



## **COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE SUMMARY**

### **(Information for Customers)**

Please note this policy can be made available in a range of formats. Please contact the Head Office if you require this document translated or issued in a format which is more appropriate for you.

### **WHY DOES THE SOCIETY HAVE A COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE?**

The Society aims to provide a good service to its tenants and others. We aim to get things right first time, but accept that mistakes can happen. If we make mistakes, we want to be able to correct them as quickly as possible and learn from those mistakes. For sheltered schemes the Scheme Manager will try to resolve, in the first instance, any complaint at scheme level.

This Complaints Policy and Procedure summary explains how the Society deals with complaints.

### **WHAT IS A COMPLAINT?**

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of actions by the Society, its contractors or its staff, affecting an individual customer or group of customers.

Complaints are important as they provide a measurement of customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the services we provide. They can be seen as a formal input into the activities of the Society, and can help us assess when policies and procedures are not working or may need amending.

Complaints can be made by residents, contractors, waiting list applicants, neighbours of the Society's properties, councillors and MPs, solicitors, Citizens Advice Bureaux and other similar agencies.

The complainant can express dissatisfaction about any aspect of the Society's service e.g.

- something being done wrongly or badly
- something not being done or a delay in something being done
- impolite or unhelpful staff or contractors
- a decision that the complainant feels is unfair
- the Society not operating its policies fairly
- the Society not fulfilling its legal duties

It is inevitable that complaints will be received and it is important that all Officers respond to complaints in a conciliatory, helpful and non-defensive manner. The Society can and should learn from criticism from its customers, and complaints can highlight where perhaps more information is needed by residents (and others) and can also lead to changes in policy and procedure.

We would not normally deal with the following matters under our Complaints procedure:

- Complaints about the behaviour of other people, this would be more appropriately dealt with through the anti-social behaviour procedure.
- Making an insurance claim.
- Where legal action is being taken.

## **THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

### **How can complaints be made?**

You can complain by:

- (a) telephone
- (b) letter
- (c) calling into our office
- (d) telling a member of staff at any time, who could also assist with writing a complaint
- (e) email
- (f) representation from someone else on your behalf, e.g. Citizens Advice Bureau, friend or family member.

### **Stage 1 – looking into the complaint**

The complaint should be acknowledged in writing within **5 working days** enclosing a copy of the Complaints Procedure by the Admin Officer.

The Chief Executive should be made aware of all correspondence relating to complaints.

The appropriate officer will look into your complaint and let you know:

- whether a mistake has been made, and if so what we will do to put this right
- the reasons for the decision
- what you can do if you are unhappy with the decision

If the problem cannot be solved immediately, it is important that the complainant is informed of what is being done and is given a timescale of a full response. The target time for solving the problem is **10 working days**. Of course this is not always possible and if it is expected to take longer then the complainant should be kept fully informed.

It is also important to explain to the complainant what further steps are available if they are dissatisfied with the full response.

## **Stage 2 – reviewing the decision**

If the complainant is not happy with the response received at stage 1, the complainant should contact SHS **within 10 working days** stating why the outcome is not satisfactory. The Chief Executive will review the decision.

The Chief Executive will look carefully at all the information available and respond in writing to your appeal within **10 working days**.

## **Stage 3 – Appeals Panel**

If a complainant is not satisfied then they can appeal to the board of management **within 10 working days** of receipt of the Chief Executives decision. A panel made up of two Board members will consider the appeal and report to the Chairman.

A meeting will be arranged within **1 month** of receipt of the appeal. The customer will be given at least five days notice of when and where the meeting will be held. If the customer wishes the meeting could be held in their own home. A customer can have a friend, family member or representative with them for support or to act on their behalf.

The Society's response will be reviewed and a decision will normally be sent to the customer in writing within **10 working days** of the meeting.

If a decision is delayed for any reason the complainant will be advised and given a date when the decision will be made.

## **How are complaints brought to a close?**

If the complaint has been responded to or there have not been any further incidents within a 3 month period we will close the complaint. The Officer responsible for responding to the complaint is responsible for closing it and advising the Admin Officer who will log it on the database.

However, if the same issue arises again, whilst it should be treated as a new complaint, reference can still be made to the fact that the problem has occurred before.

## **What further rights of appeal are there if a complainant is still not satisfied?**

We hope that any complaint will have been fairly resolved. However, if a complainant is still not satisfied then they may be able to ask for a review of the case through the Housing Ombudsman Service. The Ombudsman will only investigate a complaint where a tenant has exhausted the Society's complaint procedure above, and where the complaint is from a tenant, leaseholder, service users or applicant for housing.

**Housing Ombudsman Service**  
**81 Aldwych**  
**London**  
**WC2B 4HN**

**Tel: 0300 111 3000**  
**Lo call: 0845 712 5973**  
**Email: [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)**  
**Web: [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk)**

## **Compensation for failure of services**

The Society will pay compensation for failure of certain services. A copy of our Compensation Policy, which gives details, is available from the office and should be read in conjunction with this Complaints Policy and Procedure.

## **Advice agencies**

Impartial advice can be obtained from a number of organisations e.g. the Citizens Advice Bureau may be able to help. Alternatively, they will provide details of other agencies and support groups who may be able to assist, depending on the problem.

Please note that there is advice on a number of matters relating to Tenancies in our Residents' Handbook, which all residents should have received at their initial Tenancy sign-up meeting. However, a copy can be provided on request to the office.

## **Equality and Diversity**

Sutton Housing Society recognises that tenants of all races, religions, gender, sexual orientation, literacy levels and disability should be treated equally and fairly and we will not discriminate in implementing this policy and procedure.

### **SUMMARY OF COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

1. Report the problem to the Society.
2. Complaint responded to by relevant Officer.
3. Complain to the Chief Executive if the response is not satisfactory to the customer.
4. Appeal to the Board Panel if you are not satisfied with the Chief Executive's response.
5. If you are still not satisfied and have exhausted Sutton Housing Society Complaints Policy and Procedure you can appeal to the Independent Housing Ombudsman

**Sutton Housing Society is committed to providing an effective and equal service to all tenants and customers and to avoiding discrimination.**