



Complaints Policy

Introduction

Grand Union Housing Group aims to ensure our customers always come first by welcoming complaints and using what we learn from them to help us improve services. 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 approach to handling and resolving complaints as effectively as possible.

Policy statement

When our customers express 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 have a dedicated Complaint Resolutions team. Every complaint we receive will have a designated complaint owner, who will take responsibility for liaising with the customer to resolve the problem quickly and effectively. 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
- provide our customers with a real opportunity to influence change
- increase awareness of our customers' needs and expectations.

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

Aims and objectives

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. Our Complaint Resolutions team will take full ownership and

attempt to resolve the problem 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 wide variety of ways:

- via our websites
- online account
- email
- letter
- face to face
- web chat
- telephone call.

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/procedures.
- not taken account of exceptional circumstances that may have affected a decision we made.

There are circumstances in which a matter will not be considered to be a complaint. For example:

- The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over six months ago or is an issue that has already been investigated under the complaint procedure. Where the problem is a recurring issue, we will consider any older reports as part of the background to the complaint if this will help to resolve the issue for the customer. The exception to this is where complaints concern safeguarding or health and safety issues. In these circumstances, we will always investigate the issue irrespective of whether this occurred over six months ago.
- Legal proceedings have been started. However, we will make sure customers are not left without a response for lengthy periods of time, for example, where a letter before action has been received or issued but no court proceedings are started, or settlement agreement reached.

The key objectives of this policy and associated procedure are to ensure:

- Complaints are dealt with in a timely manner and in accordance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.
- 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.

- 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 Customer Experience Committee, 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 they are being listened to and 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 and comply with the requirements of the Complaints Handling Code.

Other related policies/procedures

Compensation Procedure
 Data Protection & Confidentiality Policy
 Complaints Procedure
 Corporate Plan
 Equality, Diversity and Customer Care Policy
 Unreasonable Customer Behaviour Policy

Training

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

Monitoring

We will report quarterly on complaint numbers and any negative customer feedback received, reasons, trends and corrective action taken. This will be provided to our Leadership team, Executive Management team and our Customer Experience Committee. Learning and improvements made will be included in our Annual Report and on our website.

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 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 local issues should 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 eight 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 12 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.

Contact details for the Ombudsman are:

Housing Ombudsman Service
PO Box 152
Liverpool
L33 7WQ

Telephone: 0300 111 3000
Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk
Website: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

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 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 eight 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.

Person responsible for review:	Director of Customer Experience
Supported by:	Customer Contact Manager
Ratified by:	Executive Management Team 22 December 2020
Date of review:	December 2020
Date of next review:	December 2023