

Housing Service Complaints Policy

Introduction

Housing Services welcome all feedback from residents including complaints which provide an opportunity to remedy and to learn from mistakes when they occur. This policy sets out our approach to dealing with complaints and what council tenants and leaseholders can expect from this service.

At the time of writing, this policy is an interim arrangement pending emerging government policy/legislation. The Green Paper, 'A New Deal for Social Housing' published in August 2018 began a widespread consultation on areas for reforming consumer redress in the social housing sector. The changes include the potential removal of the 'Designated Person' stage prior to complainants approaching the Ombudsman and a shortening of the time complainants must wait before requesting a review of their complaint by the Ombudsman.

Scope

This policy applies to all Housing Services' Officers and all Council tenants and leaseholders.

Policy Statement

The Housing Service is subject to a regulatory requirement to publish a Complaints Policy that clearly sets out how Council tenants and leaseholders can make a complaint and what they can expect when they do so.

Housing Services are responsible for delivering Slough Borough Council's landlord function to its tenants and leaseholders. Whilst the service complies with corporate policies and procedures as far as possible, the policy also reflects the regulatory and legislative requirements that apply to social housing landlords and their duty to their tenants and leaseholders.

Complaints can be made in a range of ways, including:

- through the Council's website using the online form which can be found at https://slough-self.achieveservice.com/service/Neighbourhood_Services_complaints_and_comments
- by e-mail sent to any officer or to the dedicated complaints e-mail address https://slough-self.achieveservice.com/service/Neighbourhood_Services_complaints_and_comments
- in writing to Housing Services, Slough Borough Council, St Martins Place, 51 Bath Road, Slough SL1 3UF
- by telephone on 01753 875440.

Assistance will be given to residents who require help or support to make a complaint, including information on independent advice or support services available to them, for example Shelter Thames Valley and how they can access this support.

Serious Detriment

Where a complaint is about or may cause or risk serious detriment to a tenant or leaseholder (or a potential tenant or leaseholder) this will automatically be directed to the Housing Service Lead to ensure that urgent action is taken to remedy the situation and remove any risk or threat to residents' health and wellbeing.

Complaints Procedure

The Housing Services' complaints procedure has three stages:

Stage One

At stage one, complaints will be acknowledged within 2 working days of receipt and investigated and responded to by the relevant manager within 10 working days of receipt.

Wherever possible we aim to provide a full, comprehensive response within the 10 working day deadline, however there may be occasions where the complaint is so complex that a full response will take longer. In these circumstances residents will be advised of the reasons why the timescale is likely to be exceeded and an alternative timescale will be agreed with them.

If the complainant is unhappy with our response at Stage One, they can ask for their complaint to be escalated to Stage Two. The request must state which aspects of the response they are dissatisfied with.

Stage Two

At Stage Two of the process, complaints will be acknowledged within 2 working days of receipt and investigated and responded to by a senior manager within 10 working days of receipt. If the resident remains unhappy with the response at Stage Two, they can ask for their complaint to be escalated to Stage Three of the process. The request must state which aspects of the response they are dissatisfied with.

Stage Three

At Stage Three of the process, Council tenants can wait 8 weeks before asking the Housing Ombudsman to review their complaint. Alternatively (or as well as) they can ask for their complaint to be reviewed by a 'Designated Person' who, depending on the nature or complexity of the complaint, could be:

- a locally elected member; or
- The Resident Complaints Panel consisting of up to five Council tenants

Once a complaint is escalated to Stage Three this will be acknowledged within 2 working days and the complainant will be contacted to discuss their chosen review process. Stage Three complaints may be reviewed on paper/evidence based basis or heard in person by the Panel. The 'Designated Person' will aim to complete their review within 10 working days, however if more time is required due to availability, this will be negotiated and agreed with the complainant.

If the complainant remains unhappy with the response at Stage Three of the process and/or the conclusion reached by the 'Designated Person' we will advise them of independent organisations who can give further support, for example Shelter Thames Valley and information on how to access this support.

Learning From Complaints

The management of complaints will be monitored by the Housing Service Lead so that a consistent, fair and equitable approach is taken to managing complaints and any learning is shared across the service to support continuous improvement.

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