints are being dealt with.
- We meet our legal and regulatory requirements.

The Housing Act 1996, Section 51 and Schedule 2, states that all registered providers have a duty to become members of any Ombudsman scheme approved by the Secretary of State.

We are a member of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme.

Other related policies/procedures

Compensation Procedure

Data Protection & Confidentiality Policy

Complaints Procedure

2020 Vision Strategy

Equality, Diversity and Customer Care Policy

Money Advice Procedure

Unreasonable Customer Behaviour Policy

Training

We will ensure that all employees across GUHG know about the Complaints policy and procedure, and how to deal with customer complaints.

Monitoring

This policy will be monitored and we will report monthly to our Leadership and Executive Management teams. An annual report at the end of the financial year will also be made to the Residents' Voice panel. Our monthly statistics and commentary will include the number and types of complaints and Ombudsman referrals, how many complaints were upheld, either in full or in part, a summary of service improvements made as a result of the processes and details of compensation payments made.

Misrepresentation, error or omission

This policy operates on the basis that all customers will provide an accurate and truthful representation of their circumstances in all of their dealings with us, and in particular, when making an official complaint and/or a claim for compensation. If it is established that any information provided, or application made, to us is incorrect or incomplete, we will reserve the right to review or revoke any decisions and/or offers of

compensation made on the basis of the incorrect or incomplete information.

The localism act 2011

This provides that customers will be able to ask for their complaints to be considered by a 'designated person' when their landlord's internal procedure is complete. The idea behind this is that ideally, local issues can be resolved at a local level without the need to involve the Ombudsman.

Who can be a 'designated person'?

This can be an MP, local councillor or customer panel. Landlords **do not** have to set up a customer panel, so we decided **not** to offer this as an option at this time.

What can a 'designated person' do?

They can either try to resolve your complaint or refer it to the Ombudsman. If they decide to do neither, you can then, immediately, refer the complaint to the Ombudsman yourself.

If you decide not to refer your complaint to a 'designated person', you must wait at least 8 weeks from the end of our internal procedure before you can contact the Ombudsman. Please note that the time limit for contacting the Ombudsman is 6 months.

In summary, customers have the following options:

- Ask their local councillor or MP to help resolve the complaint
- Wait 8 weeks from the end of our internal procedure and refer the complaint directly to the Ombudsman

Unreasonable customer behaviour or vexatious complainants

We welcome complaints and we do not normally restrict the number of complaints or level of contact made in pursuit of a complaint(s), by any of our customers. However, we occasionally receive complaints from customers whose behaviour and/or frequent contact, may result in a delay in actually dealing with their complaint or, just as importantly, may affect the ability of staff to fairly assist other customers. Such people are referred to as 'unreasonable or vexatious complainants' and where their behaviour adversely affects the ability of staff to investigate their complaint and/or provide a fair service to other customers, it may be necessary to consider restricting a person's contact with us. This may mean that email, telephone, web chat, social media, website, personal or written contact is restricted but we will aim to do this in such a way that will not deter the complaint from progressing through the complaints

procedure. In more extreme cases, contact may be restricted to written communication or via a third party. Additionally, where written communication is considered excessive in the pursuit of the complaint, we will consider the level and frequency of responses to be issued to the customer.

All decisions to restrict contact from, and/or responses to, any customer will be taken by a senior manager and the customer will be informed of this and given an explanation of what this will mean for them. (See also the Unreasonable Customer Behaviour policy).

Repeat complaints

Issues that have already been fully investigated and responded to in accordance with the Complaints procedure will not be accepted as official complaints again. (See also the Unreasonable Customer Behaviour policy)

Money advice complaints

Any complaints relating to debt adjusting, debt counselling and credit information services will follow our 'Money Advice Complaints procedure'. If the complainant is not satisfied with our response they will instead need to complain to the Financial Ombudsman Service. They can contact the Financial Ombudsman Service if they are not satisfied with our response, or if we take longer than 8 weeks to respond.

Discretion

We will exercise discretion within the context of this policy but where we do so, the reason(s) why will be recorded.

Customer consultation:	December 2018
Equality Impact Assessment carried out:	Initial screen
Person responsible for review:	Director of Customer Experience
Supported by:	Customer Service Manager
Ratified by:	Leadership team/Exec 28 January 2019
Date of review:	January 2019
Date of next review:	January 2022