

## **Complaints Procedure**

### **Introduction**

Grand Union Housing Group (GUHG) 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 procedure is to set out our approach to 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.

Complaints will be dealt with by our dedicated Complaints Resolutions team. The team 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 wide variety of ways including:

- 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.

All complaints must be registered straight away and investigated.

When handling complaints, we will review in line with the Equality Act 2010 and make reasonable adjustments to meet customer's needs.

Complaints should be made within six months of the cause of complaint. Any issues older than this may not be processed through the complaint procedure.

All complaints will be handled in strict confidence by colleagues who are involved in the investigation of a complaint.

Customers may ask someone to help them make a complaint or make it on their behalf, for example, a friend or relative. However, replies to complaints will only be addressed and issued to our customer and not to any third party, unless we hold a general authority to disclose to a third party.

Our definition of a complaint mirrors the Housing Ombudsman Service's definition which is:

- 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.

## **Recording, responding and timescales**

The following steps will be followed at Stage 1:

1. If our customer advises us, they are unhappy with any aspect of our service, the GUHG colleague who receives the complaint must capture the following information and transfer the customer to our Resolution team, preferably by phone and if not by email. Where an email is required, our Resolution team will aim to contact our customer within one working day but no longer than five working days as set out in the Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code. Where the complaint goes directly to our Resolution team, they will capture the following information and aim to resolve the matter:
  - a. full details of the issue the customer wants resolving.
  - b. information relevant to the issue including details of any conversation with the customer.
  - c. how the customer wants us to resolve the issue.
2. Our Resolution team will aim to resolve the complaint immediately, collaborating with the relevant teams.
3. We will always aim to resolve a complaint within 10 working days. Where there is a legitimate reason why this has not been possible, we will ask for the customers permission for an extension, confirming this agreement and new deadline in writing (preferably by email). This extension must not exceed more than 10 days without good reason.

4. If a customer is not in agreement to retain at Stage 1, we must provide the customer with the contact details for the Housing Ombudsman Service. This will allow the customer to challenge our plan for responding and/or the timeliness of our response.
5. If a customer raises additional complaints during our investigation, we will include them if they are relevant and if our Stage 1 response has not been issued. If a Stage 1 response has been issued or it would unreasonably delay our response, a new complaint will be raised.
6. For all complaints resolved at Stage 1, we will issue a written response using our approved template which will include, reason for complaint, action taken, and resolution agreed.
7. If the customer remains dissatisfied, they can ask for their complaint to be escalated.
8. If we refuse to escalate to Stage 2, we will write to our customer (preferably by email) setting out our reason why and advising of the right to approach the Housing Ombudsman Service about our decision.

If a complaint is escalated to Stage 2, the following steps will be taken:

1. Resolution Team Leader will escalate to Stage 2 and issue an acknowledgement, preferably by email. This will provide our customer with the name of the relevant Director.
2. The Director, or someone they delegate the complaint to, will aim to call the customer to introduce themselves within two working days and attempt to resolve matters.
3. The Director remains accountable for the investigation completed and response issued in line with timeframes, even if they delegate to a colleague. Before a response is issued, the Director must discuss with our Resolution Team Leader and our Continuous Improvement & Transformation Manager to review for potential service improvements.
4. If the complaint cannot be resolved within 20 working days, written agreement must be obtained from our customer to remain at Stage 2 (preferably by email).
5. If our customer does not agree to extending the time at Stage 2, we must provide the customer with the contact details for the Housing Ombudsman Service. This will allow the customer to challenge our plan for responding and/or timeliness of our response.
6. For all complaints resolved at Stage 2, a written response must be sent (preferably by email) giving our customer their right to refer to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

Our timeframes are in line with the Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code. If a complaint is resolved and actions are promised at either Stage 1 or Stage 2, we must contact the customer to ensure the actions have been completed and the customer is happy with the outcome.

### **Service Improvements**

Our Continuous Improvement & Transformation Manager will lead on reviewing complaints and other negative feedback. The purpose is to identify and implement service improvements.

### **Monitoring**

This procedure will be monitored alongside the Complaints Policy. Additionally, on a quarterly basis our Continuous Improvement team, Customer Insight team and our Customer Experience Manager will produce a report for our Customer Experience Committee and Leadership team. This report will be shared with our Board. It will include changes that have been made because of complaints and other negative feedback.

**Person responsible for review:** Customer Experience Manager

**Date of review:** November 2023