

# Complaints Policy



## Scope

This policy explains Town & Country Housing's (TCH) approach to managing complaints.

The policy applies to all customers of Town & Country Housing and any individual or group affected by the services we provide.

## Aims and Objectives

TCH aims to provide the best possible service to our residents and customers but recognises that sometimes we will get things wrong. We use complaints as an opportunity to improve our services. The focus of our approach to complaints management is a prompt and courteous resolution to the satisfaction of the complainant.

It is important to note that a complaint may be made to any member of staff via communication methods including, but not limited to: in person, by telephone, email or electronic form. All staff members have the responsibility to recognise and record a complaint, however it is made. All staff members should support customers to access the complaints process, making reasonable adjustments where required, and make the process clear and simple for all complainants.

A resident or customer does not have to use the word complaint for it to be treated as such. Colleagues should recognise the difference between a service request (pre-complaint), survey feedback and a formal complaint and take appropriate steps to resolve the issue for residents as early as possible

## Key terms and definitions

A complaint shall be defined as 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. For example:

- Action or a lack of action in response to a service request
- Poor quality service
- The behaviour of TCH staff or contractors working on behalf of TCH
- Failure to follow an approved TCH policy or procedure

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The difference between a service request and a complaint is that a service request is a request from a customer to their landlord requiring action to be taken to put something right. However, a complaint should be raised when a customer raises dissatisfaction with the response to a service request.

The following scenarios are not considered to be complaints:

- An initial request for service, such as the first request for a repair
- An initial request for information or an explanation
- A report of anti-social behaviour (ASB) as they are dealt under our separate ASB policy and procedure
- An appeal against action resulting in court proceedings or matters relating to ongoing court proceedings
- When legal proceedings have begun for the matter being complained about. (Legal proceedings are defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court)
- Insurance claims and appeals, including damage to personal possessions and personal injury accidents which will require referral to the relevant insurers
- Matters that have already been determined under the complaints policy or another TCH policy
- The amount of service charge or rent increase set in line with TCH policy

If the matter raised by a customer is not considered to be a complaint we will explain the reasons why and what alternative actions will be taken. We will also provide details of the Ombudsman if the customer disagrees with the decision not to consider the matter under the complaints policy.

## Policy

TCH positively welcomes feedback in the form of complaints from anyone who is affected by a service we provide, or a decision made by us, including:

- Tenants
- Leaseholders
- Shared Owners
- Any third party adversely affected by our actions or decisions
- Any person acting on behalf of any of the above groups where we have consent for them to do so, e.g.: a family member, neighbour, advice agency, MP, local councillor, Housing Ombudsman.

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A complaint may be made by post, telephone, e-mail, via an electronic form on our website or verbally to any member of staff. Our contact details are:

Telephone: 01892 501480

E-mail: [info@tch.org.uk](mailto:info@tch.org.uk)

Web: [www.tch.org.uk](http://www.tch.org.uk)

TCH accepts complaints made via social media but upon receipt these will be taken off line and dealt with through the standard process.

Our complaints process is comprised of two stages. Stage 1 is an investigation carried out by an appropriate member of staff from the relevant service area. The response to the complaint will be issued once the answer to the complaint is known and a resolution has been proposed and where possible agreed with the customer and not at the point that any outstanding actions are completed.

If an additional complaint is raised whilst an existing complaint is being investigated, the additional complaint will be responded to as part of the existing complaint, provided it is relevant and will not cause unreasonable delays in the response.

If the complaint is escalated to Stage 2, an independent review will be carried out by a senior manager from our Leadership Team, or other member of the stage 2 panel, not connected to the service area complained about.

Complaints will only be escalated to Stage 2 once a stage 1 response has been issued and at the customers request. Complaints will not be escalated to stage 2 if the requested escalation reasons are unrelated to the initial complaint but will instead be logged as a new stage 1 complaint. Complaints will not be escalated to stage 2 if the reasons given are the same as in under this policy. Please refer to the Complaints Procedure for further details on how this process works.

In order that complaints can be investigated effectively, all complaints should be submitted within 6 months of when the event occurred, or it became known to the complainant. However where there is a current complaint about a problem that is a reoccurring issue, the landlord should consider any older reports as part of the background to the complaint. Only in exceptional circumstances will a complaint be accepted outside this timescale and this is at the discretion of the Assistant Director of Customer Experience or another member of TCH's leadership team.

Confidentiality and data protection apply to the complaints process. TCH will not share personal data or property information gathered as part of the complaint investigation with any third party who is not entitled to receive it, in line with current legislation. Complaints can however be made through an authorised representative of the complainant and will be handled in line with the complaints policy.

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Any dissatisfaction raised concerning the content of TCH policies, procedures or responsibilities will not be raised as a complaint but will be used as feedback to consider when the relevant policy, procedure or responsibility are next due for review.

## Timescales

### Stage 1

- Complaints will be logged and acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt
- Complaints will be investigated and responded to within 10 working days of the date the complaint is logged
- If a response cannot be provided within 10 working days we will agree a further extension of no more than 10 working days

### Stage 2 Escalation

- A request to escalate to stage 2 of the complaints process should be made within 10 working days of the date of the stage 1 response
- Requests to escalate to stage 2 made outside of 10 working days will only be considered in exceptional circumstances

### Stage 2

- Stage 2 complaints will be allocated to a stage 2 handler within 2 working day of receipt of the request
- Stage 2 complaints will be acknowledged by the handler within 2 working days of being allocated
- Complaints will be investigated and responded to within 20 working days of initial receipt of escalation request.
- If a response cannot be provided within 20 working days we will agree a further extension of no more than 10 working days

If at any stage of the complaints process an extension cannot be agreed with the customer we will provide details of the Housing Ombudsman to the complainant for escalation.

## Monitoring and continuous improvement

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years unless legislation, business or sector developments require otherwise to ensure that it continues to meet the stated objectives and takes account of best practice developments.

## Training

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TCH will ensure that complaints handling will form part of the induction process and that refresher training is built into the organisational Learning & Development programme.

## Equalities Statement

This policy will be implemented in accordance with TCH's equality and diversity policy. An equalities impact assessment has been completed to ensure that the policy is inclusive and does not impact negatively on any resident or group of residents. The policy aims to make our complaints process fair and accessible to all.

## Resident Influence

Residents have been consulted during the 2020 review of this policy through TCH's Policy & Strategy Review Group. Feedback confirmed that the policy was easy to understand and comprehensive. Residents wanted to ensure that it was clear that the policy covers TCH contractors as well as directly employed staff; this is covered in the key terms and definitions section. As a result of resident feedback a flow chart has also been developed to illustrate the policy stages, this accompanies the complaints process and is published on our website.

## Legislation & Regulation

TCH should provide early advice to residents regarding their right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service, not only at the point they have exhausted the landlord's complaints process. The Housing Ombudsman Service can assist residents throughout the life of a complaint. This affords the resident the opportunity to engage with the Ombudsman's dispute support advisors. A complainant who remains dissatisfied having exhausted our internal complaints procedure will be advised that a referral can be made to the Housing Ombudsman Service once our complaints process has been completed. Their contact details are:

Address: Exchange Tower, Harbour Exchange Square, London  
E14 9GE

Telephone: 0300 111 3000

E-mail: [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

Web: [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

The Housing Ombudsman will only accept complaints where we have a contractual relationship with the complainant. They will not accept complaints from general members of the general public.

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## Related Documents

- Complaints Procedure
- Compensation Policy
- Persistent & Vexatious Complainant Policy
- All other TCH policies covering operational processes and procedures
- The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code

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