



	Somer Housing Group	Version: 1
Policy	Customer Feedback Policy	
Ref	Insert	
Staff affected	All	Effective Date: November 2010
Approved by	All Boards	Approval Date: November 2010
Lead Officer/ Policy Owner	Service Improvement Manager	Review Date: November 2013

Policy Statement

Somer Housing Group is committed to providing excellent services to all our customers. If things go wrong, we need our customers to let us know and give us the opportunity to put things right.

We also recognise the benefits of actively listening to our customers because their feedback gives us an opportunity to learn from their experiences and improve the way we do things.

1. Scope

This policy applies to all members of the Somer Housing Group.

Somer Housing Group aims to be a learning organisation that is respected and trusted within the communities that we serve. This policy applies to all customer feedback received about a service delivered by our staff members - including both employees and contractors working on our behalf.

The policy is group-wide but each member organisation will implement a specific customer feedback procedure. These procedures will be well publicised and available to customers in leaflets and on their website.

2. Responsibilities

The responsibilities are described in the policy and will be defined in greater detail within each organisation's local procedures for handling and managing customer feedback.

3. Definitions

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, requiring a response, about a service provided or not provided.

A compliment is when a customer gives us feedback about how we delivered an excellent service or how a staff member has gone the “extra mile” to serve them.

A suggestion is when a customer gives us feedback on how we can improve our delivery of a service.

4. Principles

- Satisfying customers by promptly resolving their complaints
- Communicating clearly and promptly putting things right when they go wrong
- Recording, analysing and learning from all customer feedback
- Monitoring our targets for responding to feedback and publicising our performance

5. Application

Detailed within policy.

Equalities Impact Assessment	15/07/10
Legal/Regulatory Framework	TSA Standards
Performance & Quality Framework	See strategy document
Associated Policies & Procedures and other documents	Compensation policy Local customer feedback procedures
Policy Category	Customer feedback strategy
Consultation Residents' Committee/Focus Group Affected Staff Staff Council/Joint Staff Forum Management Team GX	Consultation with residents, frontline staff, service managers, senior management, complaints co-ordinators and board completed during June / July 2010 Consultation on new policy with residents during September-October 2010

Customer feedback policy

We value feedback about our services and welcome customer complaints, compliments and suggestions about our services. We are committed to using customer feedback to improve our services and focus on the needs and expectations of our customers.

Our key commitments

We are committed to:

- Satisfying customers by promptly resolving their complaints
- Communicating clearly and promptly putting things right when they go wrong
- Recording, analysing and learning from all customer feedback
- Monitoring our targets for responding to feedback and publicising our performance

Our customer's rights

Our customers have the right to:

- Choose how they give us feedback about our services – online, in writing, by fax, by Minicom, SMS (text) message, in person or by phone
- Expect us to use plain language when communicating with them
- Be given a contact name and expected date for a response when we can't respond immediately
- Be kept informed when we cannot send a response in time
- Complain to the next stage when dissatisfied with a response

How do we publicise the customer feedback policy?

We will publicise our customer feedback policy by making information available:

- In our Resident Handbooks, Service Handbooks and Welcome Packs
- In all of our customer reception areas and service centres
- From any of our staff who are out at meetings or visiting people in their homes
- In local Citizen Advice Bureaux, law centres and other local advice agencies
- On our web site (www.somerhousinggroup.org.uk)

We will also publish regular articles in our residents' magazine and newsletters and on our web site on how we use customer feedback to improve our services.

How do we promote equality of access

We are committed to valuing diversity and making sure that all people in our communities are given full and equal access to the customer feedback policy.

- We will, on request, make customer information available in community languages, large print or Braille
- We will help a customer to make a complaint when needed
- We will monitor customer feedback to make sure all community groups have easy access to the process and an appropriate resolution

- We will develop strategies to improve access and awareness for under-represented communities

Who are our customers?

Our customers include residents, visitors to our offices and properties, suppliers of services and any other group or individual that uses or is affected by our services.

We will also respond to customer feedback given to us on behalf of any individual that uses or is affected by our services - but we may need to get the signed consent of that individual if we need to include personal information in our response to their representative (timescales for dealing with the feedback will start when we receive the necessary consent).

We recognise that sometimes a group of customers (such as a residents' association, community group or a group of customers associated with a petition) may want to give us feedback. We will consider feedback from these groups and decide on the best approach - this may involve suggesting the use of mediation, responding to a lead member of the group or asking that the individual members of the group contact us directly.

Who can advise customers on how to feedback about our services?

A customer can get advice, at any time, from a staff member. We may also advise a customer on how to contact a local councillor, Member of Parliament, Housing Ombudsman Service, Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB) or other independent advice agency.

Who can advise staff members on the operation of the customer feedback policy?

A staff member can get advice, at any time, from their feedback monitoring officer (*or the Customer Relations Manager*).

Local resolution

We aim to deal with any complaints, compliments and suggestions at the point of service delivery.

What is a compliment?

A compliment is when a customer gives us feedback about how we delivered an excellent service or how a staff member has gone the "extra mile" to serve them.

- We will record details and acknowledge receipt within **3** working days.
- A manager will assess the compliment and may decide to:
 1. write or speak to the team manager or individual staff member to thank them for providing an excellent service to the customer; or
 2. nominate the team or staff member for an outstanding service award.

What is a suggestion?

A suggestion is when a customer gives us feedback on how we can improve our delivery of a service.

How will we deal with a suggestion?

We will:

- Record details and acknowledge receipt within **3** working days.
- Send a response to the customer within **10** working days that either explains how we will implement the suggestion or explains why we are unable to implement the suggestion.

What is a complaint?

“An expression of dissatisfaction, requiring a response, about a service provided or not provided.”

Therefore, when a customer contacts us because they are dissatisfied with something we have or have not done, we will consider this to be a complaint. A customer complaint could include one or more of the following problems:

- A customer is dissatisfied with a **delay** in providing them with a service
- A customer is dissatisfied because we have **failed or refused to provide** a service
- A customer is dissatisfied with the **poor quality** of service they have received or a mistake that has been made
- A customer considers that we have provided them with an **inappropriate** service
- A customer is dissatisfied because we have **removed** or withdrawn a service
- A customer is dissatisfied about being charged an inappropriate **cost** for a service
- A customer is dissatisfied with a **staff member’s behaviour**
- A customer considers that they have been unreasonably disadvantaged by a **policy**
- A customer considers that we have unfairly **discriminated** against them

First contact resolution

The staff member receiving the initial complaint will:

- Record details of the complaint
- Try to resolve the complaint straight away (before the end of the next working day)

Stage 1: Service response

If we cannot resolve the complaint straight away, we will:

- Contact the customer within **3** working days to inform them about who is dealing with the complaint and give them a deadline for our response
- Respond to the customer within **10** working days
- Make sure that we do all we can to resolve the complaint to the customer's satisfaction and, where we get things wrong, try to put them right

- Keep the customer informed about any delays
- Tell the customer about their right to complain to the next stage if they are dissatisfied with our response

Stage 2: Management review

If the customer is dissatisfied with the Stage 1 response, or we fail to respond, a manager or senior manager will review the complaint. Any member of staff may request a review at this stage if they decide that the circumstances of the complaint make that appropriate.

The manager will:

- Record details
- Acknowledge the complaint within **3** working days
- Send a full response to the customer within **15** working days
- Make sure that we do all we can to resolve the complaint to the customer's satisfaction and, where we get things wrong, try to put them right
- Keep the customer informed about any delays
- Tell the customer about their right to request a review hearing if they are dissatisfied with our response

Stage 3: Panel review

If the customer is dissatisfied with the Stage 2 response, or we fail to respond, a Director will arrange for a panel to review the complaint. A senior manager may also request a panel hearing.

The director will:

- Advise the local customer feedback co-ordinator of the complaint
- Acknowledge receipt and confirm the process within **3** working days
- Ask the customer whether they want to make written or personal representations to the panel
- Appoint a panel to review the complaint at a hearing within **30** working days
- Service the panel hearing as required

The panel will consist of 3 members, representing the board and resident groups. The panel members will agree to one member to be chair person who will:

- Chair the hearing
- Write to the customer, giving details of the panel's findings, within **10** working days of the hearing
- Inform the customer of their right to complain to the Housing Ombudsman Service if they are dissatisfied with the panel's response

When can we use mediation to resolve a dispute with a customer?

We may consider at any stage that the use of mediation might help resolve a complaint - especially if the problem is about an ongoing dispute. However,

the customer can, of course, refuse mediation and insist that we handle the complaint using our 3-stage approach.

What can we do to resolve complaints and put things right when they go wrong?

If we make a mistake or could have done something better, we will try to take some practical action to resolve the complaint to the customer's satisfaction. We may ask the customer to suggest what they would like us to do.

If we have made a mistake, we will always try to put the customer back to the position that he or she would have been in but for our mistake.

We may decide that one or more of the following can be done to put things right:

- Say sorry to the customer
- Provide a gift voucher
- Provide, review or change a service to the customer
- Provide an explanation or information to the customer
- Review customer literature (leaflets, poster and so on)
- Review a policy or procedure
- Take action or enforce a decision
- Arrange training or guidance for employees
- Staff member action (such as standards setting or change of key worker)
- Pay compensation or give a refund (where money has been paid to us)

How do we deal with customers who remain dissatisfied after we have fully responded to their complaint?

We will advise any customer who has completed all stages of our customer feedback policy to contact the Housing Ombudsman Service. If the complaint is not something that can be dealt with by the Housing Ombudsman Service, we will advise the customer about any other external dispute resolution schemes that may be able to assist them.

If the complaint is about a support service, we may advise the customer to contact the relevant local authority for advice on how to progress the complaint.

If the customer complains again to us about the same issue, the director of the service concerned may write to them informing them that we will not respond to future correspondence about the complaint unless the customer provides new evidence or makes a complaint about a different issue.

How do we deal with any unreasonable behaviour by a customer?

We may decide to refuse to respond to customers who behave unreasonably (such as being aggressive or being abusive or making unreasonable demands or being unreasonably persistent) when making a complaint.

A service director may, in these situations, decide that we take action to deal with the unreasonable behaviour.

How do we deal with feedback about our contractors?

We require any organisation that provides services on our behalf to comply with this policy.

We require our contractors to:

- Record and respond to customer feedback at the Local Resolution stage;
- Provide us with information when requested; and
- Assist us with complaint investigations where necessary.

How do we deal with feedback received from elected representatives?

Local councillors and Members of Parliament can give us feedback on behalf of a constituent. We will use this Customer Feedback policy to deal with the feedback.

How do we learn from feedback?

We will monitor trends and performance in our handling of customer feedback and produce a regular report on the operation of our customer feedback policy for senior management, board members and our customers. We will also discuss issues at team meetings and build a learning culture by developing internal forums to consider the wider-improvements that can be made to our services based on the feedback received from customers and employees.

We will use performance indicators to track the performance of the policy in each organisation. We will regularly review:

- Type of feedback received (complaints, compliments, suggestions)
- Methods used to contact us (by phone, in writing, email and so on)
- Time taken to acknowledge and respond to customer feedback
- Responses completed in or outside of target time and outstanding responses
- Complaint types and outcomes
- Complaint remedies (including compensation payments)
- Action taken to improve services (complaints and suggestions)
- Customer satisfaction with the handling and outcome of a complaint
- Quality of complaint responses
- Customer profiles (tenure, age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion, locality and disability)
- Our use of the policy to deal with unreasonable behaviour by customers

We will regularly review the effectiveness of our policy. We will continually review the operation of the Customer Feedback policy and involve customers, employees, board members and resident groups. We will also regularly audit the performance of the customer feedback policy and procedures.

What complaints are excluded from our policy?

We will not use this policy to deal with complaints where:

- The customer has been aware of a problem for more than 6 months before complaining to us (we may use discretion where the customer has good reason for delaying in making a complaint)

- The customer is unhappy with our response to a complaint but fails to ask us to escalate the complaint more than 3 months after we sent our response to them (again, we may use discretion where the customer has good reason for delaying in making a complaint)
- The customer's complaint is currently being dealt with or was previously dealt with either by legal proceedings, the Housing Ombudsman Service or other external dispute resolution scheme

We also recognise that some complaints will be handled using other processes, including:

- A complaint about a service where we have no responsibility, such as local authority nomination procedures
- A complaint about a decision where a statutory appeal body or tribunal has been established to examine the case, such as the Leasehold Valuation Tribunal
- A claim for damages that should be handled as an insurance claim
- A complaint about contract-related issues where an arbitration procedure already exists