CHANGING LIVES HOMES

COMPLAINTS, COMPLIMENTS, AND SUGGESTIONS POLICY

Document Name: Complaints, Compliments, and Suggestions Policy
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Policy Statement

A core strategic goal of Changing Lives Homes is to provide excellent customer service. However, we acknowledge that sometimes things can go wrong, leading customers to raise a complaint. This policy outlines how we manage complaints, compliments, and suggestions. At Changing Lives Homes, we value all customer feedback as it provides insights into areas where we excel and areas that need improvement.

Definitions

- Customer: A tenant, leaseholder, or any individual, group, or organization with reason to submit a complaint, compliment, or suggestion.
- Advocate: A customer's designated representative, such as an MP, Councillor, third party, or family member.
- Service Request: A request for services we offer, such as repairs or addressing antisocial behavior. It also includes queries for information or requests to rectify issues. Service requests are not considered complaints. If a customer is dissatisfied with our resolution, they can file a complaint.
- Complaint: "An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by the organization, its staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents."
- Stage 1: The initial stage of our complaints service aimed at resolving issues promptly. If a customer is dissatisfied with the response, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2.
- Compliment: An expression of satisfaction with a service we provided or with an individual colleague or team.
- Suggestion: An idea to improve our services for the benefit of all customers.

1.0 Purpose of this Policy

1.1 This policy outlines how Changing Lives Homes manages complaints, compliments, and

2.0 Objectives of Policy

- 2.1 Changing Lives Homes is dedicated to providing excellent customer service by effectively handling and learning from complaints, compliments, and suggestions.

- 2,2 The policy aims to provide a clear, consistent, fair, and customer-focused complaints experience, fostering a positive complaints handling culture. We strive to listen, act, and make appropriate remedies in a timely manner, adapting to individual customer needs and cases.

- 2.3 Ensure compliance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

3.0 Complaints

How We Communicate the Complaints Process

3.1 To ensure customers can easily raise a complaint, we:
- Include information in starter packs for new tenancies
- Publish on our website.
- Provide a customer leaflet on how to make a complaint

How Customers Raise a Complaint

3.2 Customers can raise a complaint via:

- Telephone at 0191 2738891 between 8am and 5pm, Monday to Friday
- Email at complaints@changing-lives.org.uk
- Writing to our Central Office: H26 The Avenues, Eleventh Avenue North, Team Valley, NE11 0NJ
- Any Changing Lives Homes colleague, who will forward it to the appropriate person

- Direct messaging via Changing Lives Homes's social media pages, using X (formerly Twitter) Direct Message and Facebook Messenger
- Through a Councillor, MP, or other relevant third party (e.g., Housing Ombudsman or consumer rights organisation) or advocate

3.3 Customers should explain their dissatisfaction, reasons, and desired resolution. If they cannot, we will use available information.

The Housing Ombudsman

3.4 Customers can seek advice from the Ombudsman throughout a complaint.

3.5 Customers can escalate a complaint to the Ombudsman if stage 2 of our process does not resolve the issue.

3.6 The Ombudsman can be contacted at 0300 111 3000, info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk, or www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk.

Who Can Complain to Changing Lives

3.7 Anyone receiving a product or service from us or affected by our services.

3.8 A complaint made on behalf of multiple customers can be treated as one complaint, with communications directed to a nominated representative. We will seek permission from all involved customers before adopting this approach.

3.9 Customers may have an advocate or representative file a complaint on their behalf.

Complaints We Investigate

3.10 We recognise complaints as: "An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organization, its staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents."

3.11 Examples of complaints we consider include:
- Failure to provide a service
- Failure to deliver a service on time
- Failure to meet required standards or quality of service
- Staff attitudes, actions, or inactions related to a service

3.12 A customer does not need to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as one. If a customer expresses dissatisfaction, we will offer the option to file a complaint.

3.13 A complaint will be raised at the customer's request, even if the service request is ongoing. We will not cease handling a service request if a complaint is made.

3.14 Complaints must be raised within 12 months from when the issue first arose or when the customer became aware of the problem.

3.15 Customers should request to proceed to the next stage as soon as possible after receiving a stage 1 decision, or within 12 months.

What is Excluded by this Policy?

3.16 Complaints will be considered individually and excluded only for valid reasons. If we decide not to accept a complaint, we will explain our reasoning to the customer and inform them of their right to take the decision to the Ombudsman.

3.17 Typically excluded complaints:
- Service requests
- Issues occurring over twelve months ago
- Ongoing legal proceedings
- Previously considered issues
- Annual rent and service charge increase concerns
- Issues beyond our control, such as utility companies

Complaints Process: Two Stages

3.18 Stage 1: The entry point to our complaints process, aimed at resolving issues quickly.

3.19 If the response at stage 1 is unsatisfactory, the complaint can be escalated to Stage 2, our final response stage.

Role of the Complaint Handler

3.20 Different complaint handlers are assigned at each stage.

3.21 The handler must:
- Handle complaints independently and fairly
- Allow customers to present their case
- Address conflicts of interest
- Consider all relevant information
- Treat customers with fairness and respect
- Support vulnerable customers with reasonable adjustments

3.22 Engaging with the customer, they will clarify:
- The complaint definition
- Responsibilities
- Evidence needed
- Risks
- Desired outcomes
- Customer vulnerabilities and agreed adjustments
- Urgent actions

3.23 They will consider the complaint context, customer preferences, and whether immediate resolution is possible.

3.24 Appropriate remedies can be provided at any stage.

3.25 They will agree on communication frequency and method with the customer.

3.26 They will maintain a full record of the complaint.

3.27 They will oversee all actions and close the complaint once resolved.

Complaint Handling Standards

3.28 Stage 1:

- Complaints logged and acknowledged within five working days.
- Heard by a Project Lead, Corporate Manager or Service Manager.
- Customers are offered to discuss their concerns.
- Customers can comment on adverse findings before a final decision.
- Response provided within ten working days of acknowledgment (extendable by another ten working days with good reason).

3.29 Stage 2:

- Complaints logged and acknowledged within five working days.
- Heard by a Operational Lead, Corporate Lead or Director
- Customers are offered to discuss their concerns.
- Customers can comment on adverse findings before a final decision.
- Response provided within twenty working days of acknowledgment (extendable by another twenty working days with good reason).

Responding to a Complaint

3.30 Responses are provided within published timescales, even if rectification plans are ongoing.

3.31 Additional issues raised during investigation will be incorporated if related and the response not issued.

3.32 Final decisions are categorised as:

- Upheld
- Partly upheld
- Not upheld

3.33 Remedies reflect the impact of failures on the customer, including apologies, actions, changes, and compensation.

Escalation

3.34 Customers can request escalation to stage 2 if dissatisfied with stage 1.

3.35 We will escalate unless there is a valid reason not to.

3.36 Customers are asked to explain reasons for escalation to address their concerns.

Further Escalation

3.37 After stage 2, customers can ask the Ombudsman to investigate.

3.38 Leaseholders may refer disputes to the First Tier Property Tribunal.

3.39 Complaints about high-rise building safety can be referred to the Building Safety Regulator.

Handling Complaints Differently

3.40 We may handle complaints outside this policy if circumstances require it.

3.41 If handling differently, we will agree with the customer and confirm in writing.

3.42 We may accept complaints outside the 12-month limit for good reasons.

3.43 We will agree on reasonable adjustments with customers requiring them, such as additional complaint methods, pausing complaints, more response time, preferred communication methods, different formats, and support from advocates.

3.45 Exceptional circumstances (e.g., cyber incidents) will be communicated to the Ombudsman and affected customers.

4.0 Continuous Learning & Improvement

4.1 We promote a positive complaint handling culture.

4.2 We recognize complaints provide learning opportunities.

4.3 We analyse complaint themes and trends to identify issues.

4.4 We share learning and process improvement through internal communications.

4.5 We ensure accountability by sharing learnings with the Board, customers, and stakeholders.

4.6 The Chair of the Changing Lives Homes, is appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This 'Member Responsible for Complaints' oversees the complaint performance and leads on the board's response.

5.0 Compliments

5.1 We value compliments for good service or individual efforts.

5.2 Compliments are recorded, shared with the individual/team, and publicly acknowledged.

5.3 Customer can submit compliments via phone, email, writing, social media, or website form.

6.0 Suggestions

6.1 Suggestions are welcomed and considered for service improvements.

6.2 They are recorded, acknowledged, and reviewed.

6.3 Customers can submit suggestions via phone, email, writing or social media.

7.0 Policy Monitoring and Review

7.1 We ensure the policy's effectiveness through regular monitoring and reviews.

7.2 We welcome feedback to improve the policy.

7.3 This policy will be reviewed biennially and as needed to reflect legislative or organisational changes.

8.0 Equality and Diversity

8.1 This policy is applied in line with our Equality and Diversity Policy and the associated legislation including the Public Sector Equality Duty and Equality Act 2010. Changing Lives Homes aim to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, foster good relations and define the nine protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation.

8.2 To help us achieve this, we will work to improve accessibility for all, offering reasonable adjustments, adaptations and discussing ways that we can work to remove any barriers. A reasonable adjustment involves making a change to the way that we usually do things.

8.3 We work together to look at options and agree what adjustments would be reasonable in our customer's individual circumstances.

8.4 We will support people with vulnerabilities to deliver this service. We will work alongside external agencies such as social services, the police and fire services and other appropriate agencies to help and support people with vulnerabilities in the delivery of our services but also to ensure we meet our statutory and regulatory requirements as a social landlord.

9.0 Data Protection and Privacy

9.1 We have a clear policy on data protection and sharing data with other partners/third parties under the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation, the Data Protection Act 2018 and other associated legislation. This is clearly set out in the Data Protection Policy for Changing Lives Homes and Changing Lives which, along with its associated procedures, must be followed throughout the operation of this policy.

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