

**CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS,
COMPENSATION, COMPLIMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS
POLICY**

1. INTRODUCTION

At Merlin Housing Society, we are committed to providing a first class service and we believe that customer satisfaction is a key measure of service quality. Excellent customer service is critical to our success and will improve our reputation with customers and partners.

As a learning organisation, we treat complaints seriously. Where our services fall short of the standards and customer expectation, we will investigate, put it right and learn from the experience, to continually improve our services.

This policy helps to frame the complaints process, expectations and is integral to our vision, business values and our commitment to continually improve our services.

2. PURPOSE

This policy and the supporting procedure enable us to:-

- Accept complaints in many formats; email, fax, post and telephone
- Respond to complaints fairly and objectively
- Reflects our commitment to providing a good service
- Promotes and supports the organisation as an open and accessible organisation that listens
- Empower staff through training to view complaints in a positive way
- Gather intelligence as feedback to make improvements
- Take prompt action
- Ensure compensation payments are consistent and fair

3. DEFINITIONS

A **complaint** is an expression of dissatisfaction about the standard of service, actions or lack of action, by the organisation or staff, affecting an individual customer or group of customers. This is covered under this policy.

A **request for action** is not classified as a complaint and will be perceived as a request for us to take action under the relevant Service Standard and will be dealt with by the Housing Officer. However, if we have not responded to a request for action, this would fall under this Policy.

An **enquiry** is when a customer contacts us to ask us something about their home or tenancy, for example, a customer might ask about the balance on

their rent account, which would be dealt with by our Customer Service team. If however, we have not responded to your enquiry, this would fall under this policy.

A **compliment** is defined as a positive comment or observation about a particular service, process or member of staff and will be covered under this policy.

A **suggestion** is defined as an idea or proposal regarding an improvement of a service that is put forward for consideration. This is covered under this policy.

4. HANDLING COMPLAINTS

We will employ a three step process to seek to resolve the complaint:

Stage	Acknowledge in writing	Responsibility	Respond in writing	Responsibility
1	3 working days	Complaints Co-ordinator	10 working days	Service Manager
2	3 working days	Complaints Co-ordinator	10 working days	Head of Service

Stage	Acknowledge in writing	Responsibility	Notification of hearing date via letter	Hearing will take place within	Outcome of Complaints Panel in writing
3	3 working days	Complaints Co-ordinator	10 working days – notification of hearing date	20 working days from request for Stage 3 complaint	5 working days after the hearing

In some cases, it is not always possible to resolve a complaint within the timescales. In these situations, a letter will be sent to the customer explaining the reasoning and when they can expect the matter to be resolved.

Offer of mediation is available, if required, at Stage 2. After stage 1 or 2, if you are not happy with our response, you have 5 working days to contact us, so we can re-evaluate the situation.

The customer has the right to contact Merlin Housing Society within 5 working days of the response being sent. If they are not happy with the outcome, the Complaint will then be progressed to the next stage. Otherwise the complaint will be classed as closed and will only be re-opened in exceptional circumstances.

After the stage 3 Complaints Panel, if the complaint is not resolved, to the satisfaction of the customer, they may refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman.

5. EXCEPTIONS

We will do everything that we can to ensure that our customers are satisfied with our services. However, there may be situations which are beyond our control.

In these situations, we will respond as far we are able. Examples may include:

- The general law (unless wrongly applied) and matters which are, or could reasonably be expected to be, the subject of court or tribunal proceedings, or which are in the hands of our insurers
- Persons or bodies over which we have no control
- Regulatory requirements
- Where customers are regarded as vexatious or persistent (refer to complaints procedure)
- Appeals against rejected allocations and eviction decisions, this will be dealt with under the Housing and Support appeals process

6. COMPENSATION

When we accept, through the complaints process, that we have not achieved the standards of service that a customer would normally expect, we will offer appropriate redress, for example, in the form of an apology, provision of a particular service, recompense for distress. For example, inconvenience, worry or service failure following investigation.

Where we receive a complaint and the complaint is upheld following investigation, the appropriate Director (or following a successful appeal, the Complaints Panel) will determine whether the customer should receive an ex-gratia payment and the amount, based on the loss suffered. Directors may authorise payments of up to £500. Amounts above this will be referred to the Chief Executive for authorisation.

Offers of financial compensation must be justified and recorded in order for compensation payments to be made.

7. COMPLIMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

Complimentary Feedback

When we receive a compliment we will thank the customer and record it on the compliments register. It will be passed to the appropriate employee or the relevant service department. Where appropriate we will contact the customer to let them know of any lessons we have learned. The Complaints Co-ordinator will produce a quarterly report of compliments received and forward this to service managers.

Suggestions

Where we receive a suggestion from a customer we will thank them, record and where appropriate let them know the lessons we have learned. In cases where customer feedback identifies a policy or procedural problem (i.e. not service delivery), we will consider the situation and, where appropriate, amend practice accordingly.

8. VALUE FOR MONEY

We will endeavour to ensure our services are delivered economically, effectively, and efficiently wherever possible.

9. CONSULTATION

Residents are at the heart of everything that we do and have been involved in the review of this document through a focus group.

The policy will be reviewed on a two yearly basis, which will include consultation with residents, staff and the board through focus groups.

10. CUSTOMER CARE & ACCESS

Our complaints and feedback policy and procedure are easy to access and well publicised.

We aim to provide high standards of complaint handling through training and empowering all staff.

We will endeavour to use the feedback received, to learn and make changes to improve our services.

11. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

We will ensure that this policy is applied fairly and consistently to all our customers. We will not directly or indirectly discriminate against any person or group of people in accordance with our equality and diversity policy.

Monitoring information is requested so that analysis of complaints against relevant customer segments can be recorded and used to further improve our services. The information is in no way used to influence the complaint but solely used to improve our services to the communities that we serve.

We will act sensitively towards the diverse needs of individuals and communities and we will take positive action to reduce discrimination and harassment.

If a customer is unable to read the document, we are happy to read it to them.

This policy is available on request in other formats (for example in an alternative language, in Braille, on tape, in large type).

12. IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING & REVIEW

The relevant Head of Service will monitor the effectiveness of this policy, taking into account customer and staff feedback. The policy will be reviewed to build upon its performance.

If you have any concerns on the effectiveness of this policy, please report this to the Projects and Performance Team.

We will endeavour to collect information regarding the level of customer satisfaction with the Complaints process and we recognise the importance of this activity. However, we are realistic in terms of the response rate and will gather information on the volume of opportunities provided and the volume of responses received, based on research the response rates are a common problem in the sector.

Complaints will be reviewed on an annual basis and a formal review will take place every two years which may result in changes to the policy.

Please refer to the Complaints and Feedback Procedure when using this document.

This policy is linked to Merlin Housing Society's Business Plan.

Corporate Reference: <insert>

Cross references: <insert>

This version: 14th July 2009

Next review: 14th July 2010

Lead Officer: Business Analyst

**Approved by – The Board
Residents Forum**

**Date – 11.06.09
Date – 14.07.09**