

Customer Complaints & Concerns Policy

Linked strategies	All Corporate Strategies
Version	4
Date approved by (State by whom and when)	EMT – 26 February 2021
Policy level	2
Agreed by Union (If applicable)	Not applicable
Date effective (Subject to staff consultation)	Not applicable
Date of next review	3 years from above date
Policy Owner	Head of Customer Excellence

1 Policy Statement

1.1 Greatwell Homes aim to provide great services to our customers. One of the ways in which we can ensure this, is by listening and responding to the views of our customers by responding positively to complaints and putting mistakes right when things have gone wrong. Greatwell Homes welcomes customer complaints and concerns as we see them as a great way of learning how we can do things better.

1.2 We aim to provide a complaints service that:

- Ensures customers are aware of how to make a complaint and their right to access the Housing Ombudsman service.
- Is fair, impartial, and easily accessible to all customers.
- Is customer focused and takes account of individual circumstances.
- Puts things right (where appropriate) in a timely and effective manner.
- Uses learning from complaints to improve services.

2 Scope

2.1 This policy applies to all concerns and complaints made by any customer or their representative and anyone affected by a service Greatwell Homes provide, including those services provided by a contractor working on behalf of Greatwell Homes.

2.2 Where an external appeals process is being pursued e.g., a leasehold valuation tribunal or in a court of law the complaint will be closed, and the external process will be followed. The decision of the external process will be final and a complaint on the same issue cannot be reopened or made for the first time.

2.3 This policy does not apply to staff members who wish to complain about Greatwell Homes. Staff members should refer to Greatwell Homes Grievance Policy and Procedure.

3 Definition

3.1 **Customer** - A tenant, leaseholder, shared owner of Greatwell Homes or an individual receiving a service from us. Anyone else affected by the services we provide or the actions of our staff, agents, or contractors whilst they are working on Greatwell Homes business who wishes to complain, will have their proposed complaint assessed by the Head of Customer Experience who will determine if the complaints process will be applied.

3.2 **'Customer concern'** – This is where a customer is unhappy due to something going wrong with our service delivery and we can resolve the matter quickly (within 3 working days) at an operational level with little or no investigation and to the satisfaction of our customer.

3.3 **'Customer complaint'** – as defined by the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code (1.2) a complaint is *"an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the*

standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents”

This is where a customer remains unhappy or is unhappy due to:

- A customer concern being unresolved
- Something going wrong with our service delivery which cannot be put right quickly at a service level and requires investigation

3.4 **‘Complaints Officer’** – as specified within the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code 3.1 landlords must have a person or team assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling. The Code refers to that person or team as the ‘complaints officer’. This role does not have to be solely dedicated to complaints.

The Complaints Officer investigating complaints will:

- Act sensitively and fairly when handling complaints
- Be trained to receive complaints and deal with distressed and upset customers
- Have access to staff at all levels to facilitate quick resolution of complaints
- Have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve complaints quickly and fairly

3.5 Examples of things which we will not deal with as ‘customer concerns’ or complaints are:

- An initial request for service
- An initial request for information
- Dissatisfaction with a policy
- Anti-social Behaviour
- Allocation decisions by the local authority
- Insurance claims
- Complaints by staff in relation to terms and conditions of service
- General correspondence from Councillors & MPs not directly related to a complaint.
- There are legal proceedings concerning a specific matter, inclusive of complaints regarding disrepair (*this applies **only** when papers have been served in the courts*)
- Matters that have previously been considered under the complaints policy; however, where the problem is a reoccurring issue, we will consider older reports as part of the background to the complaint

If we do not accept a complaint, a detailed explanation will be provided setting out the reason why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Housing Ombudsman.

3.6 **Persistent and unreasonable Complainants** (and/or anyone acting on their behalf) may be deemed to be a ‘vexatious complainant’ where:

- They persist in pursuing a complaint when the complaints process has been properly implemented and exhausted (in such instances the complainant will have been advised of his or her right to approach the Ombudsman).
- They change the substance of a complaint or continually raising new issues or seek to prolong contact by continually raising further concerns.
- They are unwilling to accept documented evidence as being factual or deny receipt of an adequate response despite correspondence specifically answering their questions or do not accept that facts can sometimes be difficult to verify when a long period of time has elapsed.
- They do not clearly identify the precise issues which they wish to be investigated, despite reasonable efforts of staff, or focus on a trivial matter to an extent that it is out of proportion to its significance and continue to focus on this point.
- They have been verbally abusive or threatening towards a staff member or they are continually disrespectful or derogatory to other customers.
- They have, while addressing a registered complaint, made an excessive number of contacts, placing unreasonable demands on staff or display unreasonable demands or expectations and fail to accept that these may be unreasonable.

3.7 Where we categorise a customer as a 'vexatious complainant', we may refuse them access to our complaints process. This categorisation is at our discretion and will make sensitively taking account of customer needs, including if we have applied our reasonable adjustment principles. We will advise any customer where we are considering this categorisation, providing them with an opportunity to address their behaviour and an action plan for how we will manage their contact should their behaviour continue. If we believe there is an underlying health issue driving the behaviour we will work with other agencies and organisations who may be able to offer appropriate support to the customer.

4 Policy Principles

4.1 Through the implementation of this policy Greatwell Homes will ensure:

- Our approach to customer concerns and complaints is clear, simple, and accessible to all customers receiving a service from us.
- We are committed to supporting customers, in accessing this service where a health impairment may otherwise preclude them from doing so.
- Complaints are dealt with promptly, politely, and fairly.
- We are compliant with Regulatory Standards and relevant legislation including data protection. And the Equality Act 2010.
- We put things right where they have gone wrong and learn from the outcomes.
- Customers have the opportunity to tell us how they think we have handled their complaint.
- Our performance in relation to complaint handling is transparent to our customers.
- We provide early advice to customers on their right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service.

5 Raising a Concern or Complaint

- 5.1 Our expected level of service is set out within our Customer Service standards which have been agreed with our customers. Our Landlord obligations to customers and customers obligations to us are set out clearly within the tenancy or lease agreement.
- 5.2 Customer Concerns or Complaints can be made via our website, *social media, telephone or in person to a staff member of Greatwell Homes. (*concerns and complaints raised via social media will only be responded to via a private, direct message to ensure that confidentiality and privacy is maintained).
- 5.3 A concern will be referred to a member of Greatwell Homes staff deemed to be the most suitable to deal with the issue, who will aim to resolve the issue as quickly as possible directly with the customer.
- 5.4 We would expect to be able to be resolving a 'customer concern' within 3 working days.
- 5.5 If a customer concern cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of the customer and the customer wishes to make a complaint, the issue will become a formal complaint and will be handled by a dedicated 'Complaints Officer'.
- 5.6 We would expect to be able to resolve a formal complaint within 10 working days. The Complaints Officer will monitor the case until full resolution. In exceptional circumstances where this timescale is not possible, we will provide a valid reason to our customer, regularly communicating until the complaint is fully resolved.
- 5.7 All final responses will be in writing to the customer. We will always make the customer aware of their right to escalate their complaint, providing contact details for the Housing Ombudsman if they are not happy with our response.
- 5.8 Complaints must be lodged within 6 months of the event which is being complained about occurring.

6 Reasonable Adjustments

- 6.1 Complaints may be made with the assistance of a representative acting on a customer's behalf (such as a family member, friend, support worker, MP, or local councillor). The customer must provide us with their consent to deal with the representative.
- 6.2 On request, we will also provide customers with support to make a complaint i.e., helping write a letter, accept the complaint verbally. We will ask the customer their preferred method of communication.

7 Complaint Resolution

- 7.1 We will acknowledge all complaints within 3 working days. A complaints officer will be allocated to ensure the customer receives regular and accurate communication in their preferred method of communication.
- 7.2 The complaints officer will investigate the complaint fully and provide a detailed response in writing which will set out whether we uphold, partially uphold, or do not uphold the complaint. This response will be noted in detail on Greatwell Homes systems.
- 7.3 If the customer is dissatisfied with our response to their complaint, there is a right of appeal (stage 2) which may be exercised within 20 working days of our response. The customer will be asked to explain why they feel the issue is not resolved and what should be done differently. The complaint will be reviewed by a senior manager and a written response will then be provided within 20 working days. In exceptional cases where an extension is required to fully investigate and respond to the complaint, then an explanation to the complainant will be provided clearly outlining the timeframe when the response will be received. This will not **exceed a further 10 days without a good reason**.
- 7.4 If an extension beyond 10 working days is required to fully respond to the complaint, it should be agreed with both parties. If agreement of the proposed extension cannot be reached the Ombudsman's contact details will be provided to the complainant to allow them the opportunity to challenge our proposed timeframe/plan for responding.
- 7.5 Our Stage 2 determination letter will be our final response.
- 7.6 We will survey all customers making complaints to understand their satisfaction with our complaint handling.

8 Where the Customer is still unhappy with our final response

- 8.1 The customer is also able to refer their complaint directly to the Housing Ombudsman who would generally expect that it has passed through all our internal procedures first. Contact details for the Ombudsman are:

Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool L33 7WQ

Telephone: 0300 111 3000

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Website: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

- 8.2 The Housing Ombudsman will investigate the complaint and inform the customer, and Greatwell Homes of:
- The results of the investigation.
 - Details of any determination made against Greatwell Homes

9 Monitoring Delivery

9.1 Once closed, complaints will be analysed to:

- Assess whether we have kept to our service standards.
- Assess customer satisfaction with our complaints process.
- Identify any lessons to be learnt and trends
- Reported to Chair of Audit & Risk Committee
- Reported to Customer Assembly on quarterly basis

10 Implications for Customers

10.1 The Equality Act of 2010 makes it unlawful to discriminate against anyone on grounds of Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Race, Religion or Belief, Sex, Sexual Orientation, Marriage & Civil Partnership, Pregnancy & Maternity. Greatwell Homes supports its principles and is committed to the values of equality of opportunity and non-discrimination. A Privacy Impact Assessment and Equality Impact Assessment have been completed on this policy.

11 Performance Management

11.1 We will make use of the following performance indicators to monitor and report on the effectiveness of the service. These will be reported to our Board (quarterly), Executive Management Team (EMT) and customers.

KPI - % of customers satisfied with complaint handling

12 Responsibility and Decision Making

12.1 The table below illustrates the structure for responsibility and decision making in relation to this policy.

Person Responsible	Scope
Head of Customer Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overall responsibility for ensuring that all activities are undertaken, and all performance measurements are met
Customer Experience Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Responsible for the overall day-to-day application and adherence to this policy and procedure (Lead Complaints Officer)
Complaints Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Responsible for day-to-day application and adherence to this policy and procedure. They will be the named person handling the

	complaint through to conclusion, ensuring timely communication with the complainant. They will undertake an investigation of matters raised, acting quickly and fairly to resolve disputes. They will ensure all timeframes for responses laid out in the Code are met.
Operational Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All managers are responsible for reading and understanding of the policy and procedure
All staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All staff are responsible for reading and understanding of the policy and procedure

13 Review

13.1 This Policy will be reviewed every three years or in line with changes in legislation, whichever is the sooner, updates or recommendations for changes will be presented to EMT.

Associated Policies	Associated Procedures
Compensation Policy	Customer Complaints & Concerns Procedure
Anti-Social Behaviour Policy	Customer Service Standards
Data Protection and Retention Policy	
Health and Safety Policy	
Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy	