

# **South Yorkshire Housing Association**

## **Complaints Policy**

We aim to get it right – first time and every time. However, if things go wrong, we want our customers to tell us if they are unhappy with the service they've received. We want to create a positive complaint-handling culture that listens to our customers, takes action to put things right and learns from mistakes. We will use information about complaints to identify issues and drive improvement in our services.

We aim to:

- Make it simple for our customers and others to make a complaint
- Deal with complaints fairly and consistently
- Put things right quickly in a satisfactory way
- Use the learning from complaints to improve what we do
- Respond to complaints and act in a way that builds trust and creates positive relationships.

Our approach to handling complaints

1. We use the Housing Ombudsman's definition of a complaint, 'an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents'
2. We will recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint. When we are asked to provide a service or fix a problem, we will treat these as service requests. We will use our housing management system to record service requests and use this as a source of intelligence to better understand the services requested by customers and how we deliver them.
3. We will handle a customer complaint from anyone who receives or is directly affected by our services. We will also handle a complaint from an advocate or representative of a person who receives, or is directly affected by, our services – but only if the person has given permission for the advocate to act on their behalf. An advocate or representative acting on behalf of a customer will be given the opportunity to accompany or represent a customer at any meetings.
4. Complaints can be shared with us in a variety of ways and with any employee of South Yorkshire Housing Association. Customers can make a complaint in the following ways, including in person, by email, on our website, by telephone, or by writing to us.

5. When a customer expresses dissatisfaction with a service they have received or are receiving we will ask if they want to make a complaint. If a complaint is made we will continue working to resolve ongoing service requests.
6. Our complaints policy will be available on our website. We will also provide information about the Housing Ombudsman and organisations such as Citizens Advice and Shelter, as they may be able to help to resolve any disputes.
7. A complaint must be made within 12 months of the issue or the customer becoming aware of a problem. If we believe that there is a good reason why a person making a complaint couldn't let us know about their complaint in this timescale, we will respond to the complaint.
8. If the issue is straightforward and easily resolved, our Customer Advisors will aim to resolve it by the end of the next working day. We will record these issues in our housing management system, CX, as a 'Put it Right' rather than a complaint and use this learning to improve our services.
9. If we are unable to put it right, or if the person wants their issue to be dealt with as a complaint, we will give the complaint an owner. The 'complaint owner' will take responsibility for responding to the complaint.
10. When a complaint is given an owner, the person making the complaint will receive an acknowledgment within 5 working days that we are handling their complaint. The acknowledgement will set out our understanding of the complaint and the outcome they are seeking. If there are any aspects of the complaint we are not responsible for, or that need clarity we will let the person making the complaint know.
11. We aim to investigate and respond within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged. If there are outstanding actions to be completed, we will not delay our response to the complaint. If we are unable to meet the timescales for response, we will contact the person making the complaint, let them know the reason why more time is needed and when they can expect a response. We will also agree on how we will keep them up to date on the progress of their complaint. If an extension is longer than 10 working days we will share the Ombudman's contact details.
12. During our investigation if the person making the complaint raises additional issue/s, we will consider including them in the complaint if they are related and doing so would not delay our response. If the issue is unrelated or would delay our response we will record a new complaint.

13. Our response will:

- address all points made in a complaint
- give clear reasons for the decisions we have made
- describe any steps taken to put it right
- set out all outstanding actions, including timescales and how we will share the progress of these
- share information on how to ask for the complaint to be reviewed

14. If the person making a complaint confirms that they are satisfied with the response, we will close the complaint.

15. If the person making a complaint is not satisfied with our response they can request that their complaint be reviewed. The person making a complaint needs to let us know within 10 working days of receiving the response if they would like their complaint to be reviewed. After 10 working days we will close the complaint. Complaints asked to be reviewed after 10 working days will be rejected unless there is a reason why the person making the complaint could not reasonably have made contact sooner. We will deal with requests on a case-by-case basis.

16. Complaints are reviewed by a role that is at Lead level or more senior than the complaint owner, and where possible, from a different department. There may be times when this is not possible, such as when technical maintenance knowledge is required. An employee from our Customer Experience Team and a Director will also be involved in the review and sign it off.

17. We will contact the person who made the complaint to find out why they are unhappy with our response and acknowledge all requests to review complaint responses within 5 working days.

18. We aim to investigate and provide a response to a complaint review within 20 working days of acknowledging a review. If there are outstanding actions to be completed, we will not delay our response to the review. If we are unable to meet this timescale, we will contact the person making a complaint to let them know the reason why more time is needed and when they can expect a response. We will also agree on how we will keep them up to date on the progress of their complaint. If an extension is longer than 20 working days we will share the Ombudman's contact details.

19. Our response to a review will:

- address all points made in a complaint
- give clear reasons for the decisions we have made
- describe any steps taken to put it right
- set out all outstanding actions, including timescales and how we will share progress of these

20. The complaint review is the final step of our process and concludes South Yorkshire Housing Association's complaints process.

21. If a person making a complaint has the right to take their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman or Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, we will share information about how to escalate a complaint to them as part of the complaints review.

22. Within 10 working days of a complaint being closed, or South Yorkshire Housing Association's complaints process being completed, we will contact the person making a complaint to carry out a complaint handling satisfaction survey.

23. We are committed to recognising and valuing diversity, achieving equality, and making sure that no one is disadvantaged when accessing our services. In our annual review of the complaints process, we will review the process from an equality perspective.

24. We will use our discretion to make fair, appropriate, and reasonable adjustments to our approach where:

- individual circumstances justify handling a complaint differently to this policy
- it improves accessibility for the person making a complaint
- it maintains or achieves a positive relationship with the person making a complaint, or it maximises the opportunity for resolution.

25. We will take a fair approach and consider each complaint on its own merits. We will accept all complaints and escalations through our complaints process unless there is a valid reason not to do so. Examples of complaints we won't deal with through our complaints policy include:

- A general enquiry or service request – see point 2
- Anti-social behaviour or issues with other residents. These are dealt with under our Anti-Social Behaviour Policy. (We will consider complaints about the handling of an ASB Case)
- Housing applications, allocations or banding decisions which are part of a Local Authority Choice Based Lettings system

- Decisions taken by other organisations (e.g. a Local Council or a utility company) which South Yorkshire Housing Association has no control over
- Instances where the complaint has already gone through our complaints procedure (signposting will be provided to external bodies where appropriate)
- Complaints that are being pursued in an unreasonable manner – see point 30
- Complaints classed as out of time – see point 7
- Where the complaint made is the same matter that is subject to legal proceedings
- Anonymous complaints.

26. If we do not accept a complaint, or refuse to review a complaint, we will explain the reasons why and let the person who made the complaint know if they have the right to take the decision to the Housing Ombudsman.

27. Our Customer Experience Team will oversee our approach to handling complaints and share learning from complaints with key areas of the business so that service improvements can be identified. We will share the changes we've made to our services or ways of working, on our website.

28. Compensation will not be an automatic outcome from the complaints procedure, but we consider it where appropriate. This will be done fairly, consistently, and proportionately.

29. We will consider any quantifiable losses, time, trouble, distress, and inconvenience. Any compensation will return the person making a complaint to the position that they would have been, had the issue not occurred.

30. We expect anyone who is making a complaint to act reasonably. If you act unreasonably, we may refuse to deal with your complaint, which the executive director within the department linked to the complaint will decide. When making this decision, we will consider both the nature of the unreasonable behaviour and the complaint. Our definition of what is considered unreasonable behaviour is available [here](#) and will be shared with customers when requested or needed.

31. We will work with our customers to scrutinise how we are handling complaints and share the following on our website:

- Our Annual Complaint Performance and Service Improvement Report
- Our Self-Assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code
- Information about the Housing Ombudsman Service

32. We will regularly report our performance on complaint handling to South Yorkshire Housing Association's Board of Management and Executive Team.
33. We are committed to ensuring how we handle complaints reflects the Housing Ombudsman's guidance for good practice. We recognise that the person making a complaint may not receive housing services and may wish to explore any dissatisfaction with an alternative Ombudsman. We will share information about the Housing and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman services on our website, and at appropriate points in the complaints process.
34. Complaints relating to care & support services delivered by SYHA and commissioned by the NHS that SYHA's complaint process cannot resolve should be referred to the appropriate Clinical Commissioning Group by the complaint reviewer.
35. We will keep all records about complaint handling in Cx, our Housing Management system.
36. Any personal data handled when dealing with complaints will be treated in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

# How a complaint is handled

