

COMPLAINTS POLICY

1.0 Introduction and Overarching Principles

- 1.1 We are committed to providing a high quality service to all our residents, clients and customers in an efficient, effective and economic way, which meets their diverse needs. For the purposes of our Complaints Policy, the term “customers” will be used to represent any individual or organisation that has dealings with our Company.
- 1.2 While we strive to maintain the highest standards, we recognise that sometimes our services might fail to meet those standards. When a customer complains we will:
- always listen to their point of view;
 - always act fairly and with courtesy;
 - respect their privacy and treat the information they give us in confidence; and
 - wherever possible, act on comments made about our services to improve future delivery.

2.0 Customer Complaints

- 2.1 A complaint is also feedback and by investigating and acting on complaints, we will learn from our customers. Where mistakes have been made and where genuine grievances have arisen, we will ensure that these are rectified to the satisfaction of the customer, wherever possible and that the circumstances do not recur.
- 2.2 We will publish our customer complaints procedure, which is set out in Appendix A to this policy. The procedure adopts the following principles:
- 2.2.1 Where possible, complaints will be resolved by the front line staff responsible for service delivery. It is envisaged that most complaints will be resolved in this way.

Stage 1:

- 2.2.2 Where a customer is not satisfied with the response from front line staff, he/she may make a formal complaint, in writing via an official complaints form, letter, email, through the website or by telephone to the Complaints Officer. Complaints must be made within 12 months of the incident taking place. Customer Service Advisors are also available to assist in the completion of complaints forms. All complaints will be acknowledged within two working days by the Complaints Officer, who will advise the complainant of the member of staff dealing with their complaint. A target timeframe of 10 working days from receipt of the complaint will be set for the investigating officer to make a site visit (or offer to visit) and for a response to be sent to you to include any areas where the complaint has been used to

improve, review or change services to all our customers. If it is not possible to reply to you in full within the 10 day timeframe we will ensure that you are kept up-to-date with progress at all times.

Stage 2:

- 2.2.3. If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they will be given the opportunity to escalate their complaint to the next stage via the completion letter sent out by the Complaints Officer at the end of Stage 1.
- 2.2.4. At Stage 2 the decision will be reviewed by an appropriate senior manager who, after making a site visit (or offering to) will reply in full within 10 working days.
- 2.2.5. The investigating officer will respond in full to the complainant identifying any areas where the complaint has been used to improve, review or change services to all our customers.

Stage 3:

- 2.2.5 If the complainant continues to remain dissatisfied, he/she will be given the opportunity to escalate the complaint to the next stage via the completion letter sent out by the Complaints Officer at the end of Stage 2.
- 2.2.6 At Stage 3 the decision will be reviewed by an Appeals Panel consisting of three people: a Non-Executive Director (who will chair the Panel) and two Executive Directors (which should include the Director responsible for the area of service delivery relating to the complaint). The Appeals Panel will be convened within 15 working days from receipt of the request of progression to Stage 3.

Only the most serious of complaints should need to be resolved at this level. At this stage mediation between the complainant and the Company should be considered and offered if the Appeals Panel considers this would be beneficial in resolving the complaint.

- 2.2.7 The complainant will be given the opportunity to meet privately with the Appeals Panel prior to the Appeals Panel meeting to state their case. The Complaints Officer will supply the Appeals Panel with an executive summary and a timeline since receipt of the original complaint. The complainant is entitled to be accompanied by a non-legal person acting or speaking on their behalf or for support, as long as the Company is advised in advance. In addition, the investigating officers from stages 1 and 2 will attend a meeting with the Panel to discuss any concerns and to advise why certain decisions were made. Following the Appeals Panel meeting the chair of the Appeals Panel will write to the complainant within 10 working days highlighting:

- any remedial actions to be carried out;

- any significant changes to policies, procedures and working practices highlighted as a result of the complaint; and
 - feed back to the complainant on how their complaint has been used to improve, review or change services to all customers.
- 2.3 On completion, a satisfaction questionnaire will be sent to the customer. Statistics summarising customer complaints will be reported quarterly and annually to the Board and the Customer Scrutiny Into Coastline Panel. Significant levels of customer complaints in relation to a particular service, whether through official or unofficial complaints, will result in a policy and service review.
- 2.4 After the completion of the Appeal Panel the complainant will be made aware of their right to refer their complaint for review to a Designated Person in the eight weeks following the completion of the Company's internal three stage procedure.
- 2.5 Customers will also be made aware of the Housing Ombudsman Service, where relevant, and how, and in what circumstances, a complaint can be made to it.
- 2.5 Individual complaints will be monitored by the Complaints Officer weekly and by senior managers and the Executive Team monthly to ensure that lessons are learned and policies improved, where possible, to ensure that recurrence is minimised. The Complaints Officer will collate information on points learned, improvements to services, policies and procedures and/or day-to-day working practices via the Complaints Monitoring Sheet and report the information supplied to senior managers via the monthly complaints update. This information will also be reported to customers annually within the Customer Newsletter and as part of the Annual Report to Customers.
- 2.6 In line with Best Practice, this policy will be reviewed by the Complaints Officer, in conjunction with the Executive Team, at least every two years, and benchmarked against areas of current Best Practice via the Housing Ombudsman Service and Housemark.
- 2.7 The Complaints Officer or investigating officer will ensure that house-files are updated where new information is identified about the customer and/or their disabilities to ensure that both the complaint and future services are delivered in the customer's best interest.