



COMPLAINTS POLICY

1. Introduction

Citizen is committed to providing excellent, responsive and accessible services for our customers and we welcome feedback on all our services.

We recognise that in some cases, we may not always meet our customers' expectations and we need to ensure there is a robust complaints policy and process in place to resolve complaints promptly, fairly and in confidence.

Complaints help us to know how we are performing by listening to our customers. An effective complaint process not only helps to resolve customers problems but is an important part of continuous improvement and quality management.

This policy is aligned to the relevant regulatory requirements of Housing Act 1996 (schedule 2), General Data Protection Act 2018, Equality Act 2010, Housing Ombudsman Scheme, and Tenant and Involvement Empowerment Standards.

This policy and our procedures set out how we will respond to complaints and how we will make sure that complaints are used to shape service delivery and produce demonstrable outcomes for customers.

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 in place to ensure excellence in complaint handling.
- Customers are treated fairly and consistently.
- Following the resolution of a complaint made in good faith we will not treat a complainant less favourably.
- When we have failed, we put it right; at the earliest opportunity and to the correct standard, as defined by our policies and procedures.

2. Scope

This policy extends to all Citizen services and applies to:

- anyone who asks for or receives services from us or;
- is affected by a decision or action taken by us.

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This policy also covers one-off discretionary payments which may be paid where:

- we are found to have failed in our service delivery and where there has been loss of facilities and/or out of pocket expenses because of this failure.
- claims have an estimated value below the policy excess of our insurers.

This policy does not cover statutory obligations to provide compensation, and insurance claims for personal injury.

3. Policy Detail

3.1 Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is defined as: an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.

If none of the above is applicable, then it is usually a request for a service and will be dealt with through our normal service delivery or customer feedback processes. We will record the customer feedback to be considered in any future service reviews.

We will not normally consider complaints when the problem happened more than 12 months before the complaint being made.

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.

3.2 Making a complaint

Our Customer Service Centre is our main point of customer contact; however, people can tell us about their complaint in the most convenient way to them. This includes in person, in writing (letter, email, My Account) and by telephone. Customers will be made aware of how to make a complaint, through a variety of different methods including on our website and in Citizen offices.

We aim to resolve all complaints at the point of contact. Where a complaint cannot be resolved at the point of contact the complaint will be investigated by the relevant service area management team. Where a complaint requires a detailed investigation, this will be passed to the Feedback and Resolution Team to co-ordinate.

When a customer makes a complaint, we will;

- Carry out an initial assessment to determine the actions to be taken as set out in our complaint's procedure.
- Contact the customer to;

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- Advise what will happen next and the anticipated timescales for a response. Usually we will acknowledge all complaints within 24 hours.
- Where further investigation is required advise them of the updated timescales and continue to keep them updated.
- When the investigation is complete;
 - if the complaint is up held we will clearly set out any action we propose to resolve the complaint. This may include an apology and a change in our processes or procedures or a discretionary compensation payment.
 - Identify the root cause of the complaint.
 - If the complaint is not upheld, we clearly set out the reasons why.

If a customer is dissatisfied with the outcome of our investigation, details of the dissatisfaction will be evaluated and escalated for review. We reserve the right to not further investigate where there is no new evidence.

At the end of our complaints process if a customer remains dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint they will be advised that they can take further action 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.

3.4 Third party reporting

We recognise that some people who wish to complain may need support to do so. We accept complaints made by a third party on behalf of a complainant only if the complainant is in agreement as set out in our Data Protection and Information Security Policy.

When we receive a complaint on behalf of a customer, we will only deal with the third party where we have a signed authorisation form from the complainant. Where for reasons of incapacity, it is not possible for the complainant to authorise a third party to act on their behalf in this way, we will require alternative documentation for example, a Mental Capacity Act Assessment or a letter from a partner agency.

3.5 Non-Statutory (Discretionary) Compensation

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 agreed. However, our primary focus will be in putting right the service failure. We will consider each case based on its individual circumstances.

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Where an offer of discretionary compensation is refused, or the customer does not agree with the amount of compensation offered we will only reconsider the decision if new evidence is provided.

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.

3.6 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. These actions can occur either while their complaint is being investigated, or once we have finished the complaint investigation.

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

Where we consider that a complainant is unreasonable or unreasonably persistent, we will deal with that complainant in line with our unacceptable behaviour protocol.

4. Roles, Responsibility and Governance

It is the responsibility of the Board to ensure that this policy is successfully implemented, and the procedures followed. The Senior Leadership Team and Heads of Service are responsible for ensuring that all staff understand the importance of this policy and the related procedures and comply with them.

Managers are responsible for ensuring that their reports have undertaken the appropriate policy eLearning by utilising reports produced by Learning and Development

Any changes to this policy must be made in line with the requirements set out in Citizens Standing Orders and our Policy framework.

5. Monitoring and review

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years, unless legislation, service delivery or sector developments require otherwise ensuring the policy continues to meet its objectives and take account of good practice developments.

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Legal advice will be taken to ensure compliance with legal, regulatory and contractual responsibilities.

Where appropriate service delivery reports in respect of this policy as incorporated into our quarterly reporting suite.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

This policy has been subject to an Equality Analysis. Staff working across Citizen have considered the impact of this policy on different groups and communities that we work with. In framing this policy, our staff are committed to not discriminate adversely against any group and will respect the diversity of the communities we are working within.

The EIA and any actions identified as needing to be implemented are in Appendix 1

7. VERSION CONTROL

VERSION	DATE	AMENDMENTS	APPROVED AT/BY	REVIEW
V 1.0	30.09.2019	Policy updated to reflect Citizen and reviewed for compliance.	Board 30.09.19	Sept 2022
V 2.0	28.10.20	Definition of complaint updated to reflect requirement set by housing ombudsman	Board 09.11.20	Sept 2022
V 3.0	23.03.2021	Change in template	Policy Owner	Sept 2022

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