

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK POLICY

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Policy provides a means through which customer can provide feedback and hold Stockport Homes to account for the services it provides.

2 STRATEGIC LINKS

2.1 The Policy reflects the Social Housing White Paper proposals, the Housing Ombudsman Scheme and Complaint Handling Code. This means that Stockport Homes will always make a reasonable and proportionate effort to resolve a complaint and learn from the outcome of complaints.

2.2 The 'Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England' sets out that Registered Providers¹ shall 'have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly'. The Policy has been designed to deliver the requirements of the Framework.

2.3 The Policy meets the obligations of the Hackitt Review, which prescribes an approach for residents to raise complaints about fire or structural high-rise safety issues. Any such complaints will be directed to the Building Safety manager, with escalation to the Building Safety Regulator where requested.

2.4 The Policy provides a route for Home Improvement Agency² complaints to be raised. The Home Improvement Agency (HIA) delivers certain aspects of Stockport Council's private sector housing grants scheme, including disabled facilities grants. When making a complaint, grant applicants will be made aware of their right to use the Council's complaints procedure rather than the Stockport Homes complaint process. If a grant applicant chooses to use Stockport Homes' complaints process, Stockport Council will be consulted before any scheme delivery complaints progress to the appeal stage, and as part of the normal Stockport Homes complaints process the Council will be consulted on the appeal decision. A similar approach will be applied to other local authority commissioned works.

2.5 The Policy operates alongside the Unacceptable Behaviour Policy, which is designed to protect members of staff that are subject to abusive behaviour, unreasonable demands, and unreasonable persistence. These behaviours can sometimes arise during the investigation of complaints.

2.6 The Policy operates alongside the Disciplinary Policy, Procedure and Guidance, which deals with the conduct of staff employed by Stockport Homes.

¹ Stockport Homes is a Registered Provider for the properties it owns. The social housing stock managed by Stockport Homes on behalf of Stockport Council is also covered by the framework.

² <https://www.stockporthomes.org/staying-put-scheme/>

2.7 The Policy operates alongside the Compensation Policy, which sets out where compensation gestures may be awarded

2.8 The Policy supports the Stockport Homes Group aim to 'be accountable to customers'.

3 POLICY STATEMENT

3.1 Complaints are defined as:

'An expression of dissatisfaction about a service provided by Stockport Homes in the last six months, 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

3.2 Stockport Homes welcomes customer feedback from all sources, including via social media, because it provides an opportunity to learn from the experiences of its customer and identify areas where services can be improved. In instances where some fault has been found the complaint response will set out the actions that will be taken to address the issue. Similarly, residents' expectations will be managed from the outset where a desired outcome is unreasonable or unrealistic, or where there is no fault or service failure on the part of Stockport Homes.

3.3 Stockport Homes operates a two-stage complaint investigation process that consists of a 'stage one' investigation and an 'appeal panel'. It will make every effort to resolve complaints in a timely way, including prior to the issue entering the two-stage process if an issue is likely to be resolved quickly and easily.

3.4 There are instances where complaints will not be accepted for investigation. These are where the issues:

- are being addressed via another route,
- have not been raised within six months of the matter arising
- have already received a response through the complaints process
- are being pursued in an unreasonable manner, such as being accompanied by unacceptable behaviour
- concern matters that do not cause significant adverse impact to the complainant, or
- are subject to legal processes

³ In line with guidance from the Housing Ombudsman Code, page five, paragraph 1.2: <https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Complaint-Handling-Code.pdf>

3.5 In those circumstances the complainant will either be advised to pursue their complaint via the more appropriate alternative route to resolution; the complaint will be put on hold until the alternative route has been exhausted; or the complaint will not be accepted⁴.

4 COMPLAINT STAGES

4.1 'Stage one': This stage of the process encourages investigating officers to resolve complaints through verbal communication with customers. It allows up to ten working days to respond, with an additional ten working days available in exceptional circumstances.

4.2 Appeal Panel: This involves a complaint being reviewed by a more senior officer, usually a Head of Service, alongside up to two customers from the 'Customer Appeals Panel'. The complainant can choose: not to attend the panel; to have a review undertaken without customers being on the panel; and/or to attend at a different time to the staff members that investigated the complaint. The complaint will receive a response within 20 working days of the request to escalate, with an additional ten working days available in exceptional circumstances. Where a decision is made to refuse an escalation request then it must be set out in line with the exclusions in paragraph 3.4 and an explanation will be provided to the resident. The communication will make clear that the stage one response was its final response to the complaint, and it will provide details of the Housing Ombudsman.

5 CUSTOMER SUPPORT

5.1 Complainants can access support throughout the complaints process, should it be required. It can include using a family member, friend or other representative to put forward their complaint⁵, engaging with an advocacy service, or being provided with reasonable adjustments to ensure a case can be heard. The support can continue throughout the complaint process and it can include the representative or advocate presenting the case to an appeal panel on the complainant's behalf.

5.2 Where complainants request that a complaint is escalated to the appeal panel stage and that request is accepted, the complainant will be offered contact with a customer from the 'Customer Appeals Panel'. The Customer Appeals Panel member will talk the complainant through the appeals process, answer any questions about the process, and act as a customer guide through the process. The Customer Appeals Panel member will not be involved in hearing the complaint at a panel.

⁴ Reflecting the Housing Ombudsman Scheme criteria, page 12, paragraphs 39 a to r - <https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Housing-Ombudsman-Scheme-Sept-2020-edited-by-BM.pdf>

⁵ Stockport Homes will need to confirm with the complainant that the representative has permission to discuss the case.

6 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

6.1 This policy is designed to be flexible and encourage feedback from customers. It does not limit the ways in which complaints can be raised, instead it creates an open approach to complaints handling. The policy encourages the use of advocates or representatives where customers need support in raising or pursuing the complaint. It provides ways in which customers can be supported to raise their complaint, such as via customer appeal panel members providing guidance to customers at the appeal stage.

6.2 The approach encourages early resolution, and the appeal panel stage contains options to tailor the panel to the needs of customers.

7 OWNERSHIP, MONITORING AND REVIEW

7.1 The Policy has been approved by the Board. It is owned at a strategic level by the Assistant Chief Executive and on an operation level by the Performance and Improvement Manager. It will be reviewed on a three-yearly cycle, or earlier if required.

7.2 The Policy is monitored through the Customer Feedback Report. The report is presented to the Operations Committee of the Stockport Homes Board on a six-monthly cycle. An operational version is presented to the Wider Leadership Team in the intervening quarters. Each of these reports are used to identify learning and carry out trend analysis.