



Complaints and compliments procedure

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Redland is a member of the Somer Housing Group and has adopted a Group-wide customer feedback policy. This document sets out the procedures Redland will use to ensure that we meet the aims and objectives of that policy.
- 1.2 Our aim is to deal with all feedback fairly, consistently, sensitively and with regard to confidentiality.
- 1.3 We will ensure that all staff have had appropriate training and are familiar with these procedures.
- 1.4 Complaints may be received in a variety of ways including
 - By telephone
 - By personal caller
 - By letter
 - At a public meeting
 - Through a satisfaction survey
 - Via a board member
 - Collectively through a petition, residents association or any other group of residents

2. First contact resolution

- 2.1 Most complaints can be resolved informally, and we encourage staff and customers to adopt this approach initially. The first stage of our complaints process is for the person receiving the complaint to try to resolve the complaint straight away. Sometimes that may be a simple as making an apology; at other times that may involve agreeing with the customer a course of action, for example rearranging an appointment, arranging for someone to visit and discuss the matter.
- 2.2 Any contact with us which expresses dissatisfaction with the service we have provided is considered a complaint. A complaint is also the last opportunity for us to put it right for the customer.
- 2.3 If we have failed to follow our policies and procedures, to meet our service standards or to offer the quality of service expected by the customer, we will apologise, and explain what we can do to remedy the

situation and to ensure that we do not make the same mistake again. If we feel we have not done any of the above we will explain our reasons.

- 2.4 We will record all complaints, including
 - The subject of the complaint
 - How the complaint was made
 - What action has been taken in response
 - How the customer has been advised of the outcome
- 2.5 Where a complaint cannot be resolved immediately, but the customer has agreed to a course of action, we will respond in accordance with our published customer care procedures, ensuring that the customer is aware of the timescales involved and is kept informed of progress.
- 2.6 When responding to complaints we will advise customers of our formal complaints process, sending a copy of our leaflet and complaint form with any reply.

3. Formal stages

- 3.1 Staff, residents or other customers can instigate our formal complaint process if they consider that the nature of the complaint is sufficiently serious, or if it has not been possible to resolve the complaint at the first point of contact.
- 3.2 We encourage customers to make formal complaints in writing, and provide a complaint form to assist. We will offer assistance to people whose first language is not English or who have special needs such as literacy problems. However, where customers prefer to make the complaint verbally, we will make our own written record of the complaint and will provide a copy to the customer.
- 3.3 When a complaint is received, an acknowledgement will be sent within 3 working days. This will confirm that the complaint is being considered, who is dealing with it, and when a full response can be expected.
- 3.4 The complaint will normally be dealt with by the Service Manager, depending on its nature. They will respond to the customer within 10 working days; if a full response cannot be made because further action is necessary to resolve the issue then the customer will be advised what is being done and when a full response will be made. (Stage 1)
- 3.5 If the customer is not satisfied with the outcome, they can ask for the complaint to be considered by the Head of Customer Services. The Head of Customer Services will acknowledge the complaint within 3 working days and respond within 10 working days, as in 3.4 above. (Stage 2)

- 3.6 If the customer is not satisfied with the outcome of this response they can ask for the complaint to be considered by a Review Panel. A Director will arrange for the panel to be established and to hear the complaint. The Panel will comprise 3 members representing the Board and residents groups, and may be advised and serviced by the Director. Normally, this will mean one independent Board member, one Resident Board member, and one RRC member.
- 3.7 The customer will be asked whether they wish to appear in person, or to have their written representations considered, and the appropriate arrangements will be made. In the case of written representations, we will send a response within 30 working days; if a personal hearing is arranged we will send a reply within 10 working days of that hearing. (Stage 3)
- 3.8 If the complaint is about a Service Manager then another Service Manager or Head of Customer Services will deal with the stage 1 complaint and if unresolved the Managing Director the stage 2.
- 3.9 If Redland and the customer agree that mediation or arbitration is an appropriate way forward at any stage in the process then we will arrange this. We will actively promote mediation as a way of resolving complaints.
- 3.10 If the customer remains dissatisfied following the panel's decision they can ask the Independent Housing Ombudsman to consider the complaint.
- 3.11 In circumstances where the Ombudsman will not consider a complaint (eg in the case of collective complaints) we will offer alternative options of mediation, arbitration (if not previously offered) or the provision of independent advice.
- 3.12 All formal complaints, and their progress, will be recorded by the Resident Involvement Assistant, who will also carry out surveys to determine levels of customer satisfaction with our complaints process.

4. Vexatious complaints

- 4.1 We may adopt a different procedure in cases of customers who make vexatious complaints.
- 4.2 We consider people to be making vexatious complaints when they
- Make repeated complaints on similar issues and these have been considered and not upheld
 - Fail to engage in the complaints process
 - Use the complaints as a form of protest

- 4.3 Considering a complaint unreasonable is not in itself grounds for considering it vexatious
- 4.4 The Managing Director will determine if a complaint is considered vexatious. The way in which we will then deal with the complaint will be determined on a case by case basis. We will write to the customer and explain that this is the case, and the action we intend to take.

5. Compensation

- 5.1 We will consider the payment of compensation in the following circumstances.
- Where a residents belongings have been damaged because we have not carried out a repair in a reasonable time
 - Where a resident has been without a facility or service (for example heating) because a repair was not carried out in a reasonable time
 - Where a resident has lost money (eg taking time off work for an appointment we did not keep) because we failed to do something we had agreed to do
 - Where a resident has lost money because we did not follow our written policies and procedures
 - In other circumstances where a resident suffers loss or inconvenience due to our failure to provide a service
- 5.2 We will not pay compensation in the following circumstances.
- Where a claim is to do with an accident or fault that the resident has not reported or that we could not reasonably be expected to know about
 - Where someone else has caused the damage, for example if the washing machine in the flat above leaks. Residents are expected to claim on their own household insurance for such damage.
- 5.3 Claims for compensation must be made in writing (our staff will provide assistance where necessary) and be accompanied by relevant bills, receipts, payslips etc.
- 5.4 Claims which relate to matters for which we have insurance will be passed to our insurers for assessment and settlement
- 5.5 A separate guidance note sets out how compensation payments are to be calculated, and authorisations required.
- 5.6 Compensation payments will always be linked to a complaint record (either informal or formal) and the outcome should include detail of any compensation payment.
- 5.7 Formal compensation payments detailed above are made when customers have suffered a loss as a result of a service failure. In

addition, we will enable all staff who deal with informal complaints to reinforce apologies where a service failure has occurred, but not necessarily resulted in a loss, by offering customers a store voucher up to a maximum £10 by way of apology.

6. Learning from complaints

- 6.1 All complaints, those resolved at first point of contact and those that reach formal stages, are recorded as detailed above. Those records are used to measure our performance in dealing with complaints and to improve service by learning from those complaints.
- 6.2 We will produce performance indicators as set out in the Group wide customer feedback policy.
- 6.3 We will monitor customer satisfaction with the way we deal with complaints as part of our customer satisfaction framework.
- 6.4 Operational team meetings will review all complaints as a standard agenda item, focusing particularly on actions improve services to address issues raised by complaints.
- 6.5 Redland's management team will review all informal complaints on a quarterly basis.
- 6.6 A quarterly report will detail all complaints received, actions taken and service improvements instigated as a result. This report will be reviewed by the board.

This procedure is effective from : September 2010.

This procedure will be reviewed by: September 2013

The responsible officer is : Head of Customer Services

The responsible focus group is : Customer Care