



ORE VALLEY HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Complaints Handling Policy

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Complaints Policy

1. Introduction

This policy describes our overall arrangements for handling complaints and is supported by detailed procedures. Both the Policy and procedures comply with:

- i) The Statement of Complaints Handling Principles produced by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) under the Public Services reform (Scotland) Act 2010 and published in January 2011.
- ii) The SPSO Model Complaints Handling Procedure for registered Social Landlords, published in April 2012.

The policy and procedures are also supported by guidance for staff on handling and recording complaints and a public information leaflet giving those who wish to complain advice on what is and what is not a complaint, how to complain and how we deal with and respond to their complaint.

2. Complaints handling – Principles

In implementing this policy and the supporting procedures we aim to comply with the SPSO Statement of Complaints Handling Principles, which states that an effective complaints handling procedure is:

- User Focused:** It puts the customer at the heart of the process.
- Accessible:** It is appropriately and clearly communicated, easily understood and available to all.
- Simple and Timely:** It has as few steps as necessary within an agreed and transparent timeframe.
- Thorough, proportionate and consistent:** It should provide quality outcomes on all complaints through robust but proportionate investigation and the use of clear quality standards.
- Objective, impartial and fair:** It should be objective, evidence based, and driven by the facts and established circumstances, not assumptions, and this should be clearly demonstrated.
- And should:
- Seek early resolution:** It aims to resolve complaints at the earliest opportunity, to the service user's satisfaction wherever possible and appropriate.
- Deliver improvement:** It is driven by the search for improvement, using analysis of outcomes to support service delivery and drive service quality improvements.

Our complaints policy and procedure reflect our commitment to valuing complaints. They seek to resolve customer dissatisfaction as close as possible to the point of service delivery and to conduct thorough, impartial and fair investigations of customer complaints so that, where appropriate, we can make evidence based decisions on the facts of the case.

In implementing this policy and procedure, we are adopting the standard approach to handling complaints in the housing sector, which complies with the SPSO's guidance, aiming to deliver quicker, simpler and more streamlined complaints handling with local, early resolution by capable, well trained staff, to help us get it right first time.

We recognise that complaints can:

- Provide our staff with a first hand account of the service users views and experience
- Give us valuable information which we can use to improve customer satisfaction and prevent the same problems that led to the complaints from happening again
- Highlight problems we may otherwise miss.

We also recognise that resolving complaints quickly, and sorting them out as close to the point of service delivery:

- Can save costs and create better customer relations
- Means they are less likely to escalate to the next stage of the procedure
- Can minimise the overall workload involved in dealing with complaints
- Can improve relationships with our service users
- Can enhance the public's perception of Ore Valley Housing Association.

3. Complaints – Definitions and Stages

Definition

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by us, or on our behalf. This may include:

- Delays in responding to enquiries and requests
- Failure to provide a service
- Inadequate standard of service, such as repair not carried out properly
- Dissatisfaction with a policy or a decision (but only if there is no other way of dealing with the matter such as a formal appeal process)
- Provision of misleading, unsuitable or incorrect advice or information
- Unacceptable behaviour by, or attitude of, a member of staff, Committee member, volunteer or contractor's staff
- Unfairness, bias or prejudice in service delivery
- Our failure to follow proper procedure.

For further details and information on what is not a complaint, see procedures supporting this policy.

We recognise that while in most cases it will be clear if the individual is making a complaint which should be dealt with in accordance with this policy, there will be occasions when this is not initially clear. We will provide staff who deal with members of the public with relevant training to help them identify complaints that should be recorded and followed up in accordance with this policy.

Stages

There are two stages for handling complaints:

Stage 1 – Frontline resolution

Stage 2 – Investigation

Stage 1 complaints will be:

- Issues that are straight forward and easily resolved, requiring little or no investigation
- Dealt with at the 'front line', i.e. by an appropriate staff member who can deal with the complaint quickly
- Replied to with an 'on the spot' apology, explanation or other action to resolve the complaint right away, or in the majority of cases within 5 working days unless there are exceptional circumstances and an extension is agreed with the complainant.

Stage 2 complaints will be:

- Issues that have not been resolved at Stage 1
- Issues that are complex, serious or high risk, normally requiring thorough investigation (these will include complaints against the attitude or behaviour of staff, Committee members, volunteers or contractor staff);
- Passed to the Corporate Support Team for investigation, co-ordination and reply;
- Acknowledged within 3 working days and replied to within 20 working days, unless there are exceptional circumstances and an extension is agreed with the customer.

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, (SPSO)

If the customer is still dissatisfied following Stage 2 reply, they will be advised that they may appeal to the SPSO and will be given information to assist them to do so, including that any appeal must be submitted to the SPSO within 12 months of their complaint first being raised with us.

Responsibility

All OVHA staff will take responsibility for complaints that they become aware of and do all that they can to help customers and deal with problems as fully as possible.

Recording Complaints

We will ensure that the appropriate details of each complaint and the outcome are recorded at each stage in the process, so that the details are available should the customer remain dissatisfied and further investigation etc. is required, and also to provide information on trends etc., that may require us to review standards, policies or procedures. For full details, refer to the procedure supporting this policy.

Publicising Outcomes

We will publish summary information on complaints received, their outcome and any resulting action on our website and in our Newsletter.

4. Redress

Where the complaint is upheld, in whole or in part, and we accept that we have not achieved the desired standards, we will offer appropriate redress. This may be in the form of an apology or recompense for actual loss or damage, or a good will payment in compensation for inconvenience or distress.

Where a goodwill payment is offered, the Director will have delegated authority from Committee up to £500; over this amount will require the approval of the Management Committee.

5. Confidentiality

Wherever possible we will respect the confidentiality of customers that make complaints and those being complained about. Where it is necessary to reveal a name, we will only do so with the individual's agreement.

6. Training

We will provide the relevant training required by all staff who have to deal with complaints in the course of their duties.

7. Monitoring and Review

The Director is responsible for ensuring that all staff comply with this policy and the procedures that support it.

The Corporate Support Manager is responsible for ensuring that appropriate arrangements are in place for recording the information required to monitor the receipt, progress and outcome of each complaint.

The Corporate Support Manger will ensure that the Complaints Procedure is publicised as widely as possible to all who need to be aware of it.

On a monthly basis, the Management Team will monitor the progress with dealing with current complaints and will consider any action required as a result of emerging trends.

The Corporate Support Manager will ensure that a report is provided to the Management Committee quarterly summarising all complaints received in that period, the outcome and any resulting changes to internal procedures or other action, plus summary totals for the year to date.

The Corporate Support Manager will ensure that this policy and related procedures is reviewed at least every 5 years.