

Complaints Policy

Policy Statement & Purpose

Complaints are important to us. We need to know if our service goes wrong, so we can put things right and learn from our mistakes.

We capture all expressions of dissatisfaction, even if we feel we've delivered services in line with our policies. It helps us to concentrate on improving the things that are important to our customers.

Our complaints policy covers an actual or perceived failure in;

- (a) our service offer
- (b) something we have or haven't done
- (c) the way our people delivered the service or
- (d) Services delivered by our partners.

Scope

This Policy sets out how we deal with unhappy customers and formal complaints.

Through this policy we seek to make sure:

- We are consistent and fair
- Complaints are resolved as quickly as possible
- Mistakes are corrected quickly and we do what we say we will
- That action is taken to prevent similar service failures happening again

Reference Documents

Consumer Credit Complaints Policy. (For customers receiving Debt Counselling services. I.e. our specialist money advice service).

Compensation

Restricting access policy

(Note links will be included when above policies are integrated)

Responsibilities

Complaints covered by this Policy

Where a customer, applicant or individual affected by Bromford has expressed dissatisfaction with the service we have provided directly, or by any company we employ to provide a service on our behalf.

Complaints not covered by this policy

This policy does **not** cover;

- Consumer Credit related complaints

Or complaints where there is another process already in place to handle them. For example;

- Complaints relating to another customers behaviour (Anti-Social Behaviour)
- If there is already legal action taking place regarding the issue
- Decisions where there is another appeal process in place
- Services which are not our responsibility, e.g. Local authority decisions regarding nominations – these will be referred to the appropriate local authority

- Requests for a new service; when a customer informs us of a problem, but they are requesting the service for the first time e.g. a repair, anti-social behaviour
- An issue which happened over 6 months ago; A complaint must be made no later than 6 months after the date the event occurred, unless there are exceptional circumstances
- If a complaint relates to a legal claim or personal injury claim.

If we fail to deal with an issue through the relevant process however, then the failure to do so can be dealt with as a Complaint under this Policy. The above list is not exhaustive. On receipt of a complaint we will confirm if there is a more appropriate process for the issue and let the customer know how the matter will be managed and by which colleague.

How we manage complaints

We are committed to resolving issues quickly and efficiently for our customers and aim to do this at the first point of contact, without the need for escalation to our formal process.

We will;

- Accept complaints in any way the customer wishes, including online
- Accept complaints from a third party acting on a customer's behalf. We will need signed authority from the customer to divulge any information we hold to a third party. This includes requests from Councillors and MP's
- Offer a review process if the customer feels their complaint has not been resolved
- Offer mediation whenever it seems appropriate to reduce the time, cost and/or improve the outcome of the complaint. Mediation will be delivered by a trained colleague from an alternative Team who has not been involved in the complaint historically.

In the first instance, when we have an **unhappy customer**, our colleagues will do all they can to resolve the issue quickly. We aim to deal with these issues within 5 working days but will communicate with the customer if we can agree the resolution but will need further time to conclude matters.

The issue will be recorded to capture the insight by recording the reason the customer was unhappy, even if it wasn't a service failure, so that we can identify trends and areas for improvement.

Where a complaint is made about the conduct of our people, appropriate consideration of our People Policies will be made if and where required. We will not disclose the detailed outcome of a people policy investigation due to the confidentiality rights of our colleagues.

We have two stages of our formal complaint process:

Stage 1

We aim to deal with all formal complaints at Stage 1 because we want to put things right as soon as possible. We will keep in touch with the customer verbally unless the customer requests another type of communication. We may in some instances arrange to meet a customer at their convenience.

We will acknowledge receipt of a complaint by close of business the following working day and aim to respond to the points of the complaint within 7 working days. However, if the complaint is complex we will discuss and agree an extension of the timescale directly with the customer.

In the main, our response will be given verbally, although this can be in writing at the customer's request.

The response will include any actions we are going to take to put the matter right and clear timescales as to when the actions will be completed. We will continue to monitor all complaints to ensure actions agreed are completed.

If the customer is not satisfied with the outcome at stage 1, or the actions agreed have not been completed, they have the right to request their complaint is reviewed at stage 2. Prior to escalation we will need to understand what issues remain unresolved and what outcome the customer is looking for. Before escalating the complaint, we will review our previous response to ensure there are no outstanding and unresolved issues that can't be resolved straight away.

There may be times when escalation of the complaint may not be accepted. For example, where the only point outstanding is the amount of compensation offered or where we believe we have already responded to all the points of the complaint and escalation will not change the decision. In these instances, we will review our response at Stage 1 and confirm to the customer whether the complaint will be escalated and if not, what alternative options are available to them outside of our internal process.

Stage 2

A Senior Bromford Colleague will review the case along with a customer member of the Locality Influence Network. They may arrange to meet the customer who can bring along a friend or advocate for support.

We aim to respond within 14 days. However, if the complaint is complex we will discuss and agree timescales directly with the customer. The outcome of the review will be communicated in writing.

This is the final stage of our internal complaints process.

Designated Persons / Housing Ombudsman

Following completion of our internal process, if the customer remains unhappy the following options are available to them;

Self-referral to a designated person; “**Designated persons**” are defined as an MP, a local councillor for the district in which a customer's home is located.

Tenants and leaseholders can refer to the Housing Ombudsman; the customer may refer their complaint directly to the Ombudsman without referral to a designated person but **will need to wait 8 weeks** from the date of the final response, before the Ombudsman will accept the case for adjudication.

Other considerations

On occasion we may escalate a Stage 1 or 2 complaint and conclude our internal complaint process if we consider the dissatisfaction is now subject of another process. This will be communicated and agreed with the customer on acknowledgement of the complaint.

Restricting or changing a customer access to services. On rare occasions we may make the decision to restrict a customer's access to our services by making alternative arrangements for communication to manage the relationship more effectively. For full detail as to how and why the decision will be taken refer to our [Restricting Customer Access Policy](#).

Learning lessons from complaints

To learn from mistakes and continually improve, we review activity and trends around complaints and what action is taken to improve the service and prevent similar issues reoccurring. Key Performance Measures will be reviewed monthly and on a quarterly basis reporting, which highlights performance, service improvements and trends will be presented to the Locality and Service Delivery Forums, the Customer and Community Influence Network and the Locality Influence Network.

Additionally, Board will receive an Annual Complaints Report and all customers will receive a summary of complaint performance and themes via the Annual Customer Report.

The Head of Customer Experience is responsible for the Complaints Policy.

Legislative Requirements

By following this summary guidelines, it ensures that Bromford complies with;

- Regulator of Social Housing – Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard
- Localism Act 2011
- Social Housing Green Paper, 2018

Assurance Framework

Document Details

Owner: Head of Customer Experience
Approved By: Board of Bromford Housing Group Limited
Date of Approval: March 2019
Next Review Due: March 2020
Policy Version: