

Complaints Policy

Version Control						
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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Westmoreland Supported Housing Limited (WSHL) is committed to providing a high-quality service for our customers and working in an open and accountable way that builds trust and respect. One of the ways in which we can continue to improve our service is by listening and responding to the views of our customers and in particular by responding positively to complaints and by putting mistakes right when things have gone wrong.
- 1.2. We will use complaints as an opportunity to learn and drive improvements in service delivery throughout the business. We will also record and share compliments with our staff to foster a successful culture.
- 1.3. This policy explains how customers can make a complaint if they are not satisfied with our services and how we will respond.
- 1.4. We will make a distinction between a complaint, service request and reporting of incidents e.g., Anti-Social Behaviour, rubbish dumping. If we do not respond to service requests or incidents to your satisfaction, they may become a complaint.
- 1.5. Complaints about the provision of the care service should be made to the Care Provider in the first instance.

2. Legal and Regulatory Requirements

- 2.1. The Regulator of Social Housing Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard requires Registered Providers have an approach to Complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly.
- 2.2. The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code has been developed to make complaints handling and learning a part of the whole organisation and will enable boards to foster a culture of learning to drive improvements in service delivery and lead to better relationships with our customers.
- 2.3. This policy also meets any legal obligation outlined in the following legislation:
 - Housing Act 1996
 - Localism Act 2011

Relevant legislation is all that legislation either by way of Common Law, Act of Parliament or Statutory Instrument which relates to this policy. and is in force at the relevant date.

3. Definitions

- 3.1. The Complaint Handling Code defines 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. For us, this means that a complaint is when a customer is unhappy with a service provided by WHSL and wants us to put it right.
- 3.3. Examples of Complaints are:
 - Where we have failed to provide a service, or there has been a delay in providing one.
 - Where we have failed to follow our policies and procedures or have been unfair or inconsistent in applying them.
 - Where we have failed to keep a customer informed through lack of or insufficient information.

 - Where there has been inappropriate behaviour or attitude from our staff.
 - If a customer is unhappy about the way we have delivered a service.

4. Policy principles

- 4.1. Our policy is based on the following principles:
- a. We will deal with Complaints promptly, courteously, systematically, and fairly.
 - b. All Complaints will be dealt with in confidence.
 - c. We will keep complainants informed of progress and the outcome of any investigation.
 - d. Complaints will be recorded, monitored and acknowledged unless it is not appropriate to do so.
 - e. Complainants will have the right, at their own cost, to have a friend or advocate present at any interview.
 - f. We will provide support and assistance to help a complainant make a Complaint where needed.
 - g. We will use complaints to learn from any mistakes and to seek to improve our service.
 - h. Where any complaint is upheld we will offer an appropriate apology and will seek to compensate for any significant periods of inconvenience, distress or monetary loss.

5. Making a Complaint

- 5.1. Normally a complaint must be received by WHSL within six months of the issue taking place or the customer finding out they have a reason to complain, but must be no longer than 12 months after the issue took place.
- 5.2. This time limit is in line with the Housing Ombudsman Service guidance on Complaints and the timescales they operate. In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to accept a complaint after the time limit has passed. If a customer feels that the time limit should not apply, they will need to tell us why so that we can consider the case and a decision can be made.
- 5.3. A complaint can be made by anyone who is entitled to receive a service from WHSL or is affected by the service. With written consent, a family member, friend or advocate may act on behalf of a complainant.

5.4. Complaints can be made face to face, by phone, by email by letter or through any social media channel.

6. Priority Response Process

6.1. In order to try and resolve complaints as quickly as possible, we may initially deal with the problem or service failure under our 'Priority Response' process.

6.2. We aim to resolve the failure in service and get it 'back on track' within 5 working days. A priority response is dealt with much quicker than a formal complaint, we will not normally carry out an investigation or send formal letters but will look to get the problem resolved as quickly as possible. You are still eligible to then proceed to a formal complaint if you wish.

7. Formal Complaints Process

7.1. We operate a two-stage formal complaint process:

Stage 1 Complaint

- a. If a customer is unhappy with a service we have provided or if we have been unable to resolve an issue to their satisfaction under our Priority Response process, a Complaint can be logged under stage one of our formal complaints process.
- b. The complaint will be logged and an acknowledgment sent within 5 working days.
- c. A manager will investigate the complaint and provide a written response within 10 working days of receiving the complaint and will keep the customer informed of the progress until resolution. A further 10 days may be agreed with the customer if this is not possible.
- d. Where a complaint is upheld and there were significant periods of inconvenience, distress or loss we will offer compensation in line with our Compensation Policy.

Stage 2 Complaint

- e. If a customer is dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint review at stage 1 the customer can make a request for their complaint to be escalated to the CEO. Where the CEO has already been involved in the Complaint it will be escalated to an independent Board member. The complaint will be reviewed and a written response will be sent to the customer within 20 working days. A further 10 days

may be agreed with the customer if this is not possible. This is the final stage of the WHSL Complaints process.

8. Beyond the 2 Stage Process

8.1. If a customer would like to escalate their complaint after completing the WHSL internal process, they can contact the following:

Designated Person – A designated person is a Councillor, MP or Tenant Panel. A designated person will help resolve the complaint in one of two ways; they can try and resolve the complaint themselves or they can refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service if they believe the complaint remains unresolved.

Housing Ombudsman Service – A customer can wait 8 weeks after completion of WHSL internal Complaint process and contact the Housing Ombudsman Service directly or the case can be referred to the Housing Ombudsman Service by a Designated Person.

9. Complaints relating to WHSL Contractors

9.1. We require any contractor that provides services on our behalf to comply with this policy by:

- Recording and responding to customers' feedback within the stated timescales.
- Providing us with any information relating to a Complaint when requested.
- Assisting us with Complaints investigations as appropriate.

10. Vexatious Complaints

10.1. We are committed to providing clear and prompt responses to people who contact us. We have adopted procedures to support staff when, on the rare occasion, they are faced with dealing with a complainant who becomes unreasonably persistent or vexatious. These will only be applied when other courses of action have been exhausted and only under limited circumstances.

11. How we learn from Complaints and Compliments

- 11.1. A complaint or compliment is seen as an opportunity to learn about what or how we need to improve our service. We therefore want to learn from every complaint and capture and share the things that we learn so that improvements can be made where appropriate.
- 11.2. In order to do this, we will:
- Record and monitor all complaints and compliments including details such as what the complaint was about, how it was resolved, how quickly it was resolved, what we learnt and what changes we have made as a result.
 - Carry out regular complaint reviews in order to continuously look at how we can improve our handling of complaints and the services we provide.
 - Survey customers on their satisfaction with the way the complaint was handled.

12. Monitoring and review

- 12.1. Performance and learning from complaints will be published monthly to the Board.
- 12.2. We must comply with the Housing Ombudsman scheme and complete an annual self-assessment against the code.
- 12.3. We will publish annual performance on Complaints management and learning from Complaints in our Annual Report to Residents.
- 12.4. This policy will be reviewed every two years.