



Appendix B

POLICY DOCUMENT

Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy

POLICY TITLE:	Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy
LEAD OFFICER:	Head of Customer Services
DATE APPROVED:	April 2024
APPROVED BY:	St Leger Homes Board
IMPLEMENTATION DATE:	April 2024
DATE FOR NEXT REVIEW:	April 2028
ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE:	Customer Charter & Service Standards Dignity at Work Grievance Policy Compensation and Goodwill Policy Data Protection Policy Freedom of Information Policy Tenant Voice Strategy
ASSOCIATED CUSTOMER PUBLICATIONS:	Corporate Plan 2024 - 2028 Customer Access Strategy Equality and Diversity Strategy
TEAMS AFFECTED:	All Staff and Board Members and the Member Responsible for Complaints
THIS POLICY REPLACES WITH EFFECT FROM 1st OCTOBER 2022:	Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy

DOCUMENT CONTROL

For guidance on completing this section please refer to the document version control guidance notes

Revision History

Date of this revision:	April 2024
Date of next review:	April 2028
Responsible Officer:	Head of Customer Services

Version Number	Version Date	Author/Group commenting	Summary of Changes
4.3	April 2024	Head of Customer Services	Changes in response to the implementation of a revised Housing Ombudsman Complaint Code.

Policy Creation and Review Checklist

Action	Responsible Officer	Date Completed
Staff consultation through Trade Unions if applicable	Not applicable	
Trade Union consultation if applicable	Not applicable	
Stakeholder consultation if applicable	Consultation with Chair of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel and Secretary of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel	March 2024
Equality analysis carried out on the intranet	This is not a new Policy. Impact on equality is embedded within the Code and the Policy has been reviewed/changed to reflect this.	March 2024

NB. The above table must be completed on all occasions. The policy will not be accepted or approved by EMT without this information completed.

Table of Changes

Date of changes	Changes		
July 2019	Policy shortened in places to make more concise and to move to procedures where applicable Duplicate sections of policy removed Appeals section revised to reflect new approach to appeals using a tenant representative appeals panel. Removed reference to 'old' systems that were listed		
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	Added section setting out the different stages of the complaints process
July 2022	Changes in response to the review of the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Code.
September 2023	Updates to the policies and strategies list and changes to ensure compliance with the housing ombudsman's complaints code. Changes to how complaints are dealt with at Stage Two. Stage Two complaints will be investigated by a Head of Service to ensure ownership of complaints within respective service areas and to support performance against the Tenant Satisfaction Management measure on the time taken to respond to Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints. Tenant challenge will be provided by the Tenant and Resident Improvement Panel.
March 2024	Updates to the policy to reflect the changes arising from the amended Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Code which came into force on the 1 st of April 2024. The Code sets out our statutory requirements. Addition to the Policy to include complaints about building safety risk, or the performance of an accountable person or principal accountable person, in a high-rise residential building.
May 2024	Typo corrected at section 5.7 following reporting to Board.

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POLICY DOCUMENT

Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 St. Leger Homes of Doncaster (SLHD) aims to provide the highest standard of service that is efficient, responsive and customer orientated, however we accept, that on occasions, we may give individuals cause to complain.
- 1.2 We recognise that customers have a right to complain, comment and compliment, about the provision, or non-provision, of services. As such, SLHD aims to provide an accessible, fair and inclusive complaints procedure for tenants, leaseholders and stakeholders; our customers. SLHD takes all complaints seriously as an important part of a commitment to customer care, always putting the customers at the heart of what we do, day in day out.
- 1.3 We view all complaints received as an opportunity to continuously improve its services to meet our customer's needs by learning from and regularly monitoring all complaints. We will publicise how we have learnt from complaints.
- 1.4 We also want to know when we do things right, and therefore we equally value our customer's comments and compliments as well.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 The purpose of our Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy is to ensure that:
 - any customer who is not happy with the service received (or not received) from SLHD has an accessible and easy to use method for making a complaint, which offers rapid action and response;

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- the customer can be confident that their complaint will be dealt with confidentially, effectively and fairly, even if the outcome is not to their satisfaction;
- SLHD uses complaints and comments positively, so that by listening to our customers and taking subsequent action to learn from our mistakes, we will continue to improve our services.
- Board Members, partnering groups and all members of staff understand the need to handle complaints, comments and compliments through the correct operation of this policy;
- Customers are aware of their right and how ask for their complaint to be reviewed if they are not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint.
- If customers remain dissatisfied after their complaint has been through all stages of the internal complaints procedure SLHD will advise of their right to complain to their designated person (which is their MP or Councillor) or the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) or Housing Ombudsman (HO) (dependent on the service area the dispute relates to).

2.2 All compliments and comments received by SLHD are recorded and promoted to all staff. Compliments are used to ensure improved and consistent service delivery. The Complaints Policy supports a number of other key policies which impact on our customers. These include the Repairs and Maintenance Policy, the Housing Policy, the Damp Mould and Condensation Policy, the Domestic Abuse Policy, the Allocation Policy, the Sustainable Tenancy Fund Policy. Further information about these policies can be found on our website at [St.Leger Homes | Policies and Strategies \(stlegerhomes.co.uk\)](http://St.Leger Homes | Policies and Strategies (stlegerhomes.co.uk) .) .

3. Scope

- 3.1 This policy relates to anyone who receives or requests a service from SLHD.
- 3.2 This policy is relevant to any customer, tenant or resident who wants to make a complaint, comment or compliment about any SLHD service.

4. Complaints

4.1 What is a complaint?

Our definition of a complaint is:

- 4.2 An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by St Leger Homes, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of customers.

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- 4.3 The complainant does not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. Whenever a customer expresses dissatisfaction we will give the customer the choice to make complaint. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative will be handled in line with this Policy.
- 4.4 Where an issue is being reported for the first time, this will be treated as a service request, and we will take appropriate action to ensure it is dealt with. A service request is a request from a resident to the landlord requiring action to be taken to put something right. This is not recorded as a complaint and the customer will be informed this will be handled as a service request to be recorded, monitored and reviewed in accordance with internal procedures.
- 4.5 Where further enquiries are made about the same issue, the issue is of significant impact or where the customer advises they want to complain this would be recorded as a complaint.

Examples (as defined with the help of our tenants) are when we:

- do something wrong or badly;
- do not do something at all, that we should do;
- are impolite or unhelpful (this includes staff and contractors);
- do not provide a service within our specified times;
- fail to communicate as promised;
- fail to meet legal duties;
- providing wrong or misleading advice;
- failure to act within agreed policies, procedures or service standards;
- delays in undertaking work which cannot be explained within the terms of policy and procedure;
- bias or inequality of treatment;
- rudeness, offensiveness, attitude and actions of any SLHD staff member or representative;
- failure to keep appointments;
- if we have to make further enquiries to resolve a matter where a customer has expressed dissatisfaction or if the resident requests it, the issue must be logged as a complaint.

- 4.6 Examples where individuals may express dissatisfaction that would not be regarded as complaints are:

- the general law, unless wrongly applied;
- requests for new services;
- persons or bodies over which SLHD has no control;
- Where legal proceedings have started. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and the Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court;
- the subject of the complaint occurred, or the complainant became aware of the issue more than 12 months ago and/or is already subject to an on-going or resolved complaint. We will consider whether to apply discretion to accept complaints outside of this

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time lime where there are good reasons to do so.

- matters that have already been considered under the complaints policy;
- expressions of dissatisfaction made through a survey. We will, however, provide details of how a customer can complain.

4.7 Where a decision has been made not to accept a complaint, a detailed explanation must be provided to the resident setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman. We will not take a blanket approach to excluding complaints and will consider the circumstances of each complaint.

5. Responsibilities, and Reasonable Adjustments

5.1 Complaints, compliments and comments may be received in any format, by letter, telephone, email, web form, social media or face to face and to any member of the organisation, referred to as the Receiving Officer.

5.2 They can also be received via a Local Authority Councillor, Board Member, MP, Mayor's office or a 3rd party representative acting on behalf of a customer, with their consent, unless there is a legal basis, under the Data Protection Act 2018, to share personal information with a 3rd party representative without consent. 3rd party representatives can accompany the customer to any meetings.

5.3 Complaints about the services provided by a third party (e.g., a contractor or independent adjudicator) will be investigated and responded to in line with our complaints procedures.

5.4 Residents of high-rise residential buildings can use these procedures to make complaints about building safety or the performance of an accountable person or principal accountable person, which have been raised as service requests and where the complainant feels this is not being resolved.

5.5 Where a complaint is received via social media we will acknowledge the complaint using private messaging so that all details of the complaint and the complainant are confidential. We will then process the complaint and assign a dedicated Customer Relations Officer to deal with the complainant.

5.6 Where customers raise additional complaints during the investigation, these will be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related provided the stage 1 response has not been issued. Where the stage 1 response has been issued, where the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being investigated or it where it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues will be logged as a new complaint. The complaint will be investigated taking into account:

- All the details provided by the complainant in support of their case;

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- Whether or not the complainants has been treated fairly;
- Whether the complainant has experienced any unreasonable delays;
- The relevant policies and procedures of SLHD have been applied correctly ensuring that individual needs are taken into account;
- Consistency when dealing with an individual person and when dealing with other tenants and complaints;
- Clarity where responsibility lies for any action to resolve the complaint;
- Respect of confidentiality.

5.7 All responses to complaints will include:

- a response that is clear to read and free from jargon showing empathy and understanding
- the decision that has been reached;
- the reasons behind that decision, an outline of promises made to rectify the complaint (if applicable)
- who the complainant should contact if they are not happy with that decision and wish to take further action

6. Reasonable Adjustments

6.1 All St Leger Homes staff are trained in equality and diversity to embed understanding about where they may need to adapt normal policies, procedures, or processes to accommodate an individual’s needs. This is mandatory training, the compliance of which is monitored by our Organisational Development team.

6.2 Our Equality and Diversity Statement sets out that “We are committed to understanding more about the needs of our customers. Collecting, storing and using customer information appropriately enables us to tailor our services to meet their needs”.

6.3 In line with our Equality and Diversity Statement and commitments, we will support the needs of our diverse customers by adapting this policy, and other policies and associated procedures, to accommodate an individual’s needs. This includes taking into account the customer’s need and where appropriate changing work practices, for example, contact preferences providing correspondence on coloured paper where requested, having an accessibility compliant website, taking into account diversity when delivering our services and ensuring that our complaints procedures are accessible for all. We keep a record of disabilities and adjustments in our Housing Management System, where customers have provided these, and these are updated as customers contact us and through our Keeping in Touch visits.

6.4 A full copy of Equality and Diversity Statement can be found at [New Fairness and Equality Statement Launched \(stlegerhomes.co.uk\)](http://stlegerhomes.co.uk)

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7. Stages of the Complaint and Timescales

7.1 All complaints will be acknowledged within 5 working days from the day the complaint is received.

7.2 We will be clear which aspects of the complaint we are, and are not, responsible for and clarify any areas where this is not clear, setting out our understanding of the complaint when the complaint is logged. Where this is not clear we will ask for clarification.

7.3 There are two stages to the complaints process:

7.4 Stage 1

7.5 This is the first opportunity to resolve the customer's complaint. The majority of complaints will be resolved at this stage by the relevant Complaint Investigating Officer. If the customer is dissatisfied with the response the complaint can be escalated to Stage 2 of our procedures.

7.6 Complaints will be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 1 of the complaints procedure within 5 working days of the complaint being received. The day the complaint is received is classed as day zero of the 5 working days.

7.7 We aim to respond to most stage 1 complaints in writing within 10 working days of date of acknowledgement. This can take longer if the complaint is of a complex nature. Where this is the case, we will contact the customer to extend our response time, agreeing suitable intervals for keeping the customer informed and will provide the contact details of the Ombudsman. Any extension must be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) must be clearly explained to the resident.

7.8 Where customers raise additional complaints during the investigation, these will be incorporated into the stage 1 response, if they are related and the stage 1 response has not been issued.

7.9 Where the stage 1 response has been issued, the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being investigated or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues will be logged as a new complaint.

7.10 Stage 2

7.11 Stage 2 is our final response. If the customer is not satisfied with the answer they receive, they have the right to ask for a review. Customers do not have to explain their reasons for requesting a stage 2 consideration.

7.12 Complaints must only escalate to stage 2 once it has completed at stage one. A request for a review must be submitted by the complainant within

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20 working days of the date of the response letter. We will however take into account individual circumstances and make reasonable adjustments as appropriate.

- 7.13 Requests for stage 2 must be acknowledged, defined and logged at stage 2 of the complaints procedure, within five working days of the escalation request being received.
- 7.14 A stage 2 response will be a review of the initial stage 1 response unless further investigation is required. This will depend on the information and reasons for escalation set out by the customer in their escalation request. If no new information is provided, or there is nothing that requires further investigation, we will complete a review of the investigation carried out at stage 1.
- 7.15 If new information is provided or the Stage 1 findings are disputed we will carry out a further investigation of these matters. If the issues raised are new and not related to the issues already being investigated, the new issue must be logged as a new complaint.
- 7.16 All reviews will be investigated in full by, a Head of Service unless the complaint can be resolved to the full satisfaction of the tenant.
- 7.17 The remit of the Head of Service is to be fair in their approach, independently investigating the complaint to come to a conclusion. The Head of Service will help SLHD to learn from their complaints and to challenge, where and when appropriate.
- 7.18 The Head of Service will be provided with:
- The original complaint, investigation and the Stage 1 response letter;
 - The details of the review and why the tenant is unhappy with the original decision;
 - Details of what the tenant would like to happen to resolve the complaint to their satisfaction;
- 7.19 Visits, inspections and any interviews the Head of Service may want to conduct will be co-ordinated by the Customer Relations Team.
- 7.20 We will issue a final response to the stage 2 within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.
- 7.21 If an extension is needed due to the complexity of the complaint we will inform the customer of the expected timescale for response. Any extension will be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) will be clearly explained. Where we do extend the timescale for responding we will provide contact details of the Housing Ombudsman.
- 7.22 Where it is deemed not appropriate for a complaint to be progressed to Stage 2 of the process, the complainant will be informed of this in writing.

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Reasons why a complaint would not be progressed to Stage 2 include:

- the general law, unless wrongly applied;
- requests for new services;
- persons or bodies over which SLHD has no control;
- Where legal proceedings have started. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and the Particulars of Claim, have been filed at court;
- the subject of the complaint occurred more than 12 months ago and/or is already subject to an on-going or resolved complaint;
- matters that have already been considered under the complaints policy

8. Unacceptable Behaviour and Unreasonably Persistent Complainants

8.1 SLHD is committed to dealing with complaints fairly and impartially and to providing a high-quality service to those who make them. As part of this service SLHD do not normally limit the contact complainants have with their offices.

8.2 Any restrictions placed on contact due to unacceptable behaviour will be proportionate and demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

8.3 However, SLHD will not tolerate behaviour by complainants which is unacceptable, for example, which is abusive, offensive, or threatening, or if complainants are unreasonably persistent in contacting SLHD concerning the same issues. We will take action to protect staff from that behaviour.

8.4 When a complainant's behaviour has been considered as being unacceptable or unreasonably persistent, we will explain why we find their behaviour to be unacceptable or unreasonable and ask them to change it. We will tell them that, if the unacceptable behaviour or unreasonable persistency continues, we will take action to restrict their contact with our offices.

8.5 The decision to restrict access to our offices will be taken by the Head of Service and/or Executive Management Team (EMT). Any restrictions imposed will be appropriate and proportionate.

8.6 We will advise the complainant of the action we are taking and that they can appeal the decision we have made to the Chief Executive. We will agree a review period at the outset. If behaviour has not improved, we will provide an explanation as to why the restriction will remain in force for a further period pending the next agreed review date.

8.7 The options SLHD are most likely to consider are:

- requesting contact in a particular form (i.e., by letters only);
- requiring contact be made with a named officer only;
- restricting telephone calls to specified days and times;
- requesting contact is made through a third party;

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- asking the complainant to enter into an agreement about their conduct;
- if the complainant is a tenant, whether it may be treated as a breach of the tenancy agreement;

8.8 In all cases we will write to the complainant telling them why we consider his or her behavior to be unacceptable or unreasonable and explaining what actions we are taking and the duration of that action.

9. Unacceptable Behaviour

9.1 Where a complainant continues to behave in a way that is unacceptable, SLHD may decide to terminate contact with that complainant and discontinue any investigation into their complaint.

9.2 Where the behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate safety and welfare of SLHD and the City of Doncaster Council staff members, Councillors or any representatives working on behalf of SLHD/Doncaster Council, members of the public, and other tenants, we will consider other options:

- advise the complainant of their tenancy obligations;
- report the matter to the police;
- consider taking legal action;
- include on SLHD Potentially Violent Persons' register;
- if the complainant is a SLHD tenant, whether it may be treated as a breach of the tenancy agreement.

9.3 Depending on the circumstances we may not give the complainant prior warning of what action is taken.

10. Unreasonably Persistent Complainants

10.1 Where a complainant who persists in communicating with SLHD about the same issues, we may decide to terminate contact with them. In such cases we will read all correspondence from that complainant, but unless there is fresh evidence, or it is a new complaint then we will acknowledge receipt and place it on file..

10.2 All new complaints from people who have been unreasonably persistent complainants will be treated on the merits of the complaint and not the person.

11. Compliments and Comments

11.1 Compliments

11.2 A compliment is when someone takes the trouble to tell us that a person, team, or service we provide has exceeded their expectations and is worthy of praise and compliments should be unprompted and unsolicited. It is not a compliment if it has been given when completing a satisfaction survey.

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11.3 All compliments received will be acknowledged and where a customer has provided a member of staff's name, we will pass the compliment on to the member of staff or/and the team concerned, via an email from the relevant Director.

11.4 A selection of compliments will be shared each month in our staff magazine and all compliments uploaded onto SLHD's intranet site for all staff members to view.

11.5 **Comments**

11.6 A comment is when a customer takes the trouble to tell us what changes they think would assist us in improving the delivery of our services.

11.7 Comments are also encouraged from our customers and are taken seriously as they also enable us to view our services from the customers' experience. Comments are acknowledged within 3 working days.

11.8 All comments are sent to the relevant Service Managers for them to record and action if any improvements are identified to the services they deliver and are used as "You Said, We Did" feedback

12. **Service Promises**

12.1 SLHD is committed to continuous improvement in service delivery.

12.2 Our Service Standards for Compliments, Comments and Complaints are:

- We will make it easy and straightforward for our customers to make a complaint, comment, or compliment, publicising our service on our website and other platforms;
- We will acknowledge and respond to your complaint and compliment in line with our Service Standards and published timescales and keep you informed if we cannot meet the timescale, explaining why and when we will respond;
- We will ensure that you will have a full explanation to your complaint in your preferred format;
- We will tell you if changes have been made to services following your complaint as "You said, We Did" reports on our website;
- We will publish the quarterly performance figures on the SLHD website on how we are meeting our set timescales;
- If we are unable to comply with the Code due to exceptional circumstances, such as a cyber incident, we will inform the Ombudsman, provide information to customers who may be affected, and publish this on our website.

13. **Monitoring and Review**

13.1 We record the numbers of and reasons for complaints as well as the information necessary to ensure response times are met.

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- 13.2 Regular reports are produced for all levels of the business highlighting any trends, which may suggest possible improvements in areas of service provision or practices. Customer journeys are also created and shared at all levels, highlighting a true journey of the reasons which led to the customer having to complain which then prompts changes to services.
- 13.3 We will publish this Policy, information about the Housing Ombudsman and their contact details, and our self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Code, on our website and ensure we have a nominated Member Responsible for Complaints.
- 13.4 We will report annually on our complaints performance and service improvements to our governing body, or equivalent and publish this and the governing body's (or equivalent) response on our website.

14. Training

- 14.1 An overview is provided to all new starters at induction covering high level information to recognise and try and resolve a complaint.
- 14.2 More detailed training is provided to members of staff who investigate and respond to formal complaints. Training is also provided to tenant representative who have a role in scrutinising how we are dealing with complaints.

15. Partnership working

- 15.1 We work in partnership with the City of Doncaster Council and other partners to resolve any joint complaints.

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