



Comment, Compliment, Complaint Policy and Procedure

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COMMENT, COMPLIMENT, COMPLAINT

We aim to provide good affordable homes in a way that satisfies the housing and social needs of each of our customers and by the principles of equality of opportunity.

Customer-focused housing services

- We appreciate your participation in commenting on our services, how we do things, or complementing our organisation. We actively welcome feedback.
- We aim to provide a high quality and efficient service at all times but we realise that on occasions, you may not be satisfied.
- We value your views and comments, whether positive or negative, as they enable us to learn and to improve our services, policies and procedures.
- We are committed to maintaining and improving our customer focus.
- We will acknowledge feedback and act upon it quickly and simply in relation to services.
- Changing our policies and procedures can take a little longer.

What is feedback?

Feedback can either be a comment, a compliment or a complaint. We do not have any set forms on which to give feedback as we like to remain as flexible and open as possible.

You can give us feedback in any number of ways and to any member of staff. All staff are authorised, trained and encouraged to take a complaint and are familiar with the policy and procedure.

Other avenues you may choose

- 1 Suggestion box
- 2 Contact the service concerned either in person, in writing or by telephone
- 3 At a Resident's Forum or public meeting
- 4 Via a Board member or tenant representative
- 5 By petition
- 6 Via a solicitor, advice centre or other advocate
- 7 By email to solon@solonswha.co.uk
- 8 Via the website www.solonswha.co.uk
- 9 Via FaceBook or Twitter

- When work is carried out at your property we will request some information on whether you were satisfied. This is sometimes by letter, phone or sometimes via a device that the operative who carries out your repair will have with them called a PDA. At Solon we really appreciate your feedback via this route to help us assess the contractors we use.
- Solon has also signed up to the 'West of England Local Authority and Bristol Housing Partnership- Protocol for investigating and taking action on Complaints about housing standards'. If you would like more information about this, please contact our Corporate Services Manager.

Please ask our assistance:

- if you need help to make a comment, compliment or complaint.
- If you need translation or interpreting services.

A Comment is - a suggestion on how we could improve something or make a change to a service”

All comments will be acknowledged, considered and where appropriate, acted upon and we will always give feedback to the person making the comment.

A Compliment is - “When you tell us we have done something well, you are satisfied with our service or you are satisfied with the way we have acted”

We will acknowledge all compliments and make sure that the appropriate people know about the appreciation that you express.

A complaint is - “When you tell us that

- We did not deliver a service on time
- We gave you the wrong information
- You received a poor quality service
- You were unhappy with the level of customer care you received

For the purpose of this policy, a complaint is not any of the following:

- A request for service or information
- A first report of a fault or defect
- A question about a Solon policy
- A matter for which there is an alternative route of appeal (i.e. someone objecting to an offer made under the homelessness procedure)

See Appendix 1 for guidance on the different stages of a complaint.

How can I be sure that you will deal with my comment, compliment or complaint?

The Corporate Services Team will be responsible for monitoring and keeping records at all stages and will monitor the timescales and targets to maintain our aim to respond to all comments, compliments and complaints within set targets.

The following principles will be followed when dealing with your comments:

- 1 They will be dealt with promptly, courteously, systematically and fairly.
- 2 Where appropriate, they will be treated confidentially. If information is to be discussed with staff or external bodies, you will be asked for permission before any information is disclosed.
- 3 They will be used to improve and develop procedures and services.

Please remember!!!

Assistance to make a comment, compliment or complaint can be provided - please ask if you would like help.

Arrangements can be made for translation or interpreting services.

Solon's POLICY and PROCEDURE for COMPLAINTS **or what you can expect and how we look at your complaint**

The Complaints Process

We will make every effort to resolve your complaint as quickly as we can using Stage 1 of this process.

If we have done something wrong, we will apologise to you and make appropriate changes to services.

Stage 1

- 1 We will make sure that we deal with your complaint quickly and keep you up-to-date with what is going on.
- 2 We will write to acknowledge the complaint within 3 working days and let you know who will be dealing with it and how you will be contacted.
- 3 It may be that the first person you speak to can resolve the complaint. We will write to confirm that the complaint has been resolved and ask if you have any more comments. We always keep a record of the complaint so that we can learn from this complaints process.
- 4 If the complaint is not resolved straight away the Department Manager will deal with it.
- 5 The Department Manager will look into the complaint and contact you in writing within 10 working days with the outcome. They may contact you by phone or email to discuss the complaint in more detail. Sometimes a complaint can be complicated and it may take longer to be dealt with - the Department Manager will contact you to agree a date when we will give a full answer. It may be that during this time, the complaint is resolved and if this is the case and you are satisfied with the outcome, the complaint can be withdrawn.

Stage 2

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 1 you can ask for the Head of Department to investigate your complaint.

You need to give reasons why the response at stage 2 was not satisfactory. These could be the following:

- The complaint was not upheld and you feel it should have been
- The compensation amount offered was not in line with our policy or not offered where it should have been.

We ask that this be done within 2 months of the end of Stage 1.

You can make this request in any of the ways listed on page 1.

- 1 We will acknowledge your Stage 2 complaint within 3 working days and pass the details to the Head of Department.
- 2 The Head of Department will investigate the complaint, looking at the action taken to date, the outcome of Stage 1 and the outcome you were seeking. They will see if anything needs to be done differently and if so, make recommendations to sort out your complaint.
- 3 The Head of Department will respond within 10 working days of receiving the Stage 2 complaint and tell you the outcome of your complaint and tell you about your right to appeal to the Chair of the Complaints Panel.
- 4 Where the complaint is complicated the investigation may take longer than 10 working days, however, the Head of Department will agree with you a date by which the complaint will be resolved.

Stage 3 - Appeal

If you are not happy with the outcome of the Stage 2 investigation and response, you can request that the Complaints Panel hears your complaint.

You will need to give reasons why you believe that the responses you had from Stages 2 was not satisfactory:

- The complaint was not upheld and you feel it should have been

- The compensation amount offered was not in line with our policy or not offered where it should have been.

You should make the request within 2 months of receiving the outcome of Stage 2. (We will take requests up to 12 months, however the sooner the better to help resolve the complaint effectively).

The Complaint's Panel consists of three people. The panel can be made up of a combination of the Chief Executive, Board Members (including resident Board members), and an engaged resident.

1. We will acknowledge receipt of the request for an appeal within 3 working days.
2. We will prepare the paperwork for the Complaints Panel and send copies to you and all members of the panel within 7 working days. This paperwork must include a report written by the manager responsible for responding to the complaint at Stage 2. It must include an overview of the complaint, chronology of events and the information reviewed as part of previous responses.
3. You can send in further comments at this stage for consideration by the Complaints Panel.
4. The Complaints Panel will investigate the complaint, and may consult you and relevant staff if it needs further information. [They should give both you and the staff involved an opportunity to meet with them if required.](#)
6. The Panel will then have 20 working days to review the complaint and respond to you in writing with the results of its findings.

This letter will either:

- a) Give you a decision by the Panel and tell you that you have a right to refer your complaint to the Independent Housing Ombudsman Service if you are still not satisfied.

OR

- b) Invite you to a hearing - Examples where this may be appropriate might be when:
 - the issue is complex.
 - you cannot express yourself in writing.
 - what you say about your complaint and what the staff say are different.

What will happen?

- You will have at least a week's notice of the hearing.
- You will be asked to say whether you will come to the hearing.
- You can allow the Panel to meet without you being there.
- You can bring a friend, representative or advocate.
- We will offer help and assistance with travel arrangements and childcare.
- The hearing must be attended by a least two of the three Panel members in order to be able to make a judgement.

It is the Panel's decision whether to hold a hearing.

7. The Chair of the Panel will write giving you its decision within 5 working days of the hearing, and tell you of your right to refer your complaint to the Independent Housing Ombudsman Service within 12 months, if you are still dissatisfied.
8. The Panel will report back to the Board on any other policy matters or issues of concern that arise from the operation of the Complaints Process.

Designated People

- If you feel you are still not satisfied with the outcome or handling of your complaint, you can take it to the housing Ombudsman. However, from 1 April 2013, the Localism Act 2011 put in place new arrangements for dealing with complaints by social tenants against their landlords. This change means you can only escalate your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman once you have first approached your designated person.
- Tenant panels, MPs and councilors can all be 'designated persons' and these people will have the opportunity to play a more active role in resolving complaints at the local level. The benefit of this is that local people understand the issues that matter locally and may be the best people to offer solutions.
- These local representatives (designated people) will have an 8 week window to use their local knowledge and expertise to try to resolve issues. If they cannot resolve the issue within that period, you can refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman.
- To help 'designated persons' carry out their role effectively, the government have issued guidance and helpful information via a free web-based guide. This guide sets out the context for the changes, clarifies roles and relationships and identifies helpful tips to support 'designated persons' make the most of their new role. The guide, along with a list of frequently asked questions, can be found at:
www.nationaltenants.org/designatedperson.

Currently, we don't have a 'designated tenant panel' member. This will change in the future if we have willing volunteers. For now this means that your designated person is likely to be your MP or councilor.

Independent Housing Ombudsman

If your complaint has been through a designated person and hasn't been resolved, then the housing Ombudsman is the next option.

The contact details are:

Housing Ombudsman Service
Exchange Tower
Harbour Exchange Square
London
E14 9GE

Telephone : 0300 111 3000 (lines are open Monday to Friday from 9:15 to 17:15)

Fax : 020 7831 1942

Email : info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Website

www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

The Corporate Services Team will make the relevant files and records available to the Investigating Officer on request and we will co-operate fully with the investigation.

Any determinations made by the Ombudsman will be implemented promptly and in full.

What is the role of our regulators in our complaints process?

Our regulators, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), will only get involved in dealing with complaints about the service if they believe that there is a risk of 'serious detriment' to a resident or potential resident.

Examples of serious detriment could be:

- health and safety
- loss of home
- unlawful discrimination
- loss of legal rights
- financial loss

How can I contact the HCA?

If you want to report something you feel represents serious detriment, you can get in touch with the HCA in a number of ways:

- By telephoning 0300 1234 500 to speak to the regulator's Referrals and Regulatory Enquiries Team.

- By writing to:

Referrals and Regulatory Enquiries Team
The Social Housing Regulator
Second Floor
Lateral
8 City Walk
Leeds
LS11 9AT

- By emailing: mail@homesandcommunities.co.uk

Monitoring

For the purpose of monitoring complaints, Solon will use Housemark to compare performance with other housing providers. Solon will therefore use Housemark guidance to measure its performance information.

Resolving your complaint

All Managers will consider the appropriate remedy in a particular case. For example: "aborted appointment" – the first remedy here would be to rearrange the appointment within a time that is suitable for the customer.

Where a complaint is justified and upheld, the reply will include an apology. Where there is also evidence of financial loss resulting directly from the subject of the complaint, consideration will be given to appropriate recompense.

Please see the Compensation Policy for further information.

Misconduct of Employees

Solon will discuss causes of complaints with staff responsible for them to ensure they understand the issues and impact on residents, and ensure they take action to avoid the problem recurring. This could result in disciplinary procedure being invoked, should the complaint be relating to misconduct of an employee, which would result in an investigation.

This could include, taking disciplinary action against staff and if the misconduct is serious, could lead to dismissal.

Unacceptable behaviour

On rare occasions we receive complaints from individuals whose actions or behaviour we consider unacceptable. Such complainants have the potential to consume resources and cause stress for our staff whilst achieving no benefits for customers and service users.

In these instances we aim:

- To deal fairly, honestly, consistently and appropriately with all complainants, including those whose actions we consider unacceptable.
- To provide a service that is accessible to everyone who is entitled to it. However, we retain the right, where we consider complainants actions to be unacceptable, to restrict or change such access.
- To ensure that other residents and our staff do not suffer any disadvantage from complainants who act in an unacceptable manner.
- We acknowledge that people may act out of character in times of trouble or distress. There may have been upsetting or distressing circumstances leading up to a complaint.

We consider the following to be unacceptable behaviour:

- Aggressive or abusive behaviour
- Unreasonable demands

In order to deal with these situations we may have to restrict contact in relation to the complaint. We can offer contact through a third party in extreme situations.

The threat or use of physical violence, verbal abuse, or harassment towards staff is likely to result in the ending of all direct contact with the perpetrator. Incidents may be reported to the Police.

We do not deal with correspondence or other forms of communication which is abusive to staff or contains allegations that lack substantive evidence. When this happens we will tell the sender that we consider their language offensive, unnecessary, and unhelpful. Whenever possible we will ask them to stop using such language and state that we will not respond to them if they do not stop.

Staff will end telephone calls if the caller is considered aggressive, abusive, or offensive. The staff member taking the call has the right to make this decision, tell the caller that the behaviour is unacceptable, and end the call if the behaviour does not stop.

Do Solon do anything else with my comment, compliment or complaint?

All feedback from residents is taken very seriously.

All of your comments, compliments and complaints are monitored and used to make changes to services where they are needed.

Obviously if we get some positive feedback we will keep the service as it is! It is just as important to know that we are doing something the right way for you.

We will let you know if something you have said to us has meant that we have changed the way we do things. We will do this by keeping you up-to-date in the newsletter. We may also write to you personally to let you know.

Can I help make changes to services on a regular basis?

We invite all of our residents to come along to our resident groups, events and to comment on any of our services at any time. By doing this you can help to make changes to our services to make sure they suit your needs. We actively welcome feedback.

Contact our Resident Involvement Coordinator on 0117 9167768 or at solon@solonswha.co.uk for more info.

Appendix 1 – Housemark guidance for Stages of a complaint to which Solon adheres:

Stage 0

- A Stage 0 complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction which is resolved at the first point of contact, sometimes called an informal complaint. An example would be a tenant who telephones to report that a contractor has failed to meet an AM appointment and the staff member receiving the call is able to arrange an alternative appointment, at a convenient time for the tenant, there and then.
- Some landlords may not currently collect data on Stage 0 complaints. It is recommended that landlords record all Stage 0 complaints as these are service failures and examples of issues that could escalate if not dealt with effectively at an early stage.

Stage 1

- A Stage 1 complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction that is not able to be resolved at first contact.
- Stage 1 complaints require investigation and a full written response issued by the service manager.
- The complainant should be given details of how to progress to the next stage of the procedure and a deadline for doing so.

Stage 2

- A complaint progresses to Stage 2 upon notification from the complainant that the complaint was not resolved at Stage 1.
- Stage 2 complaints require internal management review by an alternative manager or specialist team.
- Stage 2 is a review stage – it is not an appeal nor is it intended that further investigation should be undertaken or new information provided.

Stage 3

- A complaint reaches Stage 3 upon notification from the complainant that the complaint was not resolved at Stage 2.
- Stage 3 complaints provide independent internal review, often by a complaints panel. Again, it is not intended that further investigation should be undertaken or new information be provided at this stage.
- Stage 3 marks the final stage in the organisation's internal complaints procedure.