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Supporting BME Communities

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**COMPLAINTS AND FEEDBACK POLICY**

## COMPLAINTS AND FEEDBACK POLICY

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## **1.0 Purpose & Scope**

- 1.1 We want to ensure that at all times Unity is delivering the best possible services. If things do go wrong, we aim to listen to feedback from our customers. The purpose of this policy statement is to set out for the benefit of our customers our approach to customer feedback.
- 1.2 This policy provides guidance on:
- What we mean by feedback
  - Unity's definition of a complaint
  - Our service standards
  - Who can complain
  - How we will use customer feedback to continually improve and tailor our services to meet the needs of individuals and the community.
- 1.3 Where necessary we will establish detailed guidance or procedures to ensure the practical implementation of this policy.

## **2.0 Policy objectives**

- 2.1 Our aim is to maximise opportunities to gain feedback from customers. We will do this by collecting feedback from customers in relation to general suggestions for service improvements, compliments and complaints.
- 2.2 Obtaining feedback from customers and handling complaints effectively will help us achieve value for money and benefit Unity by:
- Improving customer confidence and satisfaction
  - Reducing the potential need to pay compensation to customers
  - Limiting the potential for legal action against the association
  - Helping to target resources
- 2.2 We aim to correctly establish whether a customer is making an enquiry, requesting a service or providing feedback. Where feedback takes the form of a complaint we have adopted the following definition:

*A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, which requires a response about a failure to provide a service to a customer that we or anybody acting on our behalf is obliged to provide.*

### **3.0 Service standards**

3.1 We will deliver high quality services that reflect the cultural diversity of our customers. We will:

- Provide customers with information about our Complaints and Feedback Policy in a variety ways such as leaflets, on our website or in the tenants newsletter
- Attempt to deal with a complaint at the first point of contact
- Where a customer wishes to make a formal complaint acknowledge the complaint within 2 working days
- Investigate all complaints fairly
- Provide a clear, easy to understand and jargon free response to a complaint within 10 days
- Keep customers informed where it is not possible to provide a full response within 10 days
- Advise customers about the right to request that a complaint be considered at the next stage of the complaints procedure

3.2 In order to provide the best possible service to our customers we will continue to develop service standards that are challenging and lead to continuous improvement.

### **4.0 Legislation and regulation**

4.1 When we operate this policy we will have regard to all relevant legislation, regulation and good practice. In particular we will have regard to the following regulatory requirements which have been put in place by The Social Housing Regulator:

- The Economic Standard – this policy contributes towards achieving the Value for Money Standard by:
  - Ensuring that we make the best use of our resources by learning from complaints and minimising mistakes.
- The Consumer Standards – this policy contributes towards achieving the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard by:
  - Adopting an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible and
  - Ensuring that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly.

- 4.2 The Localism Act 2011 creates the right for a tenant to request that their complaint is considered by a 'designated person' once our internal procedure is complete.

We will advise complainants about the availability of the designated person and the option to approach the Housing Ombudsman after 8 weeks of the final stage of our complaints process.

- 4.3 This Complaints and Feedback Policy statement satisfies the association's regulatory and statutory obligations.

## **5.0 Our approach to feedback and complaints**

### **5.1 General principles**

Unity positively welcomes and values compliments, suggestions and complaints. We want to provide services that are right first time but where we make mistakes we will try to resolve a complaint at the first point of contact with the customer. We consider customers to be individuals, organisation or groups who are directly or indirectly affected by a service that we or anybody acting on our behalf is obliged to provide.

### **5.2 An easily accessible feedback and complaints service**

We will widely promote our feedback and complaints service and ensure that it is accessible to all customers. We will provide support to customers to access the service including the use of translated materials. We will accept feedback and complaints from third parties on behalf of a customer.

**Anonymous complaints** – where a complainant wishes to remain anonymous, Unity will thoroughly investigate, but results may not be published, equally Unity reserves the right not to investigate the complaint where it would be impractical to do so.

### **5.3 When does this policy not apply?**

For the purposes of this policy Unity does not define any of the following as a complaint:

**Petitions** – Unity will not deal with petitions as a complaint through the complaints process. We will treat a petition as a general enquiry and respond where the group clearly identify a spokesperson.

**Legal proceedings** - Where a complaint relates to the subject matter of legal proceedings that have either been started by the complainant or by Unity, the complaint ceases to be part of our complaints process. We will advise the complainant of this in writing and confirm that no further action will be taken under the complaints policy.

**Insurance claims** – If a complaint relates to the settlement of a claim for compensation which is being dealt with by our insurers, the complaint will not be dealt with as part of our complaints process and the complainant advised. A service failure that may have resulted in an insurance claim will still be covered by our complaints policy.

**Third parties** – This policy will not apply to complaints about persons or bodies over which Unity has no control.

**Starter tenancy terminations** – This policy does not apply to complaints arising from the ending of a tenancy as part of the starter tenancy procedures. In these circumstances the tenant has the right to request a review of a decision to end the tenancy.

**Unreasonable complainant behaviour** – If a complainant behaves unreasonably the complaint ceases to be part of our complaints process. We will advise the complainant of this in writing and confirm that no further action will be taken under the complaints policy.

Unity will treat a complainant as unreasonable if:

- The complaint is pursued in an unreasonable or inappropriate manner
- The complainant is abusive, insulting or aggressive towards staff
- The complainant has previously made the same complaint
- The complaint is without merit or substance
- The complainant makes excessive numbers of complaints

If we consider a complainant to be unreasonable we may close an existing complaint down or not allow the complainant to take his or her complaint to the next stage. We may also limit the means by which the customer will be permitted to communicate with us.

#### **5.4 An effective complaints handling service**

Where it is not possible to resolve a complaint with a customer at the first point of contact, complaints will be dealt with through a 3 stage formal

procedure. We will publish the timescales within which complaints will be dealt with. Generally, there are 3 formal stages of the complaints procedure which are:

- Informal stage - complaint reviewed by an officer (within 10 working days)
- Stage 1 – complaint reviewed by a manager/officer (within 10 working days)
- Stage 2 – complaint reviewed by a manager/senior manager (within 10 working days)
- Stage 3 – complaint reviewed by a group normally composed of a board member, involved tenant and member of our senior management team (we will arrange for a panel to meet within 28 days of your request)

We will ensure that in dealing with complaints a thorough investigation is be carried out and the results recorded. Where it will assist the investigation, we will establish personal contact with the customer.

Where a complainant is not satisfied with the response they can request that the complaint is escalated to the next stage. Escalation of a complaint is not automatic and subject to consideration of the reasons put forward by the customer for requesting a further review. Where the customer exhausts the complaints process we will provide information about how to contact the Ombudsman.

Where it is considered appropriate, Unity may engage the services of a third party to investigate a formal complaint. Unity may also employ alternative dispute resolution arrangements such as mediation where this would assist in resolving a complaint.

## **5.5 Learning from complaints and feedback**

Unity will ensure that as an organisation we learn from complaints, feedback and compliments to ensure continuous improvement across the business. Lessons learned from feedback and complaints will be reflected in service improvement plans and used to inform staff training.

We want to provide an effective complaints service and we will follow up completed complaints to assess how satisfied the customer is with the way the complaint has been handled.

## **6.0 Consultation and customer involvement**

- 6.1 Unity recognises the importance of working in partnership with our customers to develop and continuously improve our services. We will consult with customers on the content and operation of this policy.
- 6.2 We will also involve our customers in reviewing and learning from complaints and use this information to improve services. We will provide information to customers on how we are performing and levels of customer satisfaction with the service.

## **7.0 Responsibility**

- 7.1 Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation rests with the Complaints Manager. The Complaints Manager will ensure that staff receive the appropriate training and support to effectively achieve the objectives of this policy.
- 7.2 From time to time it may be necessary to develop specific Action Plans and strategies to support the full implementation of this policy. Responsibility for the delivery of these action plans and strategies will be allocated to the most appropriate member of staff.

## **8.0 Monitoring and performance**

- 8.1 Monitoring of the implementation of this policy will be the responsibility of the Operations Committee, who will set performance targets for the operation of the complaints service. Progress against these targets will be reported to the Operations Committee, SMT and Tenant Scrutiny Panel who will review trends and messages coming from complaints and ensure that learning and service improvements flow from this. Unity will benchmark our performance against comparable housing associations and continue to learn from best practice in this area.
- 8.2 There are no specific Business Plan objectives relating to this policy. However, this policy supports us to achieve our corporate objective to *Provide high quality housing services* by listening to feedback from our customers.

## **9.0 Equality and Diversity**

- 9.1 We will have regard to our Equality and Diversity Policy in the delivery of our complaints service and will take into account the language, translation and other personal needs of our customers. We will use the information that we collect about the profile of our customers to ensure that there are no barriers to the service and to tailor how responses to complaints are communicated to customers.



9.2 An Equality Impact Assessment was carried out in respect of this policy in September 2015. The EIA concluded that this policy has an overall positive equality impact by ensuring that all customers are able to access the complaints service and feedback obtained from customers can contribute towards targeting services and resources more effectively.

## **10.0 Associated documents**

- Compensation Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Customer Service Standards

## **11.0 Policy review summary**

Policy title	Complaints and Feedback
Policy group	Customer Services
Regulatory requirements	Economic Standards – Value for Money Consumer Standards –Tenant Involvement and Empowerment
Date created	August 2012; Reviewed August 2018
Person responsible	Complaints Manager
Version	1.4
Customer consultation arrangements	Policy went to the Tenant Scrutiny Panel on the 13 <sup>th</sup> January 2016
Authorised by	Operations Committee August 2018
Review period	3 years unless required sooner
Date of next review	August 2021