



## **VHA Policy Document**

### **Complaints and Feedback Policy**

**Reviewed: May 2024**

**Next Review Due: May 2027**

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. We aim to give an excellent service to our customers. We want to know when we get things wrong or when customers are unhappy with the service they have received from us. In the context of this policy, the term customer refers to residents, partners, contractors or other stakeholders.
- 1.2. The aim of this statement is to set out how we will listen, respond and learn from problems and mistakes so that we can give better service in the future.

## **2 How we identify a complaint**

- 2.1. A complaint is:

*'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service actions or lack of actions by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents'* (Housing Ombudsman, Complaint Handling Code 2022).
- 2.2 Any dissatisfaction a customer feels about an aspect of our service, policies or actions and decisions. We consider a 'customer' to be anyone who has contact or receives a service from us or is impacted on services provided by us. This means we will listen to complaints from anyone who expresses dissatisfaction, in addition to our tenants and leaseholders.
- 2.3 A complaint could be when a customer feels:
  - We have failed to respond to their initial enquiries
  - Our staff were unhelpful or were not polite
  - We have failed to meet one of our customer service promises
  - We gave unclear, misleading or unsuitable advice
  - Our policies or procedures are incorrect or unfair
  - Unhappy with our actions or decisions
- 2.4 A complaint is not a request for a service (RFS) or an enquiry. A service request is an approach to VHA to address an issue. However, customers do not need to use the term 'complaint' in order for it to be treated as such. In such circumstances officers must use their judgement to decide whether a contact is an RFS or a complaint.
- 2.5 A complaint will be raised, subject to the agreement of the customer, if they are not satisfied with the response to the request for a service. However, this will not be done where the service falls outside of the Associations remit or responsibility, contravenes existing policies or breaches regulatory or statutory requirements.
- 2.6 There are some instances when we will not be able to deal with issues via the complaints process, for example, if complaints relate to:

- a matter over twelve months old, however this may not apply where health and safety are concerned or other exceptional circumstances.
- a legal matter which is already being dealt with by a solicitor.
- any agent acting on behalf of VHA, for example an agent we have employed to manage a building or a parking enforcement contractor, customers may be advised to proceed through the agent's complaint handling process first before we will consider the matter.
- Matters that have been the subject of a previous complaint reviewed under the policy.

2.7 A customer normally just wants their complaint to be resolved quickly and easily. If it is practicable, we will try to do this within the day that the customer raises it, as a Quick Fix solution.

**3 How we will respond to complaints**

3.1. We welcome complaints as opportunities to improve our relationship with our customers and to improve our service. We are clear about the benefits of hearing about situations where customers feel we have got things wrong and where they feel we need to improve.

3.2. Because we see complaints as opportunities, we will look to identify and pre-empt the causes of complaints. Staff will consider expressions of dissatisfaction as potential complaints and respond positively and constructively in the manner of our approach set out below.

**4 How a customer may relate a complaint to us**

4.1 A customer can relate a complaint to us in a wide variety of ways:

- over the telephone,
- in writing,
- via an email,
- via social media,
- via the website or
- by visit.

4.2 They can also ask someone else to complain on their behalf if they would feel more comfortable having an advocate contact us. An advocate could be a friend or a family member. The customer would need to confirm that they are happy for us to liaise with their advocate before we respond to the complaint.

4.2 We will take full account of any factor(s) covered by the Equalities Act in receiving, responding and resolving complaints.

## 5 What we will do when we receive a complaint

**5.1.1** When a customer tells a member of staff that they are unhappy with some aspect of our work or related matter, the staff member will take personal responsibility for recording the information.

### 5.2 Complaint Stage 1 – Staff Resolution:

On receipt of a complaint, it will be passed to an appropriate member of staff who will:

- Enter the complaint in the Complaints Log
- Speak to the customer within 24 hours to clarify the issue and agree how and when it will be resolved or ensure a written acknowledgement is sent within **five** working days
- Ensure any actions agreed with the customer are carried out and followed up
- Contact the customer via telephone or an alternative medium of their choice to summarise the key points of the outcome letter and then;
- Write to the customer confirming how the complaint has been resolved, within ten working days of ~~when the customer made the complaint~~ **the acknowledgement**.
- **Where residents raise additional complaints during the investigation, they will be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related and the stage 1 response has not been issued. Where the stage 1 response has been issued, the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being investigated or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues will be logged as a new complaint**

**5.3 Complaint Stage 2 - Manager Review:** If the customer is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, they can ask for it to be reviewed within ten working days of when they receive their outcome letter. The review will be carried out by a senior manager. The manager will:

- **Acknowledge the stage 2 request within five working days of receiving a review request to clarify why they are dissatisfied with the complaint response and see whether anything can be done to resolve it before the review.**
- ~~If the customer is not satisfied after speaking to the manager, the Review will be carried out by the manager, who will:~~
  - ~~Ensure any actions agreed with the customer are carried out and followed up~~
  - ~~Write to the customer with Issue a final response within 20 working days of the stage 2 acknowledgement, confirming how the complaint has been resolved, within 10 working days of when the customer made the complaint~~
  - Agree any extension of time where there are demonstrable reasons for delay and provide details of the Ombudsman.

If for any reason a substantive response is not possible within these timescales, an alternative date will be agreed with the complainant. Where this is not possible the details of the Ombudsman will be provided.

5.4 **Independent Housing Ombudsman:** If the customer is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, they can refer their complaint to the Independent Housing Ombudsman Service (IHOS). The IHOS will only usually look at a customer complaint once it has been through all stages of the internal complaints procedure.

## **6 How we will learn from complaints**

6.1 A complaint is an opportunity to learn about what or how we need to improve or amend our service. We therefore want to learn from every complaint and to capture and share the things that we learn so that everyone can improve.

6.2 In order to do this we will record and monitor every complaint including details such as what the complaint was about, how it was resolved, how quickly it was resolved and what we learnt.

6.3 We will contact customers after they have complained to find out about their experience of the process and we will seek to learn from this feedback and to change our processes and approach to reflect customers' views.

6.4 We will carry out regular complaint reviews to continuously consider how we can improve our handling of complaints.

6.5 We will report on the learning that has resulted from our experience of complaints over a given timescale.

## **7 How we will make sure our complaints approach is fair and easy to access**

7.1 We will treat all customers fairly and with respect. We will provide customers with any support they need throughout their complaint, this could include translating information or providing an interpreter if their first language is not English.

7.2. We will accept complaints from a customer's advocate or representative when the customer has confirmed they would like that person to act on their behalf.

7.3 We reserve the right to take appropriate action when a customer's actions or behaviours are deemed to be unreasonable. An example of this could be if a customer uses threatening or offensive language towards staff, then we would ask them to communicate in writing, to a manager. We would always try to find a way to work with customers before reaching this stage, but very occasionally have to use this policy in order to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our staff.

## **8. Compliments**

8.1 We also recognise the value of recognising when things have gone well. This is an endorsement of our approach and positive feedback to individual staff members for

their work. Compliments will be recorded in the same way as complaints and learning points taken to inform future practice.

## **9. Feedback**

9.1 We will encourage other feedback from residents and service users including suggestions to improve value for money and/or improve our services. In situations where these lead to changes in the way we do things, some reward may be offered.

## **10. Summary**

- In all stages of these procedures meetings between parties should be arranged as this is often the best means of resolving such matters.
- We may offer suitable and proper redress if a complaint is upheld, including if appropriate, the payment of financial compensation, and considering disciplinary proceedings where warranted.
- We will make sure the complaints procedure is managed equitably and fairly.
- We will use information gathered from complaints where a product or service deficiency is highlighted to monitor and improve overall performance.