

Complaints Procedure

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This procedure sets out the process that will be used when managing and resolving complaints received by Town & Country Housing (TCH) (A subsidiary of Peabody).
- 1.2 This procedure provides a structure for complaints to be investigated and resolved promptly, politely, fairly and consistently, and to ensure that customers are kept informed both during their complaint and of the final outcome. It should be read and applied in conjunction with the Peabody Group Complaints Policy.
- 1.3 Most complaints will be recorded and progressed on Dynamics 365 CRM system but a legacy Rosebery process is in operation for Epsom pending further IT system integration.

2.0 Roles and Responsibilities

- 2.1 All staff who have responsibility for responding to and managing complaints within their service area will receive complaints management training, which will be refreshed on a regular basis or upon request. All staff involved in complaints management will be expected to follow this procedure.
- 2.2 Specific roles within TCH with responsibility for ensuring the complaints procedure is followed are:
 - **Assistant Director of Customer Experience** – will own the complaints policy and procedure, provide performance information, insight and monitor service improvements following complaints feedback.
 - **Customer Feedback and Information Manager** –will oversee contact with the Housing Ombudsman Service, ensure all written complaints are logged on the CRM system and allocated to the correct team, monitor complaints progress in accordance with our published timescales and monitor quality of complaint responses. Additionally, will allocate Stage 2 complaints to a member of the Stage 2 Panel to provide an independent review of the complaint handling at Stage 1.
 - **Customer Services Manager** – will ensure that all verbal complaints are logged on the CRM system and allocated to the correct team.
 - **Operations Director/other EMT members** – will provide guidance and oversight in the management and decision making of complex cases and drive the performance of complaints management.
 - **Heads of Service Areas/ADs** – will monitor complaints within their service area to ensure they are dealt with in a timely and appropriate manner, with focus on the quality of the response.
 - **The Senior Customer Experience Officer** supports the **CF&IM** with the effective handling and resolution of all stage 1 and stage 2 customer complaints at Epsom.

3.0 Complaints

3.1 Complaints relating to disagreement with our policies and procedures.

- We will check that the policy/procedure has been followed correctly and that the individual's support needs have been taken into account when applying the policy.

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- If our agreed policy/procedure has not been followed, we will investigate the complaint as a failure of service.
- When reviewing policy and procedure we will consider feedback about the content from relevant complaints.

3.2 Persistent and unacceptable behaviour by customers

We will treat our customers with fairness and respect and expect our staff to be treated likewise. We will not accept :

Aggressive or abusive behaviour – which may include:

- Physical violence or threats
- Verbal abuse, rudeness or unnecessary personal comments about our staff
- Rude, vicious or aggressive correspondence or entries made on social media and personal blogs
- Unreasonable demands which impact on our staff's time (eg requesting large volumes of information, asking for responses within a short space of time or refusing to speak to an individual).
- Persistently insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular member of staff;
- Continually making phone calls or sending letters or emails which repeat the same issues or do not allow reasonable time for response
- Repeat requests for services that are not provided by the organisation

We have a Persistent and Vexatious Complainant Policy which details in full how we will deal with persistent, unacceptable or unreasonable behaviour.

Complaints submitted by a third party or representative will be handled in line with the Peabody Group Complaints Policy.

3.3 Help to make a complaint

We can provide information in other formats, for example in large print or Braille or in other languages. Customers can also contact us through a third party representative, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, Shelter, or an MP/Councillor/designated person.

4.0 Complaints Process

4.1 Stage 1 – Investigation

4.1.1 All complaints will be logged and acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt. If a complaint is received after 1pm the tracking of working days will begin at 9am the next working day. The below steps will occur within the 5 working days.

4.1.2 The complaint will be recorded on the appropriate system and then allocated to a complaint handler, within 2 working days of receipt and no longer than 5 working days.

4.1.3 At Epsom, stage one complaints are dealt with by the Senior Customer Services and Complaints officer.

4.1.4 The complaint handler will check that the case has been correctly allocated to them within 2 working days of it being allocated and within 5 working days of the

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complaint being received. If the complaint needs to be reallocated the handler will contact the appropriate team manager to agree this before passing to the appropriate team queue. Any disputes or questions around this should be escalated to the Customer Feedback and Information Manager.

4.1.5 The complaint handler will contact the customer within 2 working days of the complaint being allocated and no longer than 5 working days from receipt of the complaint, ideally by phone or home visit. This type of contact must always be attempted and recorded on Dynamics 365 CRM/ Epsom equivalent unless there is a valid reason and in such cases the reasons should be record on Dynamics 365 CRM/ Open Housing. This allows us to check our understanding of the problem, the customer's desired outcome and the opportunity to agree a course of action to allow full investigation. If direct contact cannot be made, written acknowledgement of the complaint should be sent within 5 working days from receipt of the complaint.

4.4.6 Acknowledgement of the complaint whether verbal or in writing will contain the name the complaint handler, a basic summary of our understanding of the complaint and the timescale in which we will respond to the complaint. Verbal acknowledgements will be followed up with written confirmation.

4.1.7 We should understand:

- What exactly are the main points of the complaint that need investigating, and if anything has gone wrong?
- What does the customer expect us to do?
- Is that expectation reasonable?
- How best to respond – apology; explanation; assurance; action; compensation (or any combination of these)?
- Have we done everything we possibly can to resolve the issue and that we've made the right decisions?
- Can our responses withstand scrutiny by a third party?

4.1.8 All attempted contacts, messages left, conversations and decisions must be recorded on CRM/ Epsom equivalent as they occur with full details of what was discussed or if a message was left or not.

4.1.9 All information relied upon when reaching the outcome of the complaint must be recorded on CRM/ Epsom equivalent or a record of where this is centrally stored if it is not possible to add to the system.

4.1.10 The complaint should be investigated, and a resolution discussed and ideally agreed with the complainant before we send a written response. The response should be sent within ten working days of the date we acknowledge the complaint or ten working days from the fifth working day of the complaint being logged, whichever is sooner. The response must always include the following elements;

- The complaint definition
- A clear outcome
- A personal and empathetic tone
- An apology if and when appropriate (it may be appropriate to apologise for our approach or how we have made a customer feel even if a complaint is not upheld)
- The findings from the investigation
- Confirmation of any remedial action completed/to be completed

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- Where appropriate, details of any compensation awarded, including a breakdown of how this has been calculated and how it will be paid
- Learning points for TCH or its contractors arising from the complaint
- Steps that the complainant can take if they remain dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage1

4.1.11 If a customer raises a new complaint while an existing complaint is being investigated, this should be incorporated in to the existing complaint if the points are related and the response has not yet been issued. Where the points are not related, the response has been issued or the delay would be unreasonable, a new complaint should be logged.

4.1.12 Whilst it is important to complete complaints within the ten working day timescale, the aim is to resolve the complaint. If the complaint cannot be resolved within target timescales, we must inform the complainant at the earliest opportunity within the 10 day deadline, giving them an honest indication of when a response will be provided and outline the reason for the delay, any extension should be no more than 10 working days without good reason (extensions should only be necessary as a result of the investigation i.e. arranging interviews or inspections). All of this must be recorded on the complaints module on CRM/Epsom equivalent. The frequency of contact should be agreed with and maintained with the complainant until a resolution has been reached. If the customer does not agree to any extension, details of the Housing Ombudsman should be provided to the customer.

4.1.13 Compensation may be considered but only in accordance with our approved procedure and in discussion with the budget holder. Refer to the TCH Compensation Policy and Procedure for further details.

If possible the stage 1 response letter should be emailed to the complainant, on headed paper. If we do not have an email contact or the complainant has requested a hard copy this should be sent by clarity mail. The letter templates are set to print correctly on clarity mail and do not need to be on headed paper.

4.1.14 Following closure of the complaint, it is the stage 1 handler's responsibility to ensure that any agreed resolution whether compensation or action is delivered within agreed timescales and to remain in contact with the complainant until they have confirmed the promised action is complete.

4.1.15 The complainant has ten working days from the date of the outcome letter to consider our response and raise any concerns or further dissatisfaction. The case will be held as 'pending' within Dynamics 365 CRM or Epsom equivalent during this period. If concerns are raised during this ten day period, the case handler should consider if there is a satisfactory resolution that can be provided without the need to escalate i.e. a reasonable increase to compensation offered. If the complaint is not escalated after ten working days, we will then close the complaint on Dynamics 365 CRM or Epsom equivalent as appropriate.

4.1.16 However, if the customer remains dissatisfied with our response at stage 1, the complaint will be escalated to Stage 2 at the customers request. Customers do not have to provide reasons for escalating if they do not want to.

4.2 Stage 2 - Review

4.2.1 Upon receipt of a request to escalate a complaint, it will be escalated to Stage 2 on CRM and acknowledged within 5 working days. Requests to escalate received after 1pm will be tracked from 9am the next working day. The Customer Feedback and

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Information Manager will allocate the case to a member of the Leadership Team, or other member of the stage 2 panel, from an area of the business not connected to the subject matter of the complaint.

4.2.2 A review is not a way of appeasing a very persistent customer or a way for them to obtain more compensation. Consideration must be given to the following to determine whether the complaint has been correctly escalated to Stage 2:

- Are the reasons for escalation related to the original subject matter – if not, a new complaint should be recorded on Dynamics 365 CRM or Epsom equivalent at Stage 1. However, a review of the stage 1 response should still be completed and a stage 2 response sent confirming the outcome of the review.
- Has the request for escalation been submitted outside of the 10 day deadline – if so, the request for escalation may be declined but reasonable consideration will be given on each case. In exceptional circumstances, the Assistant Director of Customer Experience or another member of TCH's leadership team may agree the escalation.
- Is it an appeal relating to an insurance claim that has been refused – if so, a review of the stage 1 complaint will be completed but will not address the appeal of the insurance claim.
- If we do not agree to the complaint being escalated for any reason a written response will still need to be sent explaining why and that the complaint has reached the end of our process and can now be referred to the Housing Ombudsman.

4.2.4 The reviewing manager should approach the matter with an open and reflective mind. If the complaint is particularly complex or controversial, the matter should be discussed with the Assistant Director of Customer Experience, therefore if the case escalates they are already informed of the history of the case and actions taken.

4.2.5 The reviewing manager will aim to contact the customer within 2 working days of the complaint being allocated and within 5 working days of the request to escalate being received. The purpose of the call is to confirm that the complaint has been escalated to Stage 2, to fully understand the issues outstanding and what outcome the customer is looking for.

4.2.6 We will aim to issue a reply within 20 working days from the date we acknowledge the escalation or from the fifth working day after receiving the request for escalation. However, if the matter is complex, the reviewing manager will agree a realistic timescale with the customer for the investigation to be completed. Any extension will be agreed with the customer and be no longer than 20 working days without good reason. Any agreed extension will be recorded on Dynamics 365 or Epsom equivalent in the notes and using the process.

4.2.7 Once completed, the reviewing manager will attempt to speak to the customer to advise them of the outcome of their investigation, whether their complaint has been upheld or not and the reason(s) for that decision, and agree any actions that need to be taken (with timescales) if appropriate. This will be followed up by a confirmation letter taking into account the relevant points from section 4.1.10 above, including confirmation that all stages of the complaints process have been concluded and if they are still dissatisfied they can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service.

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4.2.8 The complaint will then be closed on Dynamics 365 CRM or Epsom equivalent and this completes the TCH complaints process.

4.2.9 Although the complaint process has been completed, it is the stage 2 complaints handler's responsibility to ensure that any agreed compensation or action is completed. This process should be supported by the original stage 1 handler or other appropriate team representative to ensure actions are completed and keep the Stage 2 handler informed.

4.3 Complaints & our contractors

If a complaint is logged about one of our contractors we will always oversee the process, with overall responsibility for complaint resolution sitting with the appropriate TCH staff member. (See section 4.1.10 for required actions). We will also ensure Dynamics 365 CRM/ Epsom equivalent is updated with the outcome of the investigation, with the appropriate lessons learnt.

4.4 Lessons to be learnt from complaints

4.4.1 It is essential that we use the learnings identified from complaints to help improve services across TCH.

4.4.2 The Customer Feedback & Information Manager/Assistant Director of Customer Experience will provide a quarterly report at Performance Group which will highlight service failures and recommendations where appropriate for service improvements. Implementation and monitoring of success will be the responsibility of the appropriate Head of Service/AD, who will feed in to the monthly report as necessary.

4.4.3 An in depth review of any cases the Ombudsman has found Service Failure, Maladministration or Severe Maladministration and upheld stage 2 complaints will be carried out by the Assistant Director of Customer Experience/CF&IM including all staff involved in the complaint. The purpose of the review will be to identify any lessons from the complaint and ensure that any identified action is taken.

4.4.4 Regular updates on how we have improved or altered a service will be provided on our website and in other communications with customers, including social media.

5.0 When a complainant remains dissatisfied following a stage 2 complaint response.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint having exhausted the internal complaints procedure, they will be advised of the following options for pursuing the matter.

5.1 Housing Ombudsman Service

5.1.1 Customers may contact the Housing Ombudsman Service directly at anytime during the complaints process but the Ombudsman would usually advise the complainant to wait for their complaint to complete all stages of TCH's complaint process before conducting their own investigation.

Housing Ombudsman Service

Address: P O Box 152, Liverpool, L33 7WQ.

Tel: 0300 111 3000

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E-mail: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk
Web: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

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

5.2 RICS Surveyors Ombudsman Service

This is an alternative service to the Housing Ombudsman Service that is available to private owners, leaseholders or commercial tenants. There is no designated person or possible time delay procedure to follow. Complainants may approach the RICS Surveyors Ombudsman Service directly and immediately after exhausting our internal process.

5.3 The Regulator of Social Housing

They will not normally investigate customer or leaseholder complaints or get involved in disputes between an association and an individual or group of complainants unless they are concerned about a specific issue or see a pattern or trends appearing in the complaints received. The Regulator will deal with a complaint about an association where this involves an allegation that the organisation or its staff are deliberately acting in a way that's leading to serious mismanagement or fraud. However it should be noted that there is a clear link between the Regulator and the Housing Ombudsman with the Ombudsman working with the Regulator of Social Housing to share insight and refer cases where necessary.

5.4 Legal remedies

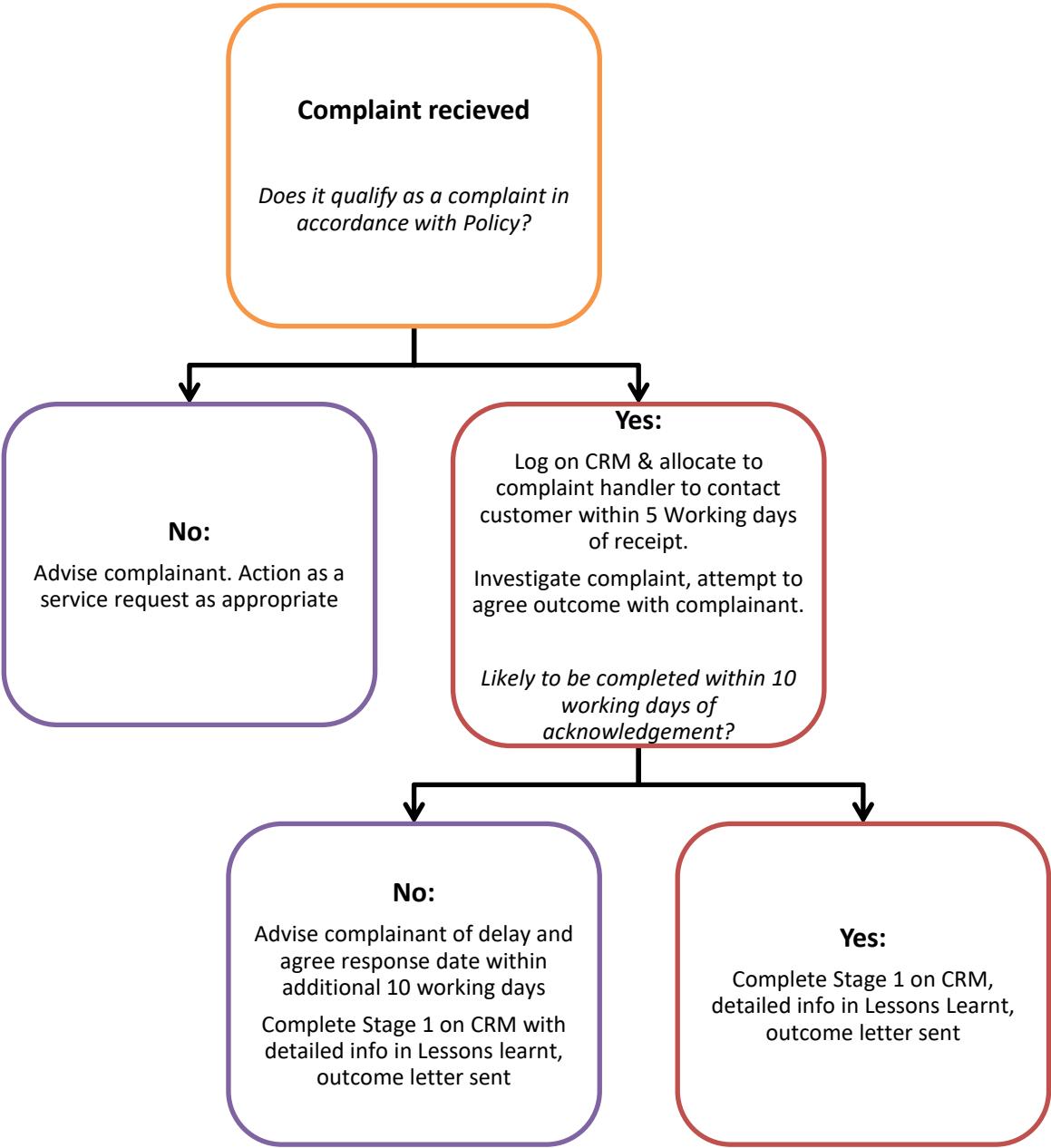
Customers and leaseholders may take their complaint to the County Court, or First Tier Tribunal (FTT). We can also direct the complainant to the Leasehold Advisory Service website or Age UK to seek independent information.

6.0 Monitoring

- 6.1 TCH will maintain comprehensive electronic files regarding all complaints and these will be maintained in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.
- 6.2 Sometimes it will be necessary to share personal data information with our contractors. We will only share the data that is relevant to investigating the complaint and carrying out any work required to put things right.
- 6.3 It is important that all formal complaints are monitored and we use the information received to improve our standards of service delivery, and share learning around the organisation. At every stage, details of the complaint and the action taken must be entered onto Dynamics 365 CRM/ Epsom equivalent.
- 6.4 We will regularly review performance, trends and lessons learned for both formal complaints and feedback. This information will be used to review and improve services and reported to the TCH Board and Customer Experience Committee as appropriate and will also be published at least annually to residents'.

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Complaint Received



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Request received to move the complaint to Stage 2

