

# Customer Complaints and Feedback Policy

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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. It enables us to put things right when they have gone wrong and to learn from our mistakes.

This policy sets out the framework and our approach for dealing with customer feedback and responding to customer complaints fairly and effectively.

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

The policy complies with the Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code and with the Regulator of Social Housing's Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard and The Equality Act 2010.

This policy is to be read in conjunction with accompanying frameworks and supporting guidance documents (see page 12, item 38).

## 2 Policy aims

The policy seeks to be compliant with the regulatory requirements for effective complaint handling and ensures our responses are clear, simple and accessible. We will resolve complaints promptly and politely.

The policy will help staff recognise a formal complaint and follow a structured process when handling complaints and feedback, to help us:

- focus on putting things right as quickly as possible
- learn from positive and negative feedback to drive service improvements
- create a positive complaint handling culture amongst staff and residents.

## 3 Links to corporate plan

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

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

## 4 Who can give feedback or make a complaint?

Anyone who receives or requests a service from Plus Dane and those acting on our behalf, or anyone who is affected by our decisions or actions, such as non-tenant neighbours or applicants for housing.

A member of a recognised organisation such as the Citizens' Advice Bureau, Housing Aid Centre, Shelter, a tenant or resident group, MP or Councillor or a friend or relative can also act on behalf of a tenant.

## **5 Compliments, comments and suggestions**

Positive feedback will be recorded at the first contact and it will be passed onto the member of staff or team. We will use this feedback to inform future services and reinforce positive behaviour across the organisation.

Comments and suggestions will also be recorded to enable us to analyse trends and improve our services, we may not always be able to act on every suggestion or idea, but we will aim to wherever possible.

## **6 Complaints**

Plus Dane has adopted the Housing Ombudsman's definition of a complaint which is defined as:

*A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by us, our staff, or those acting on our behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.*

Customers do not have to use the word complaint for it to be treated as such.

Complaints can be about:

- the standard of service we provide
- any action or lack of action by us affecting an individual or a group
- the behaviour of our staff or anyone acting on our behalf

## **7 Exclusions from this policy**

Complaints about our services other than those excluded in the Complaint Process and Procedure Guidance document (see page 12, item 38) will be recorded as complaints and administered under this policy. This includes situations such as an active case of anti-social behaviour or where there is an ongoing legal matter, for example.

Where we have investigated the circumstances and decided that we are unable to consider the matter under the complaint policy, we will:

- ensure the reason for not accepting the complaint is fair and reasonable
- provide an explanation to the customer setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for consideration through the complaints process.
- direct the customer to the Housing Ombudsman if they wish to challenge our decision

However, where appropriate the Ombudsman can instruct us to take on the complaint.

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.

## 8 How to make a complaint and provide feedback

Our customers can make complaints and provide feedback in a number of ways:

- in person
- via our website <https://www.plusdane.co.uk/complaints/>
- email us at [complaints@plusdane.co.uk](mailto:complaints@plusdane.co.uk)
- by calling 0800 169 2988
- through a member of our staff
- via social media, for example Facebook or Twitter
- in writing to our registered head office
- complete the form on the back of our complaint leaflet
- through surveys

## 9 Complaints made via social media

Where a complaint or feedback is made via social media, for example Facebook or Twitter, we will:

- respond promptly in order to collect the relevant information
- ask the complainant to direct message their name, address and a description of the issue
- handle the complaint/feedback in accordance with this policy

## 10 Accessibility

This policy and accompanying summary leaflet is available in a clear and accessible format. It is published on our website and is available in a variety of formats on request.

Staff will provide information on our complaints procedure to customers and provide any assistance and support they may require in compliance with the Equality Act 2010, for example:

- Assisting with making a complaint or completing a form
- Making appropriate arrangements for customers who have specific requirements, e.g. BSL, large print or braille, wheelchair access, etc.
- Arranging for the services of an interpreter where appropriate

- Advise on where to get help from an independent organisation to act as an advocate.

We will provide customers with contact information for the Housing Ombudsman as part of our regular complaint handling correspondence. We also inform customers of their right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service, not only at the point they have exhausted our complaints process, but throughout the life of their complaint.

## 11 The Customer Relations team (CRT)

CRT take responsibility for complaint handling and coordinating complaints across the organisation, the team consists of the Customer Relations and Service Improvement Manager (CRM) and the Customer Relations Officer (CRO), as a team we:

- act sensitively, fairly and impartially
- are trained to receive complaints and deal with distressed and upset customers with empathy and understanding
- have access to staff at all levels to facilitate quick resolution of complaints
- have the authority and autonomy to act and to help resolve disputes quickly and fairly.

## 12 Our complaint stages

In accordance with the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code, our complaints procedure is a two-stage process. This ensures that customers can challenge any decision we make by correcting errors or sharing concerns via an appeal process, however we do aim to resolve the majority of complaints at stage one.

Complaints are sent to the relevant service area for investigation and response.

## 13 Stage 1 Complaint Investigation

We will log and acknowledge a complaint within five working days.

We will issue our decision in writing within 10 working days from receipt of the complaint. If this is not possible, we will provide an explanation and a date by which the stage one response should be received. This will not exceed a further 10 days without good reason (refer to Complaint Process and Procedure Guidance).

If the complaint is not resolved satisfactorily the complainant may request for their complaint to progress to stage two within ten working days of receipt of the response.

If a complaint is escalated, it may be allocated another reference number.

#### **14 Stage 2 Review/Appeal - Complaint Escalation**

We will review the reasons why the customer remains dissatisfied, and we will send an acknowledgement explaining why we have accepted or refused the request to escalate the complaint. It would be in exceptional circumstances where we may refuse to escalate the complaint.

If we have accepted the review request; we will respond within 20 working days from the request to escalate. If this is not possible, we will provide an explanation and a date by which the stage two response will be received. This will not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason (refer to Complaint Process and Procedure Guidance).

The review will be carried out by the head of service or director who has not been involved in dealing with the complaint.

#### **15 Possible outcomes**

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

- Uphold the complaint and put things right
- Uphold part of the complaint put right the element that has gone wrong
- Not uphold the complaint as we don't agree that something went wrong

#### **16 Putting things right**

When we get things wrong, we will:

- accept responsibility,
- explain what went wrong and why
- take action to put things right
- where appropriate, take measures to prevent them from happening again.

The general principle adopted by Plus Dane 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. For further guidance refer to the Complaint Process and Procedure Guidance.

#### **17 Compensation/Redress**

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 will be made at our discretion and in accordance with our compensation framework.

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.

Refer to the Compensation Framework for further guidance.

## **18 Legal liability**

In some cases a customer may have a legal entitlement to redress. There may be concerns about legal liability in this situation. If so, we may still offer a resolution where possible, as that may remove the need for the customer to pursue legal remedies.

We have a duty to rectify problems for which we are responsible. However, where necessary a resolution can be offered with an explicit statement that there is no admission of liability. In such a case, legal advice as to how any offer of resolution should be worded should be obtained.

## **19 Closing complaints**

For reporting purposes, a complaint will be closed once the final response has been issued at each stage. This does not prevent a complaint from being monitored to ensure follow up actions are completed or prevent the case being escalated to the next stage.

## **20 Satisfaction surveys**

Complainants may be contacted by phone, text or email at least 10 working days after their complaint has been closed. If a request to escalate the complaint has been received in the meantime a survey may still be attempted. Customers can opt out of this process if they wish.

## **21 Councillor and MP enquiries**

Correspondence received from local councillors and Members of Parliament (MP) will be logged and responded to within 10 working days of receipt.

If we consider the problem to be a complaint, the issue will be logged and responded to under our formal complaint process and the MP will be informed.

## **22 Third party authorisation**

We will seek authorisation before we discuss a complaint with a third-party. If a representative is appointed to act on the complainant's behalf, correspondence and communications regarding the complaint will be directed to them in line with the customer's request.



## **23 Anonymous complaints**

Anonymous complaints will be dealt in accordance with the complaint procedure and the outcome will be held on file where practicable. There may be circumstances where it is not possible to investigate an anonymous complaint if it is not clear to identify who or what it concerns.

There may be circumstances where an anonymous complainant is identified as part of the investigation. In these cases, wherever possible, the complainant will be given the option as to whether the matter is pursued or not.

## **24 Petitions**

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

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.

## **25 Complaints addressed to a named officer, director or our CEO**

Complaints addressed to, or escalated to, a named officer should be forwarded to the Customer Relations Team (CRT) in the first instance, to ensure they are recorded consistently across the organisation and are responded to in line with complaint handling timescales.

We will assign the complaint to the most appropriate officer to review the customers concerns in the first instance.

## **26 Unreasonable, vexatious or persistent complainants**

We will endeavour to respond to complainants with patience and empathy, considering individual requirements; however on occasion there are times when nothing further can reasonably be done to assist following completion of the final stage of the complaint process or where we are unable to identify a particular issue to resolve.

Refer to the Unreasonable, Vexatious or Persistent Complainants Framework for further guidance.

## **27 When to refer to the Housing Ombudsman**

A customer can approach the Ombudsman anytime during the complaint process for advice and support. If a customer remains dissatisfied with our final response, they can also bring their complaint to the Ombudsman after our complaint's procedure has been exhausted.

## **28 Designated Person**

Following our final stage two response a complainant can approach a designated person. The designated person can be a member of parliament (MP), a local

councillor or a Tenant Panel (please note - Plus Dane customers do not have access to the latter).

If, following the intervention of the designated person, the problem is still not resolved, they can refer the complainant to the Ombudsman.

If a customer chooses not to contact a designated person to help seek a resolution, by law they must wait at least eight weeks after we have given our final response before contacting the Ombudsman.

## **29 Complaints escalated to the Housing Ombudsman**

When a complaint is escalated to the Ombudsman they may:

- Work with both us and the customer to resolve the dispute under their early resolution procedure. For example they can use their experience of resolving complaints to make suggestions if they believe there is a way to resolve the complaint.
- Carry out an investigation. They will only do this for those complaints where they decide an investigation is proportionate to the circumstances and evidence, for example complex complaints involving many issues.
- Refer the case to a different organisation if it's an issue they cannot make a decision about because it is not within their jurisdiction.

## **30 Housing Ombudsman early resolution**

Early resolution is an alternative process to formal investigation. The Ombudsman will work with us and the customer to help resolve the dispute as fairly and quickly as possible.

They will look at what has already been agreed to resolve the complaint and the issues that are still outstanding. They will use their experience to explore the possible options and make suggestions if they believe there is a way to resolve the complaint.

If an agreement to resolve the complaint is reached, they will set out the terms in an Ombudsman's determination and ensure that any agreed actions are carried out. There will be a timescale attached to the actions required by the Ombudsman and Plus Dane will adhere to these and report back once complete.

## **31 Housing Ombudsman dispute resolution**

The Ombudsman considers complaints using their dispute resolution principles which are:

- Be fair - treat people fairly and follow fair processes
- Put things right
- Learn from outcomes
- Duty to cooperate

We will cooperate with the Ombudsman's requests for evidence and provide this within 15 working days of receipt.

If a response cannot be provided within this timeframe, we will provide the Ombudsman with an explanation for the delay. If the explanation is reasonable, the Ombudsman will agree a revised date.

Failure to provide evidence to the Ombudsman in a timely manner may result in the Ombudsman issuing a complaint handling failure order.

### **32 Confidentiality**

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

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

### **33 Complaints about staff**

If a complaint is made against a member of staff, we will not disclose details of any action which may have been taken in relation to any disciplinary proceedings.

### **34 Training and development**

We will provide guidance and support for colleagues on the use of this policy and dealing with complaints.

### **35 Performance monitoring**

The performance and compliance with the service standards detailed in this policy will be monitored and managed by the Director of Customer Service (DCS), the Head of Customer Services (HCS) and CRT.

We will use performance measures that are focused on monitoring the effectiveness of our complaints handling process to improve services and to embed a positive complaint handling culture within the organisation.

### **36 Learning from complaints**

We will proactively use learning from complaints to revise policies and procedures and train staff and contractors to improve communication and record keeping.

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

Refer to Continuous Learning and Improvement Framework.

## **37 Reporting frameworks**

Each year we will publish information about complaints in line with regulatory requirements and we will provide regular reports to staff, managers, committees and Board and the scrutiny panel as required. The reports will include:

- The number, nature and outcome of complaints
- Theme and trend analysis to identify and address systematic issues to mitigate risk and reputation
- Complaint handling performance against service standards
- How we have improved services as a result of learning from complaints
- Satisfaction with complaint handling
- Housing Ombudsman 'Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment'

## **38 Accompanying frameworks and additional reading**

- Complaint Process and Procedure Guidance
- Compensation Framework
- Continuous Learning and Improvement Framework
- Unreasonable, Vexatious or Persistent Complainants Framework
- Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code
- Equality Act 2010
- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard