

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Unity is committed to providing high quality services which reflect the needs of our customers and are valued by them. It is extremely important for us to listen to the views of customers about the services we provide. When we get something wrong we have a mechanism that not only helps to put things right, but enables us to learn from our mistakes.
- 1.2. A good complaints procedure should:
 - be easily accessible and well publicised;
 - be simple to understand and use;
 - allow for speedy handling within an established timescale;
 - allow for keeping people informed of progress;
 - ensure a full and fair investigation;
 - respect people's desire for confidentiality;
 - provide an effective and appropriate response; and
 - contain a mechanism which informs service improvements
- 1.3. This procedure should be used in conjunction with the following documents.
 - Complaints reporting form
 - Standard letter templates
 - Complaints policy
 - Complaints handling guide for staff
 - Compensation policy & procedure
 - Complaints leaflet – Are you happy with our service
 - Complaints satisfaction feedback slip
 - Guidance for Board panel hearing

2. Receiving Complaints

- 2.1. Unity's complaints procedure is available to anybody with access to Unity's services. This could be a tenant, an applicant or any member of the public who is dissatisfied with our initial response to a problem they have identified. It may be this is about the outcome of their enquiry or about the way it was handled.
- 2.2. Complaints can be made in writing, over the phone, via the internet, using social media channels or in person. We will accept complaints via a third party councillor or an MP.
- 2.3. Complaints made by a representative of a customer will be accepted with the agreement of that customer. Anonymous complaints will not be ignored although

they may prove difficult to resolve. Complaints may arise from meetings with groups of tenants or at public meetings.

- 2.4. Unity has appointed a Complaints Co-ordinator, whose role it is to ensure that all complaints are logged, managed within the published timescales and outcomes recorded. The Co-ordinator is also responsible for keeping a record of customer satisfaction with the complaints process and for ensuring that lessons learned are fed back into mainstream service reviews.

3. Formal versus informal complaints

- 3.1 An informal complaint is one where the complainant is happy for it to be dealt with at the first point of contact or by the staff member or team that they have complained about. Informal complaints are dealt with at the informal stage of the procedure and only proceed to the formal stage one if the complainant is not happy with the outcome.
- 3.2 A formal complaint is where the complainant does not want frontline staff or the first point of contact to deal with it, but instead wants it to be dealt with by someone more senior. Formal complaints bypass the informal stage of the procedure and are dealt with under stage one of the formal procedure.

4. Acknowledgement

- 4.1 Complaints will be directed to Unity or to specific individuals but it is crucial that any member of staff in receipt of a complaint completes a *complaints reporting form* and forwards this to the Complaints Co-ordinator.
- 4.2 In all cases the person in receipt of the complaint should try and speak to the complainant to acknowledge the complaint, to clarify the complaint and to see if they can do anything immediately to resolve the problem. A record of any conversation at this stage should be attached to the *complaints reporting form*.
- 4.3 If the complaint can be sorted out immediately, the person in receipt of the complaint should use the standard letter template *Acknowledgement stage response* to confirm the action taken in writing and let the complainant know about the next stage of the complaints process if they are not happy. The person who received the complaint should log where Unity went wrong (if the complaint is upheld) and any lessons learnt or potential service improvements on to the *complaints reporting form* before handing it to the Complaints Co-ordinator. The complaint is then considered to have been dealt with as an informal complaint.
- 4.4 If the complaint cannot be resolved immediately, it needs investigating and should be acknowledged in writing by return post. The standard letter template *Acknowledgement letter* on the extranet should include the name of the person who

will be dealing with the complaint and confirm the timescales within which the complaint will be dealt with.

- 4.5 Complaints about Unity services should be directed to the appropriate officer or manager. Complaints about staff should be directed to their line manager. If a complaint is made about a member of staff they should be told immediately and given the opportunity to explain. They should be kept informed of progress and of the outcome of the complaint.
- 4.6 To ensure fairness, if a complaint is made about an individual or a group of individuals it should be investigated by another member of staff not involved with the issue in question.
- 4.7 Complainants should be assured that they can complain in confidence and that there will be no adverse consequence resulting from their actions.
- 4.8 Once a complaint has been closed, the investigating officer should inform the Complaints Co-ordinator and complete the *complaints reporting form* to show where Unity went wrong (if the complaint was upheld) and identify any lessons learnt or service improvements to be made as a result of the complaint.

5.0 Informal stage

- 5.1 The first time a customer raises a complaint with us; this will be classed as an informal complaint. The complaint will be acknowledged within 2 working days and a full response will be sent within 10 working days. The investigating officer should provide a written response detailing the outcome of the investigation and a proposed resolution. An informal complaint is treated in the same manner but early attempts made at reconciling.
- 5.2 If, for any reason, the complaint cannot be managed within this timescale the investigating officer shall inform the complainant, giving the reasons why and a date by which a full response will be provided.
- 5.3 The written response should be based on the standard letter template *Informal response* on the shared drive, which details the next step if the complainant is not happy with the response. The investigating officer should also enclose a *complaint satisfaction feedback slip* with their response. Copies are available from the Complaints Co-ordinator.

6 Stage 1

- 6.2 If the complainant is not satisfied with the informal response, or is not prepared to have their complaint investigated informally, they have the option to progress the complaint through the formal complaints procedure.

- 6.3 The complaint will be logged and passed to a more senior staff member who will review the complaint, the investigation and the outcome. This will be done within 10 working days of the request being received at Unity. Once the complaint has been reviewed, the responsible officer will provide a written response detailing the outcome of their findings.
- 6.4 If, for any reason, the review cannot be managed within this timescale the complainant shall be informed, giving the reasons why and a date by which a full response will be provided.
- 6.5 The written response should be based on the standard letter template Stage 1 response on the shared drive, which details the next step if the complainant is not happy with the response. The investigating officer should also enclose a complaint satisfaction slip.

7 Stage 2

- 7.2 If the complainant is not satisfied with the Stage 1 response they have the option to progress the complaint through the formal complaints procedure. They should normally do this within 10 working days of being informed of the outcome of the Stage 1 investigation, however issues raised after this time will be considered.
- 7.3 The complaint will be logged and passed to a more senior staff member, normally at Director level or above, who will review the complaint, the investigation and the outcome. This will be done within 10 working days of the request being received at Unity. Once the complaint has been reviewed, the responsible officer will provide a written response detailing the outcome of their findings.
- 7.4 If, for any reason, the review cannot be managed within this timescale the complainant shall be informed, giving the reasons why and a date by which a full response will be provided.
- 7.5 The written response should be based on the standard letter template Stage 2 response on the shared drive, which details the next step if the complainant is not happy with the response. The investigating officer should also enclose a complaint satisfaction

8 Stage 3

- 8.1 If the complainant is not satisfied with the Stage 2 response they have the option to progress the complaint through the formal complaints procedure. They should normally do this within 10 working days of being informed of the outcome of the Stage 2 investigation, however issues raised after this time will be considered
- 8.2 At this stage the complaint will be heard by a Complaints Appeal Panel which shall consist of a Unity Board member and member of the tenant's scrutiny panel.

- 8.3 An Appeal Panel hearing will be arranged within 4 weeks of the request and the Operations Director shall inform the complainant of the date and time of the hearing, and the procedure for conducting the hearing.
- 8.4 The complainant should be advised that they may also bring a friend or representative to the hearing.
- 8.5 After the hearing the Chair of the panel will write to the complainant within 5 working days, detailing their decision. If further investigation is required this letter will advise when a full response will be provided.
- 8.6 This letter will also detail the next steps should the complainant be unhappy with the panel's decision and should be accompanied by a complaint satisfaction feedback slip, available from the Complaints Co-ordinator.

9 Independent Housing Ombudsman

- 9.1 Where a complainant remains dissatisfied with the Appeals Panel decision they can refer their case to the Independent Housing Ombudsman. Only tenants, leaseholders or applicants can use this service. Complainants can contact the ombudsman service at any time during their complaint if dissatisfied.

10 Monitoring Complaints

- 10.1 All complaints will be logged and monitored on a weekly basis by the Complaints Co-ordinator and input onto the IBS complaints module.
- 10.2 It is the Complaints Co-ordinator's responsibility to ensure that the *Complaints log* and the *complaints reporting form* for each case is kept up to date, and that investigating officers are keeping to timescales.
- 10.3 The Complaints Co-ordinator should also ensure that copies of all documentation relating to the complaint are kept on file and attached to the *complaints recording form* where necessary.
- 10.4 Where a complaint is from a tenant, as soon as a *complaints recording form* is received the Complaints Co-ordinator will place a file-note on the house file stating that a complaint is being investigated. Once the complaint has been closed and is out of date for an appeal, the Complaints Co-ordinator will contact complaint to advise case closed and file the *complaints recording form* and accompanying documentation on the house file.
- 10.5 The Complaints Co-ordinator will provide quarterly reports detailing:
- the number of complaints received during the quarter;
 - the type of complaint;

- state of play of live complaints;
- cases closed during the month;
- complainant satisfaction levels with the outcome of their complaint and the way it was handled; and
- service improvements introduced as a result of the complaints process.

10.6 This information will form the basis of a quarterly report to the Operations Committee.

10.7 This report will also provide information to the Service Review Teams and help shape the delivery of future services provision.

11 Satisfaction with Complaints Handling

11.1 Whenever a response letter is sent at the end of a stage of the complaints procedure, the investigating officer will enclose a freepost complaints satisfaction feedback slip, which aims to find out customer satisfaction levels with:

- the outcome of their complaint; and
- the way that their complaint was handled.

11.2 If a freepost card is not appropriate or the complainant does not respond within 10 working days, the Complaints Co-ordinator will phone the complainant and go through the questionnaire over the phone.

12 Procedure Review

12.1 Unity will review this procedure annually and provide for interim review in light of policy change or practical usage.

12.2 This procedure is not subject to Board approval.

12.3 This procedure is owned by Operations Director. It will be reviewed in January 2021 following consultation with our tenant scrutiny panel.