

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 fair, impartial and timely 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 aim to acknowledge the complaint by telephone and/or in writing, preferably by email, within one working day. We will always acknowledge within the five working days which is required by the Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code.

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 of Service. This is Stage 2 of our process.

Timelines for both stage 1 and stage 2 of our process can be found within our Complaints Procedure which accompanies this document.

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 or anyone affected by our services can make a complaint in a wide variety of ways. Customers may ask someone to help them make a complaint or make it on their behalf, for example, a friend or relative.

- Via our websites
- Online account
- Email
- Letter
- Face to face, to visiting Grand Union Housing Group colleagues.
- Telephone call
- Social media

If a complaint is made via social media, we will ensure your privacy by asking you to Direct Message your name and contact information and we will contact you to raise your complaint.

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, or we may not agree to escalate. 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 helps 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.

- Antisocial behaviour (ASB) cases will only be considered in our formal complaints process where our customer has expressed dissatisfaction on how the case is, or has been handled, or is dissatisfied with the outcome.

When we do not accept a matter as a complaint, we will provide in writing (preferably by email) a detailed explanation why and advise of the right to take that decision to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

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.

Legislation and Regulation

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.

We will handle complaints and personal information in line with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018.

Other related policies, procedures and legislation

Compensation Procedure
Data Protection Policy
Complaints Procedure
Further Together 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.

Impartial advice can be sought from the Housing Ombudsman Service before our complaints process is exhausted. Once our complaints process is exhausted and a stage two final response has been issued, the matter can be referred immediately to the Housing Ombudsman Service. 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: Customer Experience Committee
3 February 2021

Date of review: November 2023

Date of next review: November 2026