



TRAFFORD HOUSING TRUST

Policy

COMPLAINTS, COMPLIMENTS & SUGGESTIONS POLICY

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1.0 PURPOSE & OBJECTIVES

We are committed to ensuring that our complaints, compliments and suggestions policy is easy to access, open and transparent. This policy makes it easy for customers to let us know when things go wrong, go well, or when they have a suggestion for how we can improve. This policy sets out our approach when receiving complaints, suggestions and compliments.

It is important that this policy and its implementation reveals insight about the customer experience. This insight will then be used to better understand where our products, services and the delivery of services are and aren't meeting customer needs and expectations. Insight from complaints, compliments and suggestions will be used to consider service improvements.

We are committed to ensuring that staff are trained in dealing with complaints and have access to this policy. It's important that all colleagues can recognise complaints (both formal and informal), suggestions and compliments, that they value this insight, and that they know how to progress these interactions effectively and consistently. This policy creates accountability for appropriately dealing with, and considering complaints, compliments and suggestions.

2.0 SCOPE

This policy deals with all complaints, compliments and suggestions made to us. A customer is someone who receives a product or service from us, however the scope of this policy allows complaints, compliments and suggestions from anyone, irrespective of whether they are a current customer or not.

This policy applies to all Trafford Housing Trust.

3.0 DEFINITIONS – KEYWORDS, ABBREVIATIONS & ACCRONYMS

We define a **complaint** 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.”

3.2 We define an **Informal Complaint** as:

‘an expression of being unhappy but have made it explicitly clear they do not want a formal process’

3.3 We define a **suggestion** as:

‘an idea that should be considered’

3.4 We define a **compliment** as:

‘an expression of praise or admiration about something’

3.5 We define a **customer** as:

‘Anyone who is affected by a product or service that we provide’

3.6 We define a **complainant** as:

‘someone who makes a formal complaint to us – this may or may not be a current customer’

3.7 We define an **unreasonable manner** as:

‘a complaint where it is apparent that the customer is pursuing a complaint which is without merit and is made with the intention of causing inconvenience, harassment or expense’

3.8 Open Housing CRM is:

‘the contact management system that will be used by all colleagues to record and manage all complaints, compliments and suggestions’

4.0 PRINCIPLES

We will encourage and value all customer feedback

All colleagues will be alert to and will encourage feedback from customers. We understand that customer feedback from complaints, compliments and suggestions is valuable especially when considering whether we are delivering the right services, to the right quality and in the right way.

We will record details carefully and consistently

Comprehensive details of complaints, suggestions and compliments will always be captured. Where an expression of dissatisfaction is made, this will be captured and considered as an informal complaint in the first instance and escalated to a formal complaint where necessary.

We will look into matters thoroughly and will keep customer’s informed

Formal complaints and suggestions will always be investigated robustly and by an appropriate person. We will offer great customer service throughout the period of any complaint and will explain any delays and next steps clearly and promptly. We will always let customers know what has happened with their suggestion and any justification to this.

We will deal with complaints as quickly as possible and will always focus on a resolution

We will resolve complaints as quickly as possible and will try to resolve at first point of contact. Where we cannot do this, we will escalate complaints quickly through the complaints process.

We will work hard to understand the customer perspective

We will take all complaints and suggestions seriously and will seek to understand the impact of the issue on the individual or community. We will always try to speak to the customer and visit to see any issues personally, before making a decision regarding a complaint or suggestion.

We will have a centralised complaints management function

We have a centralised complaints management function. Our Customer Relations Team will manage all formal complaints and reports on complaints, suggestions and compliments.

We will learn from customer experiences and feedback

This policy will provide a framework for us to capture customer feedback and gain better insight into the customer experience, creating opportunities to identify where service or services can be improved, take on board suggestions to improve, or reflect on where customers are happy.

We will analyse and report on complaints, compliments and suggestions

We will share information internally and externally and will always publicise what has changed as a result of this customer feedback.

5.0 POLICY STATEMENT

We recognise the importance of having a clear and simple way for customers to express opinion with the service or services that we provide. When a customer provides this feedback, this is considered a potential driver of service improvement and as such is welcomed. This policy is straightforward and accessible, to make complaining, making a suggestion or compliment, easy.

A complaint, suggestion or compliment can be made using any of our communication channels. A guidance leaflet is available on our website that summarises our complaints process - a paper version can be sent if requested. The guide explains how to make a complaint, what will happen on receipt of the complaint, and timeframes for us to respond.

6.0 COMPLAINTS RESOLUTION

Our policy on dealing with formal and informal complaints will always seek to obtain the best resolution available for the customer at the earliest opportunity.

Investigations at any stage may involve colleagues at any level of job seniority in order to agree the best resolution.

The customer will be made aware that they are able to access the Housing Ombudsman Service throughout each step of the process.

The steps to our complaints process are summarised below;

6.1 INFORMAL COMPLAINT

Where we receive an expression of dissatisfaction or initial complaint communication, but the customer makes it explicitly clear that they do not want to lodge an official complaint then it can be dealt with as an informal complaint.

Where immediate resolution is not possible and the matter requires further investigation, details will be sent to the Customer Relations Team who will also seek a resolution through liaison with the customer.

In most cases, a solution to the complaint will be offered, (not necessarily executed), by the close of business on the day after the expression of dissatisfaction was made. If this isn't possible or it was not explicitly made clear they wanted the dissatisfaction to be dealt with informally then a formal complaint case will be created and escalated for formal investigation at stage 1.

6.2 STAGE 1 INVESTIGATION (FORMAL COMPLAINT) 10 WORKING DAYS

A thorough investigation will be carried out by a Customer Liaison Officer. This will involve working closely with service managers to understand the position. The Customer Liaison Officer must make contact with the customer within 48 hours of the complaint being made. They will seek to understand the issue from the customer perspective. This can include in-depth discussion with the customer, face to face visits, desk top reviews, making appropriate enquiries with colleagues involved, visiting to see issues personally. All systems will be thoroughly checked for details as part of the investigation.

The complaint can be upheld, not upheld, or partially upheld. There may be occasions where a complaint is not upheld, but the customer has raised a valid suggestion which requires consideration.

The investigation will always seek to offer the most appropriate resolution to the customer. Limits of financial authorisation apply (as detailed in 6.5) and this should be read in conjunction with the compensation guidance to ensure consistency.

If a reasonable offer of compensation exceeds the level that can be authorised by the Customer Liaison Officer, agreement should be sought with the relevant Senior Manager and the Resolution Lead before discussing the final decision/offer with the customer. This has the effect of any offer being the very best offer that will be provided by any colleague, irrespective of seniority and business position, and should prevent complaint escalations. Customers will be made aware that the offer is likely to be the best offer to be made.

The Customer Liaison Officer must make all reasonable steps to contact the customer to explain the final decision and give the customer the opportunity to comment on this before the final decision is issued.

If a resolution is not agreed with the customer, the customer can request that the complaint is escalated for a stage 2 review and may choose to have a customer representative support this process.

6.3 STAGE 2 REVIEW 20 WORKING DAYS

The Resolution Lead will review all aspects of the complaint and the stage 1 complaint response. All information considered during the stage 1 investigation, and any new information provided will be considered. Additional enquiries, visits, and conversations with the customer and others can take place if relevant. This review may also take the form of a desk top review if more appropriate – this is likely to be where the complaint is relatively straight-forward.

The customer will be given the option to have a Customer Complaints Panel member review their complaint alongside the Resolution Lead Officer.

The purpose of the stage 2 review is to review the original investigation, options considered, offers made and final decision. This review explores whether there is anything more we could offer as a resolution, or whether the original decision is deemed the most appropriate response.

If there is an amended resolution (either financial or policy) that exceeds the Resolution Lead Officers level of authority, this should be approved by the relevant senior manager before discussing the matter with the customer.

The Resolution Lead must make all reasonable steps to contact the customer to explain the final decision and give the customer the opportunity to comment on this before the final decision is issued.

If it is anticipated that this the customer is unlikely to accept the stage 2 final decision, the Resolution Lead should consult with a member of Leadership Team to enable them to have sight of the issue and allow their input.

6.4 PROTOCOL FOR SUBMISSION OF A PETITION

This protocol sets out how our residents and local people can submit a petition and how we will respond to such a petition. We welcome petitions as a means of highlighting concerns within a local area.

Submitting a petition

A petition can be submitted by anyone. It will be the lead petitioner's responsibility to ensure that any submission will be done so under the principle of good faith, decency, honesty and respect

To trigger a petition response, it will need to include the following:

- a minimum of 5 signatures from 5 separate households
- a clear and concise statement covering the subject of the petition; the issues which gave cause to the creation of the petition; the actions we are requested to take
- contact details for the lead petitioner
- the name, address, postcode and signature of every individual supporting the petition; and
- the date the petition is submitted.

The petition may be submitted by email to customer.relationsteam@traffordhousingtrust.co.uk or by post to:

The Customer Relations Team
Trafford Housing Trust
Sale Point
126-150 Washway Road
Sale
M33 6AG

Response to a petition

An acknowledgement will be sent to the lead petitioner within 2 working days with a complaint reference number and the name of the investigating officer.

If the lead petitioner is not identified in the letter or petition, an officer from the Customer Relations Team will contact the first signatory to identify the lead petitioner.

The petition will be referred to an investigating officer who will:

- co-ordinate the process
- carry out the investigation
- carry out research
- prepare the response
- meet with the lead petitioner (where necessary)

A response will be sent to the lead petitioner in accordance with our complaints process

6.5 EXHAUSTION OF OUR INTERNAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Designated person

A social housing tenant may approach a 'designated person' (as set out in the Localism Act 2011) where they are still dissatisfied after exhausting our complaints process. These are 'designated persons':

- MP (Member of Parliament)
- Councillor
- Tenant Panel

The role of a 'designated person' is to help resolve tenant complaints by:

- providing advice to tenants
- advocating on their behalf
- discussing matters with the landlord
- engaging with other designated persons
- carrying out other actions.

They may also refer complaints to the Housing Ombudsman if they are unable to resolve a complaint locally and the complainant agrees.

Housing Ombudsman

The Housing Ombudsman Service can provide advice and support to residents throughout the life of a complaint. If the complaint remains unresolved at the end of the complaint process, customers can contact them to request a review. They must wait eight weeks unless a designated person refers the complaint.

Contact details:

Housing Ombudsman Service

PO Box 152

Liverpool

L33 7WQ

Telephone: 0300 111 3000

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Web: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Complaints about care services

Complaints about care services can be taken to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. Any customer receiving care services may choose to access their local council's complaints process instead of ours before approaching the Ombudsman.

Contact details:

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
PO Box 47771
Coventry
CV4 0EH
Telephone: 0300 061 0614
Web: www.lgo.org.uk

Consumer Credit Regulated Activity

Complaints about welfare benefits advice can be taken to the Financial Ombudsman Service if you are not satisfied with our response.

Contact details:

The Financial Ombudsman Service
Exchange Tower
Harbour Exchange Square
London
E14 9GE
Telephone: 0800 023 4567
Email: complaint.info@financial-ombudsman.org.uk
Web: <https://www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk/>

Property Ombudsman

If you are a leaseholder or have a private lease you can complain to the Property Ombudsman 8 weeks after raising the complaint with the trust.

Contact details:

The Property Ombudsman
Milford House
43-55 Milford Street
Wiltshire
SP1 2BP
Telephone: 01722 333306
Web: www.tpos.co.uk

First-Tier Tribunal (Property Chamber – Residential Property)

Customers can apply if they are a landlord, tenant, freeholder or leaseholder. The cases that can be considered include:

- Rent increases for fair or market rates
- Leasehold disputes e.g. variable service charges
- Leasehold enfranchisement e.g. extending a lease

Contact details: www.gov.uk/housing-tribunals

6.6 Compensation

Any staff member dealing with a formal or informal complaint may at any stage decide compensation is appropriate. This may be a payment or reduction in a charge. The current compensation guidance should be consulted before any offers are made to the customer and relevant financial authorisation limits should always be checked and adhered to. Where a reasonable resolution exceeds the limit of the person dealing with the matter, they are responsible to seek authorisation for a higher level of resolve to prevent escalation through the formal complaints process.

6.7 Complaints pursued in an unreasonable manner

Distinctions will be made between complaints made because it is believed something has gone wrong and complaints that are pursued in an entirely unreasonable manner. Where there is a reason to suspect a complaint is entirely unreasonable, the Resolution Lead will seek advice with the relevant Executive Director who may give authorisation to refuse to consider the complaint. This will be exceptional.

6.8 Trivial complaints

If a complaint is received about matters which have clearly not caused the complainant any injustice it may be appropriate not to escalate the complaint through the complaint's procedure. In this instance, it may be more appropriate to seek suggestions from the customer as to what is needed/desired and consider any suggestions accordingly and in line with this policy.

6.9 Mediation

Sometimes mediation can resolve complaints quickly; we may propose employing a trained mediator at any stage of the process. The mediator must be an impartial third party who does not impose a decision or attempt to judge the merits of a complaint. Mediation will focus on trying to find a mutually agreeable resolution.

6.10 Historical complaints

Formal and informal complaints must be made within 6 months of an issue arising. If a complaint is made outside of this timescale, the matter should be referred to the Service Lead / Head of Service for the service area to which the complaint relates who will determine whether exceptional circumstances warrant its consideration.

7.0 COMPLIMENTS

Comprehensive details of compliments will be recorded in Open Housing contact management system. Managers will receive a regular report that details compliments relating to specific service areas or direct reports. Managers will use compliments to feed back to colleagues during 1:1's and appraisals.

8.0 SUGGESTIONS

Comprehensive details of all suggestions will be recorded in Open Housing contact management system. Managers will receive a regular report that outlines suggestions relating to specific service areas or new products, etc.

Managers will use suggestions to develop and supplement service improvement thinking. All suggestions will be fully considered by an appropriate manager and direct feedback will always be provided to let the customer know what has happened with their suggestion and the justification for this.

8.0 EQUALITY IMPACT

The Trust is committed to treating people fairly, without bias or discrimination, and always within the law. We promote equality of opportunity for all our Tenants and stakeholders, regardless of their race, gender, age, religious belief or non-religious belief, ethnic origin, disability, marital status, or sexual orientation.

This policy can be translated into various other languages at the Tenants request;

The policy can also be issued in Braille, or larger print if required. Please contact the Customer Hub if you require any of these services.

9.0 PERFORMANCE & MONITORING

We will record all informal and formal complaints, suggestions and compliments within our Open Housing contact management system. From this we will be able to report on trends analysis and specific details. The Resolution Lead will produce monthly analysis for managers.

Insight Into Action Forums take place at least bi-monthly where the drivers of complaints are surfaced and actions to resolve initiated.

A quarterly customer complaints panel meeting will take place which invites customers to consider analysis regarding complaints. Relevant feedback from this forum will be fed directly into the IIA Forums.

Statistics and performance in relation to complaints, compliments and suggestions will be detailed on our website. This will include what has changed as a consequence of this channel of customer feedback.

We will specifically measure satisfaction with the complaints process and resolutions and will analyse emerging trends in detail.

Trafford Housing Trust Board will have oversight of key performance information in relation to complaints through the quarterly performance board meeting. Complaints performance will also be shared with Customer Committee and widely with managers and colleagues throughout the business areas.

10.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

The Resolution Lead has responsibility for the implementation of this policy.

11.0 PLANNED REVIEW

The Trust will initially review this policy every 3 years unless major changes to law require an earlier review.