

Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy



Directorate: Customer Services

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Document Information

Scope:

The purpose of this document is to set out Salix Homes' policy in relation to managing and acting on customer feedback and complaints.

The objectives of this policy are:

- To listen to our customers when they have a concern, complaint or compliment about Salix Homes.
- To ensure that the process for providing feedback to Salix Homes is simple and straightforward.
- To ensure that customer feedback drives improvement in the business when necessary.
- To use customer feedback as a way of learning more about our customers, their needs and expectations.
- To raise customer satisfaction through delivering a consistent service and making customers aware of their rights and responsibilities relating to customer feedback.
- To support staff at all levels to understand the value of complaints, listen to customers effectively and take steps to resolve complaints at an early stage.
- To ensure that Salix Homes complies with the regulatory standard and the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code

Service Standards / Performance Measures / Corporate Strategy:

Resolving the complaint at 'point of call'

- The number of expressions of dissatisfaction that have been resolved right first time.

Formal Complaints

- The number of complaints received by service area and complaint theme;

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- The percentage of complaints received successfully resolved after an investigation.

Investigating complaints

- All formal complaints to have a written acknowledgement sent to the complainant within 2 working days of our receipt of the initial complaint;
- A written response detailing the findings of the complaint investigation to be sent out to the complainant within 10 working days of our receipt of the initial complaint;
- The percentage and number of complaint elements upheld or partially upheld.

Reviewing Investigations

- All requests for a complaint review to have a written acknowledgement sent to the complainant within the 2 working days of our receipt of the request for a review;
- A written response detailing the findings of the complaint review to be sent out to the complainant within 15 working days of our receipt of the request for a review;
- The percentage and number of complaints upheld or partially upheld.

Risks:

1. Salix Homes fails to suitably act on customer feedback – Director - customer service and assets

- Annual complaints report is not produced and/or not fit for purpose: will form part of formal Service Action Plan for relevant team and will be considered by Senior Management Team
- Appropriate managers fail to act on information / recommendations outlined within the annual complaints report: acting on information will be a part of formal Service Action Plan for relevant managers. Report will be submitted to Salix Homes Board and Salix Homes Customer Committee, who will expect evidence of changes made as a result.

2. Salix Homes fails to offer customers a suitable channel through which to resolve their dissatisfaction– customer service manager

- Salix Homes' formal complaints process is not fit for purpose: formal complaints policy and procedure will be reviewed annually and may be amended in line with findings of annual complaints reports.
- Salix Homes' formal complaint process (including any alternate contact arrangements in place) fail to meet customer's needs: formal complaints process will be periodically assessed against our customer profile and appropriate support, channels and, methods of communication will be made available where reasonable required. Alternate contact arrangements will only be put in place after suitable consideration of the customers' individual circumstances, needs and preferences. Any arrangements in place will be periodically reviewed to ensure they remain appropriate, proportionate and effective.

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<p>3. Salix Homes receives a complaints handling failure order from the Housing Ombudsman Service – chief executive officer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colleagues not following the complaint policy and procedure. A formal Service Action Plan will be produced for all service areas and considered by Senior Management Team
<p>Related Policy/Procedure & Documents:</p> <p>Customer feedback and complaints procedure Equality and diversity policy Customer service strategy Anti-social behaviour hate crime and domestic abuse policy Compensation policy</p>
<p>Related Legislation / Relevant Regulation:</p> <p>This policy is developed in the context of the 2010 Equalities Act and the Salix Homes equalities strategy & policy; and takes account of the protected characteristics including: age, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion and belief.</p>
<p>Retention & Legal Basis for Storage:</p> <p>All activities and their legal basis for processing are captured on the Information Asset Register. All retention periods are stored within the Data Retention Schedule.</p>
<p>Stakeholders:</p> <p>Customers have been contacted regarding their experiences and the policy will be submitted to the Salix Homes Customer Committee (SHCC) and Senior Management Team (SMT)</p>
<p>Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)</p> <p>A DPIA was been completed in relation to this policy.</p>
<p>Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)</p> <p>An EIA was been completed in relation to this policy.</p>

Introduction

1. Salix Homes is grateful for feedback from our customers. Customer feedback is an opportunity for Salix Homes to improve the delivery of our services based directly on the feedback of our customers. Salix Homes attempts to get things right first time yet we understand that sometimes we do not get things completely right and if we do not, we will listen to our customers, understand their point of view, correct mistakes and where possible, learn from them. Customer compliments let us know when we do a good job and gives us a chance to thank our staff and teams for their good work.

Complaints – What is a complaint?

2. Salix Homes understand that at times our customers may not always be happy with the services they receive from us. Salix Homes defines a complaint as:
 - A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by Salix Homes, our own staff, or those acting on our behalf, affecting an individual resident, group of residents or another interested party.

Our resolution process for complaints:

3. Salix Homes understands that customers will express that they are unhappy with us in a variety of ways such as:
 - Contacting our customer service centre
 - Using our website or their My Salix customer portal
 - Speaking to any Salix Homes employee or one of our contractors
 - Sending us an email
 - Writing us a letter
 - Using social media
4. With every complaint we will:
 - Listen to the customer and understand the reasons for their complaint.
 - Thank the customer for their feedback.
 - Get all the facts.
 - Be clear on what we can and cannot do for the customer – we will never make false promises to a customer.

Resolving the complaint at ‘point of contact’

5. We will always attempt to resolve a complaint at the first point of contact, using our normal working practices. Salix Homes will equip its entire customer facing staff to recognise when a customer is unhappy with our service and give them the tools to resolve any concerns quickly and effectively. Salix Homes will equip its staff to deal with an unhappy customer by:

- Dealing with the customers concerns immediately where possible
 - Taking responsibility for the customers concerns
 - Being sympathetic
 - Listening and understanding the complaint
 - Taking ownership of the issue
 - Letting the customer know what we will do, when they should expect it to be done and if there is a delay for any reason and the reason for the delay.
6. Salix Homes recognises that every customer interaction of this kind represents an opportunity for Salix Homes to get crucial feedback on the customer experience and act on it. Salix Homes will record expressions of dissatisfaction using our electronic recording system, CRM and we will run regular reports from the system to identify if there are any patterns to customer dissatisfaction and if there is anything that we can address to make our customers happier.

Formal complaints

7. There are times when our attempts to resolve complaints at 'point of contact' are not sufficient to address the customer's concerns and it is necessary to investigate these using our formal complaints process.
8. A formal complaint can occur when:
- A customer is unhappy about a service that they have received from Salix Homes or the attempts that Salix Homes has made to resolve their concerns.
 - A customer requests for the service that they have received to be reviewed by a manager or the customer has expressly asked for a complaint to enter the formal complaints process.
 - Salix Homes has triggered the formal complaints process to reach a resolution with an ongoing customer concern.
 - A member of staff has triggered the formal complaints process as they feel that a customer concern is not being dealt with appropriately by Salix Homes.

What is not a complaint?

9. Salix Homes does not treat the following as a complaint:
- A comment or series of comments, where the customer is making a suggestion about how we may improve or maintain our service. The relevant service manager will consider these.
 - A question or series of questions, where a customer is requesting information about a service we provide.
 - A service request, where the customer is letting us know about a particular issue for the first time, for example reporting a repair or an incident of anti-social

behaviour or making a request for compensation.

- MP enquiries – When local councillors and MP's get in touch with Salix Homes on behalf of our customers requesting assistance or information these are addressed by the relevant service manager and are recorded outside of our formal complaints' procedure.

What will not be handled as a complaint

10. The following may not be handled as a complaint or the response may be delayed until the outcome is known.
 - A complaint that has already been subject to legal action and an order made in a court of law or tribunal or court proceedings have been commenced and are continuing.
 - Where it has been raised as a complaint within the last six months and has been addressed, unless new information is provided.
 - Where it has already been referred to the Housing Ombudsman Service and they have either issued a determination or are in the process of investigating the complaint.
 - Where there is Police criminal or fraudulent investigation involved
 - Where the complaint is anonymous
11. If a complaint is refused, it will be explained to the customer why it is being refused and a record will be kept of the contact and refusal.
12. In these cases, the customer should be advised of their right to refer their case to the Housing Ombudsman Service to investigate the refusal.

Time limit for making complaints

13. A complaint will not normally be considered if it is made more than six months after the point at which the issue became known to the customer. This is because complaints that happened more than six months ago are often difficult or impossible to investigate in a full and fair manner. However, Salix Homes will consider complaints exceeding this timescale in exceptional circumstances.

Making complaints on behalf of another

14. Customers may direct complaints through advocates, relatives or representatives. Once Salix Homes has established that the person presenting the complaint is acting with the authority of the customer, Salix Homes will treat these complaints as though they are directly from the customer.

Investigating complaints (Stage 1)

15. Once we receive a complaint, we will:

- Acknowledge the complaint in writing within 2 working days. We can also acknowledge a customer complaint via email, telephone or through their customer account at the customer's request.
- The acknowledgment will inform the customer of the name of the person who will be conducting the investigation. Usually this is the manager whom is responsible for the service area which the complaint relates to.

The complaint investigation

16. Investigating managers will fully investigate the complaint and to do this they will get all the facts relating to the complaint. They may use one or more of the following investigation tools;

- Approach the customer direct for further details about their complaint that may assist them with the process.
- Speak to members of staff or contractors involved with the area of service that the customer is complaining about.
- Search our internal ICT systems for records relating to the customer complaint.
- Visit the customer's home, communal areas or our estates.

The complaint response

17. Following a complaint investigation, a response will be written by the investigating manager within 10 working days and will include:

- The complaint stage
- The findings of their investigation against each of the component parts of the complaint and the reasons for the findings
- Whether each of the component parts of the complaint have been upheld or not upheld.
- Details of any outstanding actions and deadlines
- If elements of the complaint have been upheld then what steps the manager will take to correct the issues where possible.
- Apologise when we have done something wrong.
- Thank the customer for their feedback about Salix Homes.

- What steps that the manager may be taking to improve their service as a result of the complaint and what safeguards they will put in place so that those mistakes will not happen again.
- A compensation payment or payment as a gesture of good will if appropriate (see compensation policy for more details).
- The next steps that the customer can take if they are unhappy with the outcome of the complaint investigation.

Reviewing investigations (Stage 2)

18. Salix Homes hopes that the complaints investigation resolves the customers concerns but in some cases a customer may be unhappy with the response from the investigation and if this is the case the customer can request for the handling of their complaint to be reviewed.
19. The review process will be outlined in the complaint response letter and review requests should usually be directed to the investigating manager. Customers have 10 days from receipt of the complaint response letter in order to request a review, Salix Homes may extend this timescale in exceptional circumstances.
20. The purpose of the complaints review is a consideration of the initial investigation and not a new investigation. The review is typically conducted by the line manager of investigating manager, usually a director.
21. As with the initial investigation we will:
 - Acknowledge the request for a review in writing within 2 working days. We can also acknowledge a customer complaint via email, telephone or through their customer account at the customer's request.
 - The acknowledgment will inform the customer of the name of the person who will be conducting the review; usually this is the line manager of the manager who conducted the initial investigation, typically a director.
22. Following a complaint review, a response will be written by the reviewing manager within 15 working days and will include:
 - The findings of their review against each of the component parts of the complaint with the reasons for those findings.
 - Whether any of the decisions made at investigation have been overturned.
 - Apologise when we have done something wrong.
 - Thank the customer for their feedback about Salix Homes.
 - If we have made a mistake, what additional steps that the reviewing manager will take to correct the mistake where possible and timescales or target dates where possible.

- What additional steps that the reviewing manager may be taking to improve their service as a result of the complaint and what safeguards they will put in place so that those mistakes will not happen again.
- A compensation payment or payment as a gesture of goodwill if appropriate or increase in a compensation payment or gesture of goodwill if already awarded at the investigation stage (see compensation policy for more details).
- How the customer can progress their complaint further.

Delayed Responses

23. Salix Homes aims to respond to all of our complaints and requests for a review within the 10/15 day timescale. Occasionally if the investigation is complex or key members of staff are not available and the investigation cannot be completed without their input then Salix Homes may extend the investigation. In these cases, the customer will be informed of where the investigation is up to, and the information already identified, that there is a delay and how long it will be until they will receive a response. The customer should be notified of the delay as soon as it is identified and not wait until the tenth day. Workload pressures should not cause a delay to a case being investigated.

Progressing a complaint further

24. Salix Homes aims to resolve as many complaints as possible using our complaints process. However, if the customer remains dissatisfied with the complaint following the review stage by the senior manager, then the customer can refer their complaint to:

Housing Ombudsman Service

25. The Housing Ombudsman Service is a legal body established to impartially consider complaints and disputes between tenants / leaseholders and their landlords. They will consider all the evidence from both sides of any dispute and can make recommendations to both parties on how to rectify both the matter at hand and to ensure that such a situation does not occur again.
26. Any customer who is unhappy with the outcome of their complaint may refer their case to the Ombudsman for a judgement, provided that a minimum of 8 weeks have expired since Salix Homes' complaints process has ended (i.e. 8 weeks after a customer has received their written review of the complaint).
27. Should a customer wish to take a complaint to the Ombudsman sooner than the 8 week period, they can do with the support of a designated person recognised by the Ombudsman:
- A member of the House of Commons (i.e. an MP)
 - A member of the Local Authority for the area in which the property is located (i.e. a Local Councillor)
28. Making a referral to the Ombudsman is free and further details can be found at: <http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/>

Misuse of the complaints process

29. The making of malicious or vexatious complaints can be a form of harassment or anti-social behaviour whereby an innocent resident or member of staff is subjected to unfounded exaggerated or dishonest complaints by someone seeking to cause detriment to the individual(s) concerned.
30. A vexatious complaint is a complaint without any merit which has been made solely to harass or intimidate another resident or a member of staff.
31. A malicious complaint is a complaint that is false and the intention is to cause harm or damage to another resident or a member of staff.
32. Whilst Salix Homes will investigate all complaints in line with this policy, part of the investigation in certain circumstances may need to include the possibility that the complaint falls into one or both above categories.
33. If as part of the investigation, it becomes clear that the complainant is malicious or vexatious the director responsible for the area where the malicious/vexatious complaint relates will consider seeking approval of the Senior Management Team to classify the complainant as vexatious.
34. If the Senior Management Team decide that someone's complaint is malicious or vexatious a number of actions will be considered including:
 - Establishing a single point of contact
 - Removing an individual's implied license to attend our offices
 - Taking legal action under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 (nuisance to landlord ground)

Customer compliments

35. Salix Homes is happy to hear when we have done things right. When a customer shares a compliment with us about an individual or a team, we will arrange for that compliment to be shared with the individual or team by their service manager. We also publicise some customer compliments in our internal staff information forums or documents.

Using customer feedback

36. Salix Homes values the customer feedback that we receive and we will use this feedback as follows:
 - To spot trends from complaints and expressions of dissatisfaction and use this information on a large scale to inform our approach to our services, train our staff and how we direct our resources.
 - Service areas will keep records of lessons learned on complaints and produce/review a quarterly action plan.
 - Managers will share information on lessons learned across the business where

appropriate to maximise the impact and benefit. This will be coordinated by the complaints support officers.

- Salix Homes will publish details of how we have improved our services because of learning from complaints.
- Salix Homes will use customer compliments to identify cases of excellent customer service and this can inform our approach to how we train our staff and deliver our services.

Collecting customer feedback on the customer feedback and complaints process

37. Salix Homes will ask our customers if they are satisfied with our complaints handling and we will use this feedback to improve the service. We will continue to compare our complaints service with other organisations to improve the quality of our service