



PLYMOUTH COMMUNITY HOMES CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS AND COMMENTS POLICY

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Lead Directorate:	Corporate and Manufacturing Services
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Approved by:	Head of Customer Experience & Assurance

1. Introduction

1.1 Policy Summary

Plymouth Community Homes (PCH) is committed to delivering excellent services to all of its customers.

Customer feedback is at the heart of PCH business; both positive and negative feedback helps the organisation to understand, monitor, and assess customers' needs and expectations. It is therefore important that PCH makes it as easy as possible for customers to express their views.

Each and every PCH staff member has a responsibility to ensure feedback, in particular negative feedback, is logged using our complaint monitoring system so that it can be addressed appropriately. PCH intends to deal with complaints at the first point of contact and as quickly as possible.

1.2 Associated policies and procedures:

- Customer Service Standards
- Tenants Compensation and Payments Policy
- Reasonable Behaviour Policy
- Whistle-blowing Policy
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy

2. Policy Statement

This policy sets out how PCH will deal with customer feedback; how it will be used to understand customer expectations and experiences, and to improve service delivery. The policy applies to all PCH residents, staff members and board members.

Customer Feedback in the context of this policy refers to the following:

- Compliments
- Comments and suggestions
- Complaints
- MP and councillor enquiries and those in an agreed advocacy role

2.1 Aim

The aim of this policy is that high quality, customer focused services are provided at all times, and that service failures are identified and acted upon quickly. To enable this to happen:

- Customer feedback about services will be encouraged, accepted in any format (including through social media), and dealt with in a fair and timely manner
- Complaints will be resolved at the earliest opportunity
- Members of staff will be trained in how to identify feedback and respond to complaints
- Customer feedback will form part of the Performance Management Framework, being used to shape services, and reviewed by the Customer Focus Committee
- Customers will be advised of how their feedback is used

If PCH is not responsible for dealing with an issue raised through feedback we will aim to identify who is and refer the matter to the relevant organisation with agreement from the customer.

3. Feedback

3.1 Compliments, Comments, and Suggestions

Compliments are usually received when a customer is very satisfied with the service they have received or when they feel that a member of staff has gone the extra mile

in providing that service. All customers are encouraged to tell us when they feel that they have received outstanding service, or when they have suggestions for how a service can be improved. This information will be recorded so that it can be used to improve services in the future.

Feedback is given to the individual or department concerned and nominations may be made to the PCH Beacon Award which recognises outstanding customer service. Compliments will be taken into account as part of customer satisfaction monitoring.

3.2 Complaints

A complaint is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, action or lack of actions by us or our contractors, where a response is required whether or not it is requested”.

It should be clarified that the following are not considered to be complaints:

- A first request for a service
- A request for information about or a clearer explanation of our policies
- Contact for a further explanation of a decision
- Cases raised by a private tenant of a leaseholder
- Requests from MPs and councillors or their advocates which will be addressed as part of a separate protocol

Complaints will also not be considered for:

- Issues raised more than six months after the relevant events (unless it is an ongoing issue that PCH is aware of or illegal or improper activity that is alleged)
- Cases where a final decision has been made and no further appeal is possible
- Cases where legal action is already being taken about the issue raised

Complaints relating solely to the behaviour of a staff member will be referred to the appropriate line manager for consideration under the relevant disciplinary or capability policy. The complainant will not be told the detail of internal investigations when they fall under these policies but will still receive a response to their complaint.

3.3 Complaint Handling

Customers can raise a complaint with PCH in a number of different ways. This includes: to a PCH staff member, through the PCH website, using social media (where we have a presence), at our Shop at Frankfort Gate, our Head Office at

Plumer House, by telephone, by email or in writing.

Any PCH staff member can take a complaint, log it on our complaints system and allocate it to the right department and Investigating Officer independent to the complaint to respond. The Investigating Officer will look at the complaint objectively while establishing if anything has gone wrong and if any action could be taken to put it right. The Investigating Officer will also consider any learning from the complaint and notify the relevant departments.

The following principles apply for all complaints handling:

- Complaints are dealt with as quickly as possible and within the timeframes set out in this policy
- The customer is provided with a clear explanation of the outcome of our investigation including the reasons for the decision, an apology where appropriate, and what action we will take.

3.4 Advocacy & Support

An advocate is someone who acts on the complainant's behalf. They are usually used when a customer does not have the confidence or capability to complain themselves. PCH will accept complaints from advocates although signed authorisation from the customer will be required before we can discuss the matter with them. An advocate may be a family member or friend. Staff members can also support customers to complain as long as there is no conflict of interest with their own role. If this is the case an independent advocate should be sought which PCH may be able to assist with.

3.5 Complaint Stages

Stage 1

We aim to remedy every complaint as early as possible as we recognise that the longer a complaint continues the more dissatisfied customers' can become. It is important that we record, respond and learn from complaints and to do this effectively we need to record each complaint made.

If a customer is dissatisfied with the standard of service, action or lack of actions by us or our contractors and raises this with us we will register their dissatisfaction at Stage 1 in our internal complaint process. We will acknowledge the complaint either in person, on the telephone or in writing. All complaints will be **acknowledged within 2 working days of being received by us.**

At Stage 1, the complaint will be reviewed by a manager / supervisor who will fully investigate the issues raised.

We aim to provide a full response to **100% of complaints within 10 working days**. Occasionally this may not be possible and we will agree a suitable timeframe for response with the customer when this happens.

The full complaint response will advise the customer that if they are still not satisfied they have the option to escalate their complaint to the second stage of our internal complaint process.

Stage 2 - Reviewing the complaint

If the customer is not satisfied with the outcome of their complaint at Stage 1 and wishes for the matter to be reviewed they should let us know at the latest within 1 month of the date of our response. The customer should clearly state the outcome, remedy or recourse they are seeking as a resolution to the issue. On receipt, a senior manager will complete an investigation and review of the complaint.

The senior manager will provide a response within 20 working days from the date the Stage 2 complaint was received unless otherwise agreed with the customer.

The response to the complaint will advise the customer that if they are still not satisfied they may request that their complaint is considered at the final stage of the PCH internal complaint process. This is conducted by a complaint review panel comprised of members of the PCH Board.

Stage 3 – The Complaints’ Panel

If the customer is still not satisfied they should advise PCH at the latest within 1 month of the date of our response. The Customer Assurance Team will convene a complaint review panel consisting of a minimum of 3 members; members of PCH Board, and/or representatives from other Housing Association Boards. The panel are advised by a PCH Director without responsibility for the area to which the complaint refers.

The Customer Assurance Team will produce a background complaint report which will also be forwarded to the complainant. Further detail or information may be requested from the customer at this stage to assist the panel in reviewing the complaint.

The customer will be invited to attend the panel to detail their complaint and the resolution they require. The customer may be accompanied by an appropriate companion who may include a friend or relative to provide support. The companion will not be able to discuss the complaint with the panel on the customer’s behalf unless permission to do so has been given by the Chair of the panel prior to the meeting. Representatives cannot be someone acting in a legal capacity. Legal challenges will be addressed outside of the PCH complaints procedure by the PCH Legal Department.

Should a situation arise where the complainant is not able to attend in person; arrangements will be made for the complaint to be presented using another form of communication, e.g. in writing, or by conference call

PCH members of staff who may have had involvement in the complaint may also be interviewed as part of the panel process to understand what action has been taken. The Chair of the Panel will write to the customer within 10 working days of the meeting to confirm the outcome. The written response will confirm details of the next steps of appeal if the complainant wishes to pursue the matter further outside of the PCH internal complaint process.

4. Designated Persons

The Localism Act 2011 provides that PCH residents can ask for their complaint to be considered by a 'designated person' once it has exhausted PCH complaints procedure. A 'designated person' can be an MP, a local Councillor or a recognised Tenant Panel.

The 'designated person' will either try to help resolve the complaint with PCH or refer it to the Housing Ombudsman, although they have no legal authority over the internal complaints procedure. If the problem is still not resolved following the intervention of the designated person, either they or the complainant can refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.

Complaints to the Ombudsman do not have to be referred by a designated person if at least 8 weeks has passed from the date of the review panel's decision letter.

5. Complaints regarding debt advice

If a complaint relates to debt advice provided by Plymouth Community Homes, the Customer can request that the Financial Ombudsman looks into their complaint provided that:

- PCH has sent its final response to the complaint; or
- PCH has not sent its final response within eight weeks of the original complaint.

A copy of the Financial Ombudsman Service leaflet 'Your complaint and the ombudsman' will be provided to the customer with their stage 3 response, and a link to the leaflet will be available on the PCH website.

6. Compensation

PCH will, at its discretion, consider compensation for customers when there has been loss or damage. This compensation would normally take the form of a rent rebate, replacement items or a shopping voucher.

Compensation will not be awarded as standard practice; each claim will be considered on its own merit. There must be evidence to support the compensation

claim and receipts must be provided before any compensation is awarded. Only compensation requests made at the time of the initial complaint will be considered, and awards will only be made back to the date the service failure was first reported to PCH and only until the satisfactory resolution of the complaint.

Compensation will not be considered when:

- legal proceedings are underway or have taken place
- where PCH has not been negligent, or the loss or damage is the result of unforeseen circumstances (such as extreme weather)
- there is a current associated insurance claim against PCH

Where damage has not been caused by PCH and the loss is covered by the customer's own contents insurance, or the customer could reasonably have obtained such insurance, claims will not be considered.

If the customer has an outstanding debt with PCH, the compensation will be used to offset this in the first instance.

7. Personal Injury and Liability Claims

If the complainant makes a suggestion or claim that a failure in service by PCH has resulted in a personal injury or liability claim, the standard complaint procedure will be halted.

In these circumstances the complaint will be dealt with by the Customer Experience and Assurance Team who will liaise with our insurers before responding to the complainant. There will be no right of internal appeal for these types of cases.

8. Reasonable behaviour

We recognise that people who are unhappy about an issue may show signs of frustration when reporting a complaint; however, we will not tolerate unreasonable behaviour while trying to resolve a complaint. The PCH Reasonable Behaviour guidance outlines what will and will not be deemed acceptable and how PCH will deal with this. In essence PCH will not accept:

- Abusive or threatening behaviour towards PCH staff members or property
- Assaulting PCH staff members
- Damaging PCH property
- Refusing to cooperate with staff during the investigation
- Repeatedly contacting several members of staff about the same complaint, and making unnecessary demands on staff time
- Submitting repeat complaints, relating to the same events

- Continually raising new issues during the complaint investigation which should have been included in the original complaint.

Should the complainant fall within these categories, a decision can be made in conjunction with the Head of Customer Experience to halt the complaint process and refer directly to the Housing Ombudsman.

In these circumstances, the Investigating Officer will discuss the case with the Head of Customer Experience and Assurance and agree a course of action. This may include restricting who the complainant can contact, how and when, or stopping the investigation into the complaint altogether. The complainant will be notified that the behaviour is unacceptable and advised of the implications before further action is taken although in exceptional cases this may not be possible or appropriate.

If it is felt that during the management of the complaints process the relationship between the customer and PCH employees has broken down to such an extent it is felt beyond repair, then PCH reserve the right to cease communication with the customer and refer them to an advocate/designated person to act on their behalf.

9. Quality Checking

The standard of complaint responses and learning from complaints will be quality checked in a sample of cases to ensure quality and consistency.

10. MP and Councillor Enquiries

Enquiries received from an MP or councillor will be logged and processed under a separate contact protocol. A written response will be provided in these cases subject to customer authorisation.

11. Satisfaction Surveys

The Customer Experience and Assurance team will collect customer feedback on the complaint process using a range of methods including text messaging and telephone surveys. Customers will be asked a limited number of questions and the information will be used for both performance reporting and quality assurance monitoring.

12. Equality and Diversity

PCH will apply this policy consistently and fairly and will not discriminate against anyone based on any relevant characteristics, including those set out in the Equalities Act 2010.

PCH will make this policy available in other languages and formats on request. We will carry out an equality impact assessment on this policy, in line with our corporate procedure.

13. Monitoring and Review

We will monitor this policy to ensure it meets good practice and current legislation and will review it in accordance with our review timetable for all policies.