



PO13 Complaints Policy

Approval

Approved by Tenants' Forum	17 May 2007
Approved by Board	23 May 2007
Due for Review	31 May 2010

Review undertaken

Resident involvement <i>As agreed with Tenants' Forum</i>	Customer services group: 19 March 2007, 23 April 2007 Tenants' focus group: 13 April 2007 Complaints survey: April 2007
Equality Impact Assessment	8 May 2007
Other consultation	Senior Management Team: circulated week beginning 23 April 2007 Directors Group: 1 May 2007

1. Scope

This policy sets out Soha's approach to informal and formal complaints made by customers and other stakeholders.

For the purpose of this policy, "customer" means Soha's existing tenants, leaseholders, shared-owners, and housing applicants. The policy also refers to the complaints procedure for stakeholders, which means those customers who are not included in the list above. The difference in the procedures is that the Housing Ombudsman will not investigate complaints from stakeholders.

A complaint is any situation where the customer feels that Soha has failed to meet a reasonable standard of service. Soha aims to resolve complaints effectively, within set targets and to the customers' satisfaction.

Soha has separate policies and procedure for dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour, problems with neighbours, harassment and domestic abuse. This policy does not cover contractual disputes.

2. Aims

Soha aims to provide excellent services that meet customers' needs. However, we know that sometimes a customer may not be satisfied with the service they receive. In this case, we aim to encourage complaints and to provide a transparent, fair means of complaining.

We aim to resolve complaints fairly and effectively, within set targets and to the customer's satisfaction. Where we think a complaint is not justified, we will provide a clear explanation why.

We aim to learn from complaints. Where a service has failed, we aim:

- to identify the problem and to put it right for the complainant; and
- to address any underlying problems and make sure they don't happen again.

We will apply our Complaints policy consistently and fairly, and will not discriminate against any complainant on grounds of their race, colour, ethnic or national origins, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender, age or any other matter which may cause a person to be treated with injustice.

3. Policy Statement

Soha has a positive and pro-active approach to complaints. We view complaints as valuable feedback and a means of identifying areas for service improvements.

Soha has a Complaints procedure which sets out how we will go about investigating, resolving and learning from all complaints.

All complaints, from customers and stakeholders, will be considered in a fair and impartial manner. Staff will be approachable and helpful at all stages of the Complaints Procedure.

Where appropriate, Soha will work with other organisations to resolve a complaint in a customer-focused way.

If a customer is not satisfied with the investigation or outcome of their complaint, he/she has a right ultimately to complain to the Independent Housing Ombudsman. This fact will be included in publicity about the complaints procedure. Stakeholders do not have access to the Housing Ombudsman service.

4. Implementation

Soha will promote its complaints procedure in a variety of ways, including leaflets displayed in reception areas, promotion in our newsletter and on our website. Soha is a member of the Independent Housing Ombudsman Scheme and literature will be displayed in reception areas to publicise this.

The complaints procedure sets out guidelines for three types of complaint:

a – When no complaint has been made, but something is clearly wrong. For example, where a repair is repeatedly reported and the issue is not being resolved.

b – When contact has been made which does not say it is a complaint, but which does say that Soha has failed to reach a reasonable standard of service.

The procedure classes types A and B as informal complaints.

c – A formally registered complaint.

The procedure sets out that all complaints, informal and formal:

- Will be dealt with promptly, courteously, systematically and fairly
- Will be dealt with in confidence; and
- Will be dealt with by a named contact and that customers will be kept informed of the progress and the outcome of their complaint.

The formal complaints procedure sets out three clear stages, each with appropriate time-scales for acknowledgement and resolution. The procedure sets out that:

- Customers and stakeholders may register a complaint in a variety of ways, including by telephone, in a letter, by email, through Soha's website or using Soha's complaints form.
- Where informal arrangements to resolve complaints are not appropriate, either a member of staff or the complainant may trigger the formal procedure.
- A complaint may be registered by a representative or advocate, for example the Citizens' Advice Bureau or the Tenants' Forum.
- A Complaints Co-ordinator will record, monitor and acknowledge all formal complaints centrally.
- Where mistakes have occurred, Soha will apologise and seek to remedy the situation. Soha may consider compensation, as outlined in our Compensation Policy.
- The complaints stages escalate in terms of the seniority of the officer dealing with the complaint (manager at stage 1; director at stage 2; and panel of board members, to include where possible a tenant board member and the chair or vice chair of the board or a committee at stage 3).
- Where a complainant remains dissatisfied after either stage 2 or stage 3 of the procedure, an independent mediation service may be offered.
- Where a customer is not satisfied with the outcome of a Stage 3 complaint, we will advise them if they have a right to appeal to the Independent Housing Ombudsman.

We will ensure that people's individual needs are met in implementing this policy, for example the provision of translated materials, or home visits with carers, relatives or other agencies, if appropriate.

All staff will be given training in the handling of the complaints process.

5. Persistently Unreasonable or Vexatious Complaints

Soha is committed to providing a complaints service that is accessible to all our customers. In certain circumstances, where a complainant's actions are unacceptable, Soha reserves the right to restrict or change this access.

The Persistently Unreasonable or Vexatious Complaints Procedure sets out that:

- A complainant is not seen as 'vexatious' simply because he or she pursues a complaint in a forceful or determined manner.
- Where a complaint is being pursued in an unreasonable manner, or is frivolous, vexatious or seeks to raise again, and unreasonably, matters which have already been resolved, Soha may consider the matter closed and not re-investigate. In this case, the complainant will be informed in writing.

6 Responsibility

The Chief Executive is responsible for the effective implementation of this policy.

7 Monitoring and review

Complainants will be invited to feedback their experience of the complaints procedure. Questions will ask for their views on its effectiveness and their resulting satisfaction. Feedback will form part of a regular review process.

A quarterly detailed report will be issued to the Directors Group setting out the nature of each complaint, its path, and outcome, with the aim of learning from complaints and improving services as a result.

The quarterly management report that is submitted to the Board will include information about numbers of complaints received. It will report on how we are meeting our commitments to equality and diversity.

A quarterly summary report setting out the number, nature, action taken and time scales within which action was taken on complaints will be presented to the Tenants' Forum or relevant sub-group.

Soha will track changes made to service policy or practice by monitoring and learning from informal and formal complaints.

Context

Independent Housing Ombudsman Scheme
Independent Housing Ombudsman Complaints Procedures, Good Practice
Housing Corporation Regulatory Code
Housing Inspectorate – Key Lines of Enquiry no. 30 – Access and Customer Care