

Oxbode Housing Association

Policy and Procedure for Complaints

1.0 Policy Objectives

1.1 The complaints policy provides a procedure for customers seeking redress. An analysis of complaints received during the year will be viewed as a valuable source of customer feedback, and will feed into reviews of our policies and practices.

1.2 The policy will ensure that all staff at the Association adopt a positive approach to complaints and act as a management tool to improve services and increase customer satisfaction.

1.3 The policy will:

- Aim to be fair and be perceived to be fair both by the complainant and by those whose actions are the subject of complaints. It will be consistent with the legal rights of those involved.
- Provide a simple and easy to understand but structured approach for receiving and responding to complaints.
- Ensure that complaints can be made verbally as well as in writing.
- Aim to improve relations and reduce tensions between stakeholders and staff.
- Ensure clear records of complaints actions are kept, and to provide a monitoring system for Board.
- Be widely publicised to our customers.
- Provide a means of independent review.

2.0 Complaints Policy

2.1 Introduction

As a customer orientated organisation setting out to deliver quality services we need ways of identifying and remedying dissatisfaction amongst customers.

This complaints policy is an integral part of the Association's approach to customer care.

Complaints will only ever give a partial view of the service and a more rounded picture will include other forms of feedback such as satisfaction surveys, ad hoc questionnaires and questionnaires to tenants.

2.2 Definition of a complaint

A complaint is a voiced grievance about particular actions or inactions. It is not a request for a service or an enquiry. A complaint within the scope of this policy is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction with a service not provided, or provided at an unsatisfactory level.

Therefore a complaint is:

- About a service which has not been provided properly
- About a lack of services provided by the Association
- About the way a problem or issue has been dealt with.

2.3 Acceptance of a complaint

2.3.1 A complaint can be made by any stakeholder, their representative or advocate.

2.3.2 Staff of the Association have access to a Grievance Procedure.

2.3.3 Stakeholders may also access appeals procedures which are attached to specific policies. These appeals can relate to rent levels, service charges, allocation decisions etc.

2.3.4 Complaints can be made over the telephone, in person, or in writing. The insistence on submitting a complaint in writing can be discriminatory, as some of our stakeholders do not have English as a first language, or may have difficulty writing. Staff can assist complainants in writing down a complaint if they wish, or a file note of the conversation made by the staff member will be satisfactory.

2.3.5 Anonymous complaints cannot be actioned effectively. However, a note should be made and placed on file for future reference.

2.4 Petitions

All petitions will be copied to the Chief Executive. The matter should be investigated and responded to in line with the stages of the policy. The letter should be sent to all petitioners.

3.0 **Stages of the Complaints Policy**

Informal complaint

The complaint should be made to the relevant officer who would normally deal with the complainant.

This gives the Association the opportunity to resolve the problem at the initial contact. The intention is to ensure that most complaints should be

resolved at this stage. Staff will complete the informal complaint log (**Appendix 1**) and will inform the complainant that if they remain dissatisfied they can make a formal complaint; they should describe the Complaints Policy and how it works.

Staff will make a complete the informal complaints log and place a copy on the tenants file and forward a copy to the Housing Manager for monthly monitoring. It is advised that where the staff members feel that there may be useful feedback or implications for improving our procedures, these should be drawn to the attention of their line manager. Informal complaints can also be a valuable source of customer intelligence.

Stage One Formal complaint

- a) The complaint will be referred to the departmental manager. The manager will investigate the complaint, review the response at the informal complaint stage, and advise the complainant of the outcome.
- b) Formal recording begins at this stage.
- c) Enquiries from Councillors should be referred to the manager and are to be regarded as a Formal Complaint.

Stage Two Appeal

- a) If the complainant is still dissatisfied, they can appeal directly to the Chief Executive.
- b) The Chief Executive will review the facts, all relevant documents and decisions made up to this stage.
- c) All enquiries from Members of Parliament should be referred to the Chief Executive, and are to be regarded as an appeal.

Stage Three Review

- a) A complaint can be taken to a review by a panel of one or more members of the Board. They will review the case, and the relevant policy.
- b) The Board will decide on a response to the complainant, and recommend a review of the relevant policy by officers.

Stage Four Independent Review

Stakeholders have an ultimate right of appeal to the Independent Housing Ombudsman Scheme. RSL's are expected to comply fully with its recommendations.

3.1 Further rights

Tenants also have a right to lodge complaints of discrimination against an RSL in the County Court on the grounds of race or gender, and they also have rights under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. Complainants should note that there is a six-month time limit from the date of the event, giving rise to the complaint to the date the complaint is registered.

4.0 **Recording Complaints**

4.1 Formal complaints can be recorded using the standard form, attached as **Appendix 2**. Copies of all correspondence and notes of officers' research and investigations should be kept on a Complaints File. The Chief Executive maintains the complaints file for the organisation.

5.0 **Monitoring Complaints**

5.1 Detailed records of Formal Complaints will be maintained, to enable formal monitoring by the Board. Reports will be presented annually to Board. The report will evaluate trends, and recommending action. Where timescales have been breached when responding to complaints, this should be noted. The report should also include details of any compensation claims and the amounts awarded during the year.

5.2 In addition, customers who have made a complaint will be invited to complete a follow-up survey form (**Appendix 3**). This will ask customers how they felt their complaint was handled, and whether the issue has been resolved. The outcomes will be reported to Board also on an annual basis.

6.0 **Timescales for Response**

6.1 Officers should respond to complaints within ten working days. If a full reply is not possible, for example, because of a request for further information or clarification, a holding reply will be sent. The holding letter will give an indication of when the complainant can expect to hear the outcome of the investigation.

7.0 **Publicity and Information**

7.1 Details on the complaints procedures are included in the tenant's handbook. A leaflet is also available in reception.

8.0 **Guidelines on receiving a complaint**

8.1 When a complaint is made, staff should respond openly, and non-defensively. The complainant should be asked what they would like done about their complaint. This will help identify the real problem. Complaints often start off appearing to be about one issue, and eventually something else emerges as the real source of grievance.

- 8.2 Officers must aim to satisfy the person complaining rather than looking for fault, or identifying who is to blame. Other parts of the organisation must not be criticised in front of a complainant.
- 8.3 Officers should take a flexible, problem solving approach. The aim must be to identify and remedy failure, to achieve customer satisfaction.
- 8.4 At all times officers must acknowledge mistakes and be prepared to apologise. Openness and honesty must be demonstrated at all stages of the complaints process.
- 8.5 Neighbour disputes are to be recorded under a different policy. However, complaints about **how** a neighbour dispute was handled can be made under the complaints policy.

9.0 Remedies to Complaints

- 9.1 In many cases a letter of apology may satisfy the complainant. However, where the tenant has suffered loss through the actions or inactions of the Association, an award under the Compensation Policy may be appropriate.

10.0 Policy Review Date

This policy is due for review again in March 2007.

Appendix 1

Informal Complaint Log

Name	
Address	
Tel No	
Date Complaint Made	
How was it made	Letter / Visit / Phone

Relevant Dates	Details of Complaint

Relevant Date	Action Taken

Outcome	Resolved / Moved to stage one (Formal Complaint)

Staff Signature..... Date

Staff Name.....

* Copy to be placed on Tenants File and copy to be passed to Housing Manager.

Appendix 2

Oxbode Housing Association Complaints Monitoring Form
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Name of complainant	
Address	
Date received	
How received	
Summary of complaint	

Stage One	Formal complaint
Dealt with by:	
Date received	
Date acknowledged	
Outcome of investigation	
Date of full response	
Response within target time	Yes / No

Stage Two	Appeal
Dealt with by:	
Date received	
Date acknowledged	
Outcome of investigation	
Date of full response	
Response within target time	Yes / No
Stage Three	Review

Dealt with by:	
Date received	
Date acknowledged	
Outcome of investigation	
Date of full response	
Response within target time	Yes / No

Stage Four	Independent Review
Referred to:	
Date referred	
Date acknowledged	
Outcome of investigation	
Date response received	
Action taken to respond to recommendations	

Policy Implications	
What changes to policy or procedure should be made as a result of this complaint?	