

Customer Complaints and Feedback Policy

CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS AND FEEDBACK POLICY **Plus Dane Housing**

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Customer Facing Policy Information only

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1 Policy Statement

Plus Dane Housing is committed to providing high quality, value for money services to our customers and recognises that customer feedback is an essential element for the improvement and development of services.

This policy sets out the framework and our approach for dealing with customer feedback and resolving customer complaints. It also emphasises the importance of prompt resolution wherever possible and sets out the timeframes for responding to complaints and the reporting framework for complaints information.

This policy applies to all Plus Dane Housing staff and its representatives and anyone using Plus Dane Housing's services or their representative.

The policy complies with the Housing Ombudsman Service dispute resolution principles and with the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA) Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard.

2 Policy Aims

The aim of this policy is to provide a clear, accessible and structured process for our customers if they are dissatisfied with a service they have received. Emphasis will be on finding appropriate and satisfactory resolutions to complaints. We will ensure our staff are equipped to deal with complaints efficiently and effectively, and lessons learned from both positive and negative feedback will be used directly to improve the services that we deliver.

The policy seeks to ensure that:

- Customers are listened to and treated with courtesy and empathy
- Complaints are acknowledged, recorded and monitored
- Complaints are investigated promptly, thoroughly, honestly and openly
- Customers are informed of the outcome of the investigation
- Action to rectify the cause of the complaint is identified, implemented and evaluated
- Apologies are given as appropriate
- Complaints are handled confidentially and in accordance with data protection principles
- Learning from feedback informs service development and improvement
- All staff handling complaints receive appropriate support and training
- Plus Dane is compliant with Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard.

3 Links to corporate plan

This policy links to the objectives of the Plus Dane Housing Corporate Plan by supporting:

The Working Principles

- Be clear about what we do
- Get it right first time
- Communicate well
- Take responsibility

Customers, Products & Services

- Where success is measured through customer satisfaction and positioning the quality of our offer.

4 Definitions

We actively encourage feedback which can come in different forms including compliments, enquiries, comments and complaints and use all customer feedback as an opportunity to improve our service to all customers.

4.1 Compliments

We value positive feedback in order to understand what we are getting right. We will capture and record all positive feedback at the first point of contact. We will ensure that all compliments are passed to the relevant service or employee and we will use this feedback to inform future services and reinforce positive behaviour across the group.

4.2 Concerns, enquiries and service failures

We will always try to resolve any problems with a service as soon as we hear about it. A concern, enquiry or service failure is a problem that can be resolved or responded to straight away, usually by the end of the next working day. These enquiries are not reported as complaints and fall outside of the complaint process and can be dealt with by any member of Plus Dane Housing.

4.3 Comments and suggestions

Often people feel more comfortable about suggesting improvements rather than complaining formally. Anyone receiving services may make a suggestion. We may not always be able to act on every suggestion, but we will act on comments and suggestions wherever possible.

4.4 Complaints

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction requiring a response, communicated verbally, electronically or in writing. Anyone affected by the way Plus Dane Housing provides services can make a complaint.

Our policy covers complaints about:

- The standard of service we provide
- The behaviour of our staff
- Any action or lack of action by us affecting an individual or a group

These types of complaints can take longer to investigate and could include:

- Failure to keep an appointment or to keep the customer informed
- Unexplained or unreasonable delays
- Misleading or incorrect advice
- An employee or contractor's behaviour or attitude
- Complaints about policy decisions and / or procedures

4.5 Exclusions

There are times when Plus Dane Housing will not consider complaints under this policy, which may include:

- An initial request for a service i.e. reporting a repair, a complaint can be made after the issue has been reported and we have had an opportunity to respond.
- Complaints about anti-social behaviour (ASB) or nuisance; such complaints will be handled in accordance with Plus Dane's ASB Policy. Complaints will only be accepted under this policy where the case has been closed and the customer is dissatisfied with the way Plus Dane has dealt with the case.
- Complaints about services that we are not responsible for delivering.
- Complaints where legal action has or is being taken about the same issue.
- Complaints about disrepair or personal injury insurance claims.
- Complaints in relation to an issue which is over six months old.
- Complaints that have already been fully investigated under this policy.

Any allegations about the conduct of Plus Dane Housing Board Members will be handled separately in accordance with good practice guidance. These complaints will be taken seriously and handled independently.

A complaint should be made as soon as possible after the date on which the event occurred or came to the complainant's notice. If a complaint is received more than six months later, we will consider whether there was good reason for not making the complaint sooner and whether, despite the delay, it is still possible to investigate the complaint effectively and fairly.

Where it is identified that a complaint relates to a human resource matter or where the allegations made may be considered criminal or legal action is being taken the complaint may be dealt with outside of this policy.

5 How to give feedback or make a complaint

Feedback can be given in a range of different ways:

- in person
- by telephone
- through a member of our staff
- via our website
- via social media
- in writing (email or by letter to any of our offices)
- through satisfaction surveys

5.1 Who can give feedback or make a complaint

- Anyone who receives a service from us such as tenants, leaseholders or former tenants
- Anyone who is affected by our decisions or actions, such as non-tenant neighbours, applicants for housing
- A representative, such as Citizen Advice Bureau, Housing Aid Centre, Shelter, a tenant or resident group, MP or Councillor or a friend or relative on behalf of a tenant.

5.2 Accessibility

Plus Dane Housing is committed to providing services that are easy to use and accessible to all of our customers. The policy will be published on our website and available in a variety of formats on request. Staff will provide information on the complaints procedure for customers wishing to make a complaint and provide any assistance they may require, for example:

- Assisting with making a complaint or completing a form
- Making appropriate arrangements for customers who have specific requirements, e.g. large print or braille, wheelchair access, etc.
- Arranging for the services of an interpreter where appropriate
- Advice on where to get help from an independent organisation to act as an advocate

5.3 Third party authorisation

Authorisation will be sought before we discuss a complaint with a third party or representative. If a representative is appointed to act on the complainant's behalf, correspondence regarding the complaint will be directed to them.

5.4 Anonymous complaints

It is good practice to investigate and respond to complaints even if the source is unknown, therefore anonymous complaints will be dealt in accordance with the complaint procedure and the outcome will be held on file wherever practicable.

5.5 Petitions

A petition will be considered when ten or more people jointly complain about the same issue or concern. Petitions will be logged and dealt with in accordance with the formal complaint procedure.

When a petition is received, we will ask the group to nominate a spokesperson or key point of contact and all subsequent contact and correspondence will be managed via the nominated spokesperson.

5.6 Unreasonable, vexatious or persistent complainants

Every effort will be made to resolve a complaint before a customer can be described as unreasonable. A complainant who displays threatening or abusive behaviour or language (whether written or verbal), that causes staff to feel afraid, threatened or abused and/or continues to contact Plus Dane Housing with unreasonable demands following a complaint investigation, may be considered an unreasonable, vexatious or persistent complainant. Unreasonable demands can include seeking excessive amounts of compensation, demanding an unrealistic nature or scale of service, or seeking to prolong contact with Plus Dane Housing by continually raising new issues throughout an investigation.

The Director of Customer Services will make the decision regarding when a complainant is making unreasonable demands in conjunction with the relevant service Director.

This decision will be made using the unreasonable, vexatious or persistent complainant framework.

5.7 Complaints addressed to a named officer, director or CEO

Complaints addressed to or escalated to a named officer should be forwarded to the customer relations team in the first instance, this is to ensure that complaints are recorded consistently across the organisation and they are responded to in line with the published timescales. A decision may be taken to reassign the complaint to the most appropriate officer.

5.8 Complaints or feedback via social media

Where a complaint is made via social media, we will respond promptly in order to collect relevant information to look into the complaint. We would firstly ask the complainant to direct message their name, address and a short description of the issue. Complaints received via this channel will be logged and responded

to within the same timescales as an informal complaint. Any positive feedback or suggestions received via the method will also be captured and recorded.

6 Our Approach

6.1 How we handle complaints

We have a three staged approach to complaint handling to ensure that the process is clear, simple and accessible to all of our customers and ensures that all complaints are resolved promptly, politely, fairly and consistently. Wherever possible we aim to resolve all reports of dissatisfaction at the first point of contact.

At each stage we will obtain as much detail as is relevant to achieve the outcome that the complainant is seeking, including any documentation or evidence in support of the complaint.

6.2 The Complaint Stages

Initial step – Quick resolution (informal complaint resolution)

This is the first opportunity for us to resolve a complainant's dissatisfaction and the majority of complaints will be resolved at this step by focusing on finding a quick resolution to the issue and sorting a problem out quickly.

Any member of staff can receive an enquiry or complaint and should attempt to resolve the issue as quickly as possible. If it is not possible to resolve immediately, the customer will be informed and the member of staff will record the details and assign it to the customer relations team.

The investigating officer will carry out the initial investigation seeking to establish the facts and respond to the customer with their findings within 5 working days of the initial customer contact.

Following this stage of the procedure, the complaint will be closed. However a customer has 10 working days from the date of the response to request that their complaint is progressed to the formal complaint process. Once closed an end of process survey may be completed.

STAGE 1 – Complaint Investigation (formal complaint resolution)

The complaint investigation stage is for issues that have not been resolved at the initial step or is clear from the outset that the complaint is particularly complex and requires a more detailed investigation. The stage 1 complaint will be investigated by a manager responsible for the service being complained about.

The customer relations team will acknowledge the complaint in writing, within 2 working days of receipt and include the name of the investigating officer and the timescales involved. At this stage a 'complaint statement' should be agreed with the customer to ensure that the complaint is properly understood.

The investigating officer will carry out the investigation into the complaint seeking to establish the facts and respond to the customer with their findings, within 10 working days of the acknowledgment date; unless a different timescale has been agreed.

Following the completion of a stage 1 complaint investigation, a complainant has 10 working days from the date of the response to contact us otherwise the complaint will be closed. If the customer wishes to progress their complaint to the next stage, they will be asked to explain why they believe that their complaint has not been dealt with to their satisfaction and to provide any supporting evidence.

If there is no response from the customer after this time the complaint will be closed. Once closed, an end of process survey may be completed.

STAGE 2 - REVIEW OF COMPLAINT

This stage of the process is a review carried out by a head of service or director of the department or service that is being complained about.

The customer relations team will acknowledge the request and inform the complainant that a review of their complaint will be undertaken, the name of the head of service or director that is undertaking that review, and the timescales involved. The acknowledgement will be issued within 2 working days of the stage 2 request date.

Prior to the complaint automatically being considered at stage 2 it will be reviewed as to the appropriateness of proceeding. For example, where a response to a complaint is based upon policy (and therefore, could not be changed). If a review is considered appropriate, then a summary is recorded and the details of the original complaint and appeal are passed to the reviewing head of service or director.

An impartial review of the original investigation and will be carried out by a head of service or director, to complete an assessment of the quality and outcome of the initial investigation. A decision can then be made if further investigation is required. An opportunity for the complainant to discuss the complaint face to face may be given at this stage. At the end of the review (within 20 working days of the receipt of the review request) the complainant will be informed in writing of the outcome and any further action to be taken. Following the stage the complaint will be closed.

If the customer feels that this process fails to draw the complaint to a satisfactory conclusion they may be able to take their case to a 'designated person' or to the Ombudsman (see 6.8). The complainant may be contacted at any point during this stage to discuss the options and to request further information if necessary.

Please note: If at any stage we feel that our complaints process has been exhausted, we will refer our customers to a 'designated person' or the Housing Ombudsman (see 6.8).

6.3 Timescales for handling a complaint

This is a summary of timescales that should be followed for complaints:

Stage	Acknowledgement	Response
Initial step	Verbal or written acknowledgment on receipt	Verbal or written response within 5 working days
1	Written acknowledgement within 2 working days of receipt	Full written response within 10 working days from acknowledgment
2	Written acknowledgement within 2 working days of receipt	Full written response within 20 working days from acknowledgment

6.4 Extending timescales

We aim to complete all complaints within the timescales above; however, if a complaint is particularly complex it may occasionally be necessary to extend the time limit.

If this is the case and more time is required to deal with the complaint, we will send a letter to the complainant to explain why and tell them when to expect a response.

6.5 Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Definition
Receiving Officer	The member of staff who takes or receives the initial complaint from the customer. (This role is usually carried out by the customer access team or an officer from the applicable service area).
Complaints Coordinator	The coordinator acknowledges the complaint and ensures that a full response is provided to the customer within the agreed timescales. (This role is usually carried out by a member of the customer relations team).
Investigating Officer	This role is to carry out the initial investigation into

	the complaint and prepare a response to the customer. (This role is usually carried out by a manager from the relevant service area).
Review Manager	A case is escalated to a Review Manager by the Complaints Coordinator when a request for a review is received. (This role is usually carried out by a head of service or a director).
Data protection Act 1998 (DPA)	The Data Protection Act 1998 applies to information about individuals ("personal data"). It sets out the requirements for handling personal data and gives individuals the right to access information that an organisation holds about them.
Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard	This standard requires registered providers to provide specific outcomes in relation to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Customer service, choice and complaints - Involvement and empowerment - Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants The approach to complaints must be clear, simple and accessible and ensure that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly
The Housing Ombudsman	The role of the Ombudsman is to provide an independent service to deal with disputes between landlords and tenants in England.

6.6 Putting things right

When we get things wrong, we will act to:

- Accept responsibility
- Explain what went wrong and why
- Take action to put things right

The general principle we follow is that a complainant should, so far as possible, be put in the position he or she would have been in, had things not gone wrong. The remedy chosen to resolve the complaint needs to be proportionate and appropriate to the failure in service.

6.7 Possible Outcomes

Following an investigation, we will make one of the following decisions:

- Uphold the complaint and tell the customer how we will put things right
- Uphold part of the complaint
- Not uphold the complaint as we don't agree that something went wrong

6.8 Designated Persons and Housing Ombudsman

If having followed all of the stages of our internal complaints procedure the customer still remains dissatisfied with the response they can ask for the complaint to be considered by a 'designated person' or the Housing Ombudsman.

The designated person can work with Plus Dane to seek a resolution to the issue. If the problem is still not resolved following the intervention of the designated person either they or the tenant can refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.

If the complaints procedure has been completed but the complaint or part of it remains unresolved, and either, 8 weeks have passed or the complaint has been referred by a designated person, the complainant can ask the Ombudsman to determine the complaint.

If at any stage we feel that our complaint procedure has been exhausted, we will refer our customers to the Housing Ombudsman Service. For more information refer to their website www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

6.9 Compensation

In certain circumstances following our investigations, if a customer has incurred additional expense as a result of inaction or service failure we may offer reimbursement based on the loss. Any reimbursement or compensation granted will be offset against any rent arrears or other debt owing to Plus Dane Housing.

Payments may also be made at our discretion and where we are satisfied with the following:

- Specific evidence that reasonable financial loss has been incurred and the customer has taken reasonable steps to mitigate that loss
- Exceptional inconvenience has been caused

Compensation will not be paid in the following circumstances:

- Where investigations show that there was no service failure
- Personal injury or damage to personal belongings claims will be handled through our insurance company
- Where the loss is or should have been covered by insurance (such as the customer's home contents insurance)
- If the service failure is for reasons outside our control

Compensation due to tenants in respect of delays in carrying out Plus Dane's repairs obligation under the Right to Repair Scheme, and for possible

reimbursements under the 'Right to Compensation for Improvements Scheme' carried out by tenants is dealt with in those specific policies.

6.10 Councillor and MP enquiries

Correspondence received from Local Councillors and MPs will be logged and responded to within the same timescales as a formal complaint.

7 Assurance

7.1 Confidentiality

All complaints received will be dealt with confidentially and in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act.

If a complaint is about a member of staff or contractor we will not reveal the customers identity, if they don't want us to. However the nature of the complaint may make the customer identifiable.

If a complaint is made against a member of staff we will not disclose details of any action which may have been taken.

7.2 Training and Development

Plus Dane Housing and will provide guidance and support for all staff on the use of this policy and dealing with complaints.

7.3 Performance monitoring framework

The performance and compliance with the service standards detailed in this policy will be monitored and managed by the Director of Customer Service, the Head of Customer Services and the Customer Relations and Service Improvement Manager. We will use performance measures that are focused on monitoring the effectiveness of our complaints handling process to improve the service.

7.4 Satisfaction surveys

Complainants will be contacted following completion of our investigation into their complaint, we will encourage feedback on ease of use of the complaints procedure and their satisfaction with the way their complaint was dealt with. The results will provide valuable information to ensure that we continue to improve our services and identify areas for improvement.

7.5 Learning from complaints

We will analyse the trends arising from complaints and use this information to inform our approach to customer service and staff training, to drive improvement and to target resources.

We will seek to learn from all expressions of dissatisfaction, including those that are resolved at the first point of contact, and use them to directly inform our service improvement plans.

7.6 Reporting framework

Each year we will publish information about complaints in line with regulatory requirements:

- The number, nature and outcome of complaints
- Complaint handling performance
- How we have improved services as a result of learning from complaints
- Satisfaction with complaint handling