

This complaints policy and procedure applies to the Herefordshire Housing Group which includes its subsidiary, Independence Trust

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Aims

The aims of the Complaints Procedure are:

- To ensure that when a complaint is made it is dealt with consistently and fairly within the agreed timescales and in an impartial, objective and professional manner
- To reassure customers that no adverse treatment will arise because they have made a complaint
- To ensure that complaints are recorded centrally and that this information is used to track performance and to improve services

Introduction

We believe that excellent customer service is critical to our success and will improve our reputation with customers. We treat complaints seriously and we are committed to learning from complaints and identified service failures. We aim to get things right the first time. If we do not, we need to understand why.

This procedure sets out the way a complaint will be dealt with, by who, in what timescale, and what we will do as a result of your complaint.

We will now treat all complaints from you as a learning opportunity and use it to improve services where possible. We will continue to develop this complaints procedure to our customers' satisfaction.

What is a Complaint?

If you tell us that you are not happy with something that we have done or not done, and we have not put things right, we will regard this as a complaint. A complaint cannot

usually be made against an action that forms part of a published Group policy and procedure.

A complaint can be made in person at any of Herefordshire Housing or Independence Trust offices, or by phone, e-mail, website, letter or a private Facebook message.

Where a complaint is being made by a third party on behalf of the complainant, we will ask for the complainant to confirm that it is their wish for us to liaise with that third party.

The Herefordshire Housing Group, however, reserves the right to refuse to acknowledge and work with certain third party individuals. If this situation arises, we will explain to you the reasons why we have taken that decision. We are always happy to work with you on resolving a complaint, however, if you require assistance in making a complaint to us, we would always recommend using recognised services such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau, local councillor or MP.

Reports relating to Anti-Social Behavior and Hate Incidents will be responded to in accordance with our Anti-Social Behavior and Hate Incidents Policies and Procedures. If there is a failure of service under these policies we will deal with this under this Complaints Policy.

Herefordshire Housing reserves the right to refuse to deal with any complaint that is pursued in an unreasonable manner. This decision will be made by the appropriate Director and the reasons for that decision communicated to you.

In some complex cases, HHL may seek advice from its legal consultants and these consultants may ultimately represent HHL in any resulting legal action.

Once a complaint has been made, it will be investigated and progressed through the following procedure:

Initial Contact

The Initial Contact stage is where we determine if the feedback we have received is in fact a complaint or not. The Group expects a large proportion of complaints to be resolved at the initial stage when a customer makes contact with us. This contact provides the opportunity for both the complainant and us to give a clear explanation of the situation and to agree how the matter may be resolved.

- All colleagues are responsible for resolving initial complaints.

- All colleagues will attempt to deal with complaints on the day they receive them. If that is not possible they will acknowledge the complaint and attempt to resolve it within 10 working days or within a mutually agreed timescale. There is no need to respond formally in writing at this stage unless the customer requests this. If a complaint cannot be resolved by the first point of contact they will pass the complaint to another colleague for assistance.
- If we are unable to resolve a complaint at the initial contact stage the complaint will be referred to a Head of Service / Manager and the complaint will enter the procedure as a formal **Stage 1** complaint.
- If we consider the complaint not to be justified, then we will communicate that with you and explain why this decision has been made.

Stage1 - Review by a Head of Service / Manager

We will:

- Record the complaint on our computer system.
- Pass the complaint to the relevant Head of Service / Manager for investigation with any background details from the initial contact stage
- The Head of Service / Manager will investigate the complaint and will aim to write to the complainant within 10 working days
- This communication will address the complaint and attempt to mutually resolve the matter. It will advise the customer that if they are still not satisfied they have 10 working days in which to advise the Group Governance Manager and request that the complaint be reviewed by a Director. No new complaint can be added at this stage.

Stage 2 – Review by a Director or Assistant Director

The Group Governance Manager will:

- Aim to acknowledge to the complainant within 3 working days that the complaint has now passed to Stage 2 of the complaints procedure
- Pass the complaint to an appropriate Director/Assistant Director for investigation

- They will carry out a review and will examine all the background to the complaint to ensure that it has been dealt with appropriately
- They will aim to provide a formal written response within 10 working days of the review request being received.
- The letter will advise the complainant that if they are still not satisfied then they have 10 working days in which to advise the Group Governance Manager, by any of the communication methods previously listed, and request an Appeal. It will also provide information on the Appeals process. If no request has been made within 10 days, the complaint will be deemed as closed.

Stage 3 – Appeal

Complaints that go through to Stage 3 will be heard by a complaints appeal panel which will be made up of three members of the Company's Group Board of Management.

- The appeal panel will aim to meet within 20 working days of the complainant's request.
- The Group Governance Manager will send copies of all correspondence relating to the complaint to members of the appeals panel and to the complainant in advance of the panel meeting.
- The complainant will be invited to attend this meeting if they so wish. If they do not attend, the panel will consider the complaint in their absence and notify the complainant in writing of the outcome.
- The panel will consider all the facts relating to the complaint and decide whether the decision should be changed, upheld or re-investigated
- A written response will be sent within 10 working days of the panel meeting. This will set out the decision of the Panel and the reasons why the decision has been reached. The correspondence will also provide details of the right to complain to the Housing Ombudsman Service, the Financial Ombudsman Service or the relevant local authority should the complainant still remain dissatisfied.

Stage 4 – Housing Ombudsman Service / Financial Ombudsman Service / Local Authority

If a customer remains dissatisfied they have a right to complain to the Housing Ombudsman Service, the Financial Ombudsman Service or the local authority depending on the service you have made a complaint about.

Please note that the Housing Ombudsman and the Local Authority will only consider a complaint after it has been through all stages of the internal complaints procedure and the Financial Ombudsman will only consider disputes after we have first had the opportunity to look into the complaint and attempted to resolve matters to your satisfaction.

The Housing Ombudsman can be contacted at:

The Housing Ombudsman Service
81 Aldwych
London WC2B 4HN
Telephone: 0300 111 3000 (lines are open Monday to Friday from 9:15 to 17:15)
Fax: 020 7831 1942
Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk
Website www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

The Financial Ombudsman Service can be contacted at:

The Financial Ombudsman Service
Exchange Tower
London E14 9SR
Telephone: 020 7964 1000
Email: complaint.info@financial-ombudsman.org.uk
Website: www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk

Someone in receipt of a CQC regulated care e.g. home care or reablement has the right to complain to the Local Authority if they remain dissatisfied after the all prior stages have been exhausted.

If a customer remains dissatisfied with the care they have received they have a right to complain to the Local Authority.

The Local Authority in your area can be contacted by the following means:

Gloucestershire County Council 01452 425000 <http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk>
Herefordshire Council 01432 260000 <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk>
Shropshire County Council 0345 678 9000 <http://www.shropshire.gov.uk>
Worcestershire County Council 01905 763763 <http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk>

If you require this information in Braille, large print or audio format please call 01432 384002