



COMPLAINTS POLICY

1. Introduction

Citizen are committed to providing an excellent service to all of our customers, we will deal with any concerns or complaints properly and we welcome complaints across the full range of our services. We also recognise that in some cases, we may not always meet our customer's expectations and need to ensure there is a robust complaints policy in place to resolve matters positively in an understanding way, promptly and in confidence.

We also recognise that an effective complaints handling system not only helps to resolve customers' problems but is an important part of continuous improvement and quality management.

2. Policy statement

We will investigate a complaint when it is reported:

- we failed to do something we should have done;
- we did something we shouldn't have done;
- we failed to provide the quality or frequency of service we have said we will.

If none of the above criteria is met then the issue is usually a request for a service and will be dealt with through our normal service delivery, and/or we will record the customer feedback to be considered in any future service reviews.

We will not normally consider complaints regarding a problem that occurred more than 12 months prior to the complaint being made.

In addition, complaints will not usually be considered when the case is already going through a court or tribunal (including disrepair cases). In these circumstances court procedures, timescales and judgements would take precedence.

Complaints are extremely important. They help us to know how we are performing and to focus on new ways of improving the services we deliver, which in turn, helps to support our aim of continually improving the services provided by us.

It is essential that we engage our customers and ensure we listen and act upon their complaints. This policy will make sure that complaints are systematically used to shape service delivery and produce demonstrable outcomes for customers.

POLICY

Version: 1

Date: August 2016

[NAME OF POLICY]

Lead Officer: Director of Customer Service

Page 1 of 5

Approved at: Board

Date of review: August 2019

UNCONTROLLED WHEN PRINTED



3. Purpose

This policy aims to ensure that;

- We adopt a positive approach to customer feedback, we see all feedback, including complaints, as an opportunity to learn and to improve our services.
- There are adequate resources and training to ensure excellence in complaint handling.
- Customers are treated fairly and consistently; our complaints procedures are aligned to our equality and diversity policy. Following the resolution of a complaint made in good faith, the organisation will not treat a complainant less favourably.
- When we have failed, we put it right; at the earliest opportunity and to a good standard. As well as ensuring we learn from this to improve service delivery where appropriate.
- We will only share customer information in accordance with our Data Protection and Information Security policy. When receiving a complaint on behalf of a customer, we will only deal with the third party upon receipt of a signed authorisation form from the complainant.

4. Scope

This policy extends to all business areas and applies to anyone who receives or requests a service from us or is affected by a decision or action taken by us.

This policy refers to compensation as a one-off discretionary payment where we are found to have failed in our service delivery, where there has been loss of facilities and/or out of pocket expenses as a result of our failure, in accordance with our compensation procedure and payment matrix. This policy excludes statutory obligations to provide compensation, and insurance claims for personal injury, and those claims with the estimated value above our policy excess.

Discretionary compensation claims are not a substitute for a claim on a home or vehicle insurance. We do not provide home contents insurance to any customers, and it is the customers' responsibility that a suitable policy is purchased to cover their belongings. Where an offer of discretionary compensation is made, there will be no appeal process.

4.1 Advocates

We recognise that some people who wish to complain may need support in doing so. We accept complaints made by advocates on behalf of a complainant and will take steps in line with our Group Data Protection and Information Security Policy to make sure that the complainant is in agreement.

A completed and signed advocacy form would normally be required to evidence a complainant's authorisation. Where for reasons of incapacity, it is not possible for the complainant to authorise an

POLICY

Version: 1

Date: August 2016

[NAME OF POLICY]

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Page 2 of 5

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advocate in this way, we will assess the legitimacy of the advocate. For example, they may be a long term carer for the individual or they may be able to provide evidence such as a Mental Capacity Act Assessment or letter from a partner agency.

5. How can customers complain

The Customer Service Centre is our main point of customer contact; however complainants can tell us about their complaint in the most convenient way to them. This may include in person, in writing (letter, email, website) and by telephone. Customers will be made aware of how to make a complaint, through a variety of different methods. Information about complaints will be on our websites and in our local offices. Alternatively, customers can ask a member of staff how to make a complaint.

If a customer makes a complaint we will;

- carry out an initial assessment to determine the appropriate action to be taken in accordance with our complaints procedure. The customer will be advised of the process and anticipated timescales for a response, for example; we will aim to respond to all complaints within 3 working days however where further investigation is required this may take longer and the customer will be kept informed. Where a delay in an investigation is anticipated the customer will be advised of the reasons and estimated revised timescale.
- Once a complaint is closed we will request sufficient evidence before re-opening.
- Where customers have exhausted our complaints procedure, we will advise them of their rights in accordance with the Localism Act 2011, which is to refer their complaint to a local councillor or MP for review. The councillor or MP may then determine following this review to contact us and/or direct the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.

6. Non – statutory (discretionary) compensation

Where a complaint is justified and upheld, we will clearly set out any action we propose to resolve the complaint. This may include an apology and possibly a change in our processes or procedures. In some cases where there is evidence that the complainant has suffered financial loss or has been put to unreasonable inconvenience or delay resulting directly from the subject of a complaint, a discretionary compensation payment may be recommended at any stage in the complaints process.

7. Unreasonable and unreasonably persistent complaints

In a minority of cases customers pursue their complaints in a way that is unreasonable. They may behave unacceptably or be unreasonably persistent in their contacts and submission of information. This can impede investigating their complaint (or complaints by others) and can have significant resource issues for us. These actions can occur either while their complaint is being investigated, or once we have finished the complaint investigation.

POLICY

Version: 1

Date: August 2016

[NAME OF POLICY]

Lead Officer: Director of Customer Service

Page 3 of 5

Approved at: Board

Date of review: August 2019

UNCONTROLLED WHEN PRINTED



Unreasonable and unreasonably persistent complainants because of the nature or frequency of their contacts with us can hinder our consideration of their or other people's, complaints and in some exceptional circumstances and if the situation is appropriate we may be unable to progress the complaint.

Where we consider that a complaint is unreasonable or unreasonably persistent we will deal with that complaint in line with our Unacceptable behaviour protocol.

8. Roles, responsibility and authority

It is the responsibility of the board to ensure that this policy is successfully implemented, and the procedures followed.

The Director of Customer Service is responsible for the effective implementation of this policy.

Individual staff are responsible for ensuring that all staff understand the importance of this policy and the related procedures and comply with them.

9. Policy management system requirements

We will provide relevant training, capacity building and support across all levels of the organisation. The level of training received will be considered in proportion to individual roles within the organisation, clients worked with and the risk they are potentially dealing with.

10. Implementation, monitoring and review

The Customer Service Centre (CSC) will be the main point of customer contact and will ensure the effective collection of customer feedback and allocation to the appropriate manager.

The Customer Feedback Team (CFT) will support the CSC in ensuring complaints are allocated to the appropriate manager. The CFT will monitor compliance, performance and trends and report these to managers on a regular basis and/or immediately to a Director where a serious issue has been identified.

Complaints performance will be reported to each directorate and management team weekly. Complaints performance will be reported to our customers in annual reports.

This policy will be reviewed every three years, unless legislation or sector developments require otherwise, ensuring that it continues to meet its objectives and takes account of good practice developments.

We will consult with our customers on any review of this policy.

POLICY

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Lead Officer: Director of Customer Service

Page 4 of 5

Approved at: Board

Date of review: August 2019

UNCONTROLLED WHEN PRINTED



11. Equality analysis

An equality analysis has been carried out and shows that this policy has or has the potential to have a positive impact on all individuals regardless of their protected characteristic as per the Equality Act 2010.

12. VERSION CONTROL

VERSION	DATE	AMENDMENTS	APPROVED AT/BY	REVIEW
V 1.0	Sept 2019	Policy updated to Citizen brand format	n/a	
[VERSION]	[DATE]	[AMEND MADE]	[NAME]	[DATE]
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POLICY

Version: 1

Date: August 2016

[NAME OF POLICY]

Lead Officer: Director of Customer Service

Page 5 of 5

Approved at: Board

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