



POLICY DOCUMENT

Corporate Complaints Policy

1.0 Aim

Weaver Vale Housing Trust aims to provide the best possible services which meet the needs of our customers. The Corporate Complaints Policy will ensure that we use complaints to help the Trust learn from any failures in service and that complaints are dealt with in a systematic manner and within set target times in order to deliver the highest level of customer service. The policy will also ensure that complaints are used as a means of service improvement. It will also ensure that comments and compliments made by customers are also utilised to improve services.

2.0 Policy

This policy will be followed for all complaints made against the Trust. If a customer is not satisfied with the final outcome of their complaint he or she has a right to complain to the Housing Ombudsman.

2.1 What is a complaint?

The International Standards Organisation defines a complaint as:-
'An expression of dissatisfaction made to an organisation where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.
The following are examples of the most common complaints.

- Failure to achieve one of our service standards.

- An appointment that has not been kept by the Trust
- An unreturned call or letter within the designated timescale
- Poor workmanship by either Weaver Vale or any contractor working on behalf of Weaver Vale Housing Trust
- Lack of courtesy from any employee or contractor
- Failure to deliver a promise or commitment made by the Trust
- Failure of an individual or team to comply with the Trust's own policies
- Any failure of service from the Trust.

A complaint can be made by any stakeholders including tenants, leaseholders, shared owners, Careline, Telecare or Telemedicine customers, owner/occupiers.

2.2 What will not be dealt with under the complaints policy?

- This policy is not to be used by complainants to question the Trust's policies (policies are updated regularly and where specific legislation changes)
- carry out grievance proceedings for staff
- carry out disciplinary action against staff
- Complaints referring to events more than 12 months ago where there has been no prior complaint.

2.3 Response to a complaint

Each directorate within the Trust has a nominated Complaints and Compensation Co-ordinator, appointed by the Director to monitor the processing of complaints. The three stages of the process are outlined below and specified in detail within the Corporate Complaints Procedure.

Complaints should not be escalated through the system but should be resolved as soon as possible. Customers should not be encouraged to move to the next stage within the system.

Stage 1 – Service Department

- An attempt should be made to resolve the complaint within 1 working day (see 2.4 below) otherwise it should be acknowledged within 1 working day and the complainant advised that we will investigate the complaint and provide a full written response within a maximum of 20 working days.
- The response from the Service Line Manager **will** advise the outcome of the complaint and advise that unless we hear further from the complainant within 10 working days the complaint will be closed.

Stage 2 – Director

- On receiving a response from the complainant to the letter sent at the conclusion of Stage 1 unresolved complaints will be acknowledged to complainant within 2 working days.
- The Chief Executive, or any other Director, is to review the complaint. A written response should be provided to the complainant within 10 working days.
- The complainant is to be notified that they have 25 working days to appeal against the decision.

Stage 3 – Complaints Appeal Panel

- Appeal to be acknowledged to the complainant within 2 working days.
- Complaints Appeal Panel to be convened within 20 working days of receipt of appeal request.
- The complainant will be invited to attend and the Appeal Hearing will follow the detailed Procedure for Appeal Hearings.
- Reasonable expenses incurred by a complainant in attending an appeal hearing will be born by the Trust.

Following the hearing a written response to be provided to the complainant within 5 working days and the complainant will be notified of their right to appeal to the Housing Ombudsman.

Housing Ombudsman Appeal

The Trust is a member of the Housing Ombudsman Service which provides a free and independent way of dealing with complaints. Appeals can only be made to the Housing Ombudsman once the Trust's Complaints procedure has been completed.

The Trust will comply with any recommendations made by the Housing Ombudsman following their adjudication of a complaint.

2.4 Complaint resolution at the initial point of contact.

- Making an appointment which is satisfactory for the customer
- Completing the repair which is being complained about
- Resolving any query
- Visiting or arranging for a date to visit the complainant and resolving the problem
- Sending a letter of apology or an explanation of a situation.

2.5 Customer Satisfaction

The Trust is a member of QHS (Quality Housing Services) and tracks satisfaction with the handling of complaints by means of mystery shopping carried out by QHS. The information received from QHS will be used as both a measure of customer satisfaction and a tool to drive continuous improvement within the Trust,

2.6 Vexatious or Unnecessarily Persistent Complainants

As an organisation the Trust may occasionally face a situation where one of our customers makes persistent or repeated complaints which we have already answered, for which we are unable to take action, or which fall outside the remit of the Trust. Such a customer may be identified from their behaviour and will be someone who enters into frequent correspondence by mail or email; contacts officers on a regular basis by telephone; makes regular visits to the offices and/or makes contact with various people in the organisation at the same time often about

the same issues and who does not allow time for answers to be given.

The effect of such behaviour may be to leave staff feeling frustrated and to reduce the level of service given to other customers. Where a member of staff feels that a customer is displaying such behaviour they should discuss the application of this policy with their Manager and Director. If it is

found to be persistent behaviour of a vexatious nature a warning letter should then be sent to the complainant advising them that this policy will be implemented and that unless they desist the Trust will not respond to any further contacts made by the complainant with regard to the issues previously Investigated.

If the behaviour persists and the Director feels that the complainant should be classed as a persistent or serial complainant, with due consideration of their possible vulnerability, they should discuss the case with the Chief Executive. If the Chief Executive is in agreement with the classification then the Chief Executive will write and explain that we have tried to resolve the matter or matters and we have nothing further to add. The letter should inform the complainant that the correspondence is at an end and that future letters will be acknowledged but not answered.

The classification of people as persistent or serial complainants will be reviewed every six months.

2.7 COMMENTS AND COMPLIEMENTS

Any comments or compliments made by customers can help and assist in the development of better and more customer sensitive services. It is important that the Trust makes use of this feedback.

Any formal written or verbal comments or compliments will be shared with appropriate staff to enable lessons to be learnt in accordance with the procedure laid down in the Corporate Complaints Procedure.

3.0 OUTCOMES FOR CUSTOMERS

Efficient and effective complaints handling will ensure complaints are processed, monitored and used to improve customer service within the Trust and to prevent reoccurrence of the same problem.

Comments on services or policies are invaluable in producing customer focused services.

4.0 OUTCOMES FOR THE TRUST

Efficient and Effective complaints handling is one method by which the Trust can learn from its customers to enable the organisation's systems, processes and procedures to be changed and streamlined to deliver better more customer focused services..

5.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

The Trust's diverse customer base will cause us to question how we handle complaints from people from the target groups within the Trust's Equality and Diversity Strategy and other vulnerable groups by examining our procedures to ensure that we deliver services which are as customer sensitive as possible and do not disadvantage any group. When dealing with complaints we will be sensitive to the particular issues of equality and diversity raised by the individual complainant.

6.0 MONITORING

Complaints will be a standard agenda item at all monthly Team Briefings and issues requiring further work raised by individual complaints will be monitored by Directors by means of 'One to Ones'. An analysis of the Trust's complaints will be reported to the Executive Management Team within the standard suite of KPIs. The Trust is a member of QHS (Quality Housing Services) who carry out programmes of mystery shopping and customer surveys of the Trust's services including complaints handling. This information together with any other information from customers, the Housing Ombudsman or elsewhere on the Trust's complaint handling will be reviewed regularly by EMT.

Our customers will be reported to on a half yearly basis through "Your Home" on performance highlighting areas where their complaints have led to changes.

7.0 CONSULTATION

Consultation on this policy and associated procedure has been carried out with a group of customers.

8.0 LINKS AND INTERDEPENDENCIES

This policy draws on guidance within the Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code, the Audit Commission's Key Line of Enquiry 30. The policy links to the Trust's Compensation Policy and output from complaints may produce actions within the OSDP to address issues raised by complaints. Data on complaints will also be utilised within the policy review framework.

9.0 RESPONSIBILITY

The Chief Executive and Directors are responsible to the Board for ensuring the effective implementation and use of this policy.

The Corporate Performance Manager is also responsible to the Chief Executive and the Board for ensuring that all front-line staff are trained in the use of the Complaints Policy.

10.0 COMPLAINTS, COMPENSATION AND APPEALS

Complaints about the operation of the Complaints Policy and procedures, attached in Appendix 1 will be reviewed by the Trust's Complaint Appeals Panel.

11.0 REVIEW

This policy will be formally reviewed in November 2009.

12.0 CONCLUSION

Weaver Vale Housing Trust welcomes all feedback about its services from its customers. Where it is determined that the Trust is at fault, the necessary arrangements will be made to rectify the problem. Where compensation payment or other recompense is deemed necessary, this must be done in line with the Trust's Compensation Policy.

This policy is supported by detailed procedures covering the handling of complaints and the conduct of appeal hearings.

Corporate Complaints Policy Action Plan

Ref.	Action	Comments	Target Date	Responsible Officer
7.0	Review QHS mystery shopping output on complaints		February 2007	EMT
7.0	Report to Customers on complaints performance to tell them what we have changed as a result of complaints "You said – We did" and what we have done well twice yearly		Spring 2007	TC
10.0	Design, schedule and carry out refresher training for all front line staff including gaining hearts and minds on the importance of complaints and other customer feedback. Training to include importance of monitoring E & D	With the assistance of complaints & compensation co-ordinators.	January 2007	TC
	Electronic complaints forms to be uploaded to the Intranet		January 2007	IL
12.0	Review of Corporate Complaints Policy	Add to Policy Time table	September 2009	TC
	Consider implications for tender documents	Ensure GR RE Complains and Compensation Action Plans.doc alignment of tender documents with policy	April 2007	GR

Version: 3

8

Date Approved: 06.09.07