



COMPLAINTS POLICY

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1. Purpose & Scope

- 1.1 We aim to deliver the best possible service but sometimes we get it wrong. This policy statement sets out how we will respond if a tenant or customer complains to us.
- 1.2 This policy provides guidance on:
- The definition of a complaint
 - Our service standards
 - Who this policy applies to
 - How we will use complaints to improve our services
- 1.3 We will establish and maintain a complaint handling process to ensure the practical implementation of this policy.

2. Policy objectives

- 2.1 Our aim is to identify when we have got something wrong and offer and deliver a suitable remedy. We will recognise the impact that the issue has had and identify appropriate solutions.
- 2.2 In delivering a complaints service we will:
- Take all expressions of dissatisfaction seriously
 - Initiate an appropriate response to the issue
 - Offer a suitable remedy
 - Deliver our promises
 - Learn from complaints
- 2.2 We aim to correctly recognise the difference between a service request where a tenant or customer may be unhappy with a situation and a complaint about a service.

3. Our approach to complaints

3.1 Definition of a complaint

A complaint is defined as: *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.*

A tenant or customer does not have to use the word ‘complaint’

3.2 Exclusions

We will accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so. A matter will not be considered as a complaint if:

The issue occurred more than six months ago – unless the complaint concerns health and safety or safeguarding matters

Legal proceedings have started – by either Unity or the complainant

Previous complaints – the matter has been previously considered under the complaints policy

Insurance claims – issues that would be covered by insurance claims

Third parties – complaints about persons or bodies over which Unity has no control, including where Unity delivers services on behalf of another organisation.

Unreasonable complainant behaviour – if a complainant behaves unreasonably or we consider a complainant to be unreasonable due to the manner in which they make a complaint or the complaint is without substance.

If we do not accept a complaint, we will explain to the complainant the reasons and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman.

3.3 Accessibility and awareness

We will widely promote and publicise our complaints service and ensure that it is accessible to all tenants and customers through a variety of channels including digitally.

We will comply with the requirements of the Equality Act and will make information about our policy and the complaints service available in clear and accessible formats including the use of translated materials. We will make reasonable adjustments to ensure tenants and customers can access the service including accepting complaints from advocates or third parties on behalf of a tenant or customer.

We will also ensure that we publicise information about the Ombudsman’s Complaints Handling Code and contact information for the Ombudsman.

3.4 Resourcing our complaints handling service

We will nominate a designated officer with responsibility for the administration of our complaints service. This officer will have the skills needed to support the managers who will deal with complaints and when required step in to ensure complaints are resolved quickly and fairly.

3.5 Complaints stages

Complaints will be dealt with through a two-stage process.

Stage 1

When we receive a complaint, it will be logged and acknowledged within 5 days. The complaint will be investigated by a manager from the relevant service area and a response provided within 10 working days of the complaint being logged.

When we deal with a complaint at Stage 1, the complaint handler will:

- Establish the detail of the complaint and the outcome the complainant is seeking
- Investigate impartially with an open mind
- Consider information and evidence carefully
- Provide a full response that includes the decision, reason for the decision and details of any remedy offered
- Details of how to escalate the matter

Stage 2

If a complaint cannot be resolved at Stage 1 the tenant or customer can request that the matter is escalated to Stage 2. The request to escalate must be made within 14 days of receiving the Stage 1 response.

The request will be acknowledged within 5 days and the complaint reviewed by a senior manager and a response provided within 20 working days of the complaint being escalated.

When we deal with a complaint at Stage 2, the complaint handler will:

- Set out the issues outstanding and the outcome the complainant is seeking
- Review the handling of the complaint at Stage 1

- Determine whether the complaint or part of it should be upheld and details of any outstanding actions and remedies offered
- Confirm that this is the final stage and how to escalate to the Ombudsman

Unity will not unreasonably refuse to escalate a complaint through the complaints process. However, we may decline to escalate a complaint and if we do this we will provide the complainant with clear reasons.

Where it is considered appropriate, Unity may engage the services of a third party to investigate a complaint. Unity may also employ alternative dispute resolution arrangements such as mediation where this would assist in resolving a complaint.

3.6. Putting things right

When something has gone wrong, we will acknowledge this and set out the actions we will take to put things right. Any remedy that we offer will reflect the extent of any service failures and the level of detriment caused to the tenant or customer.

When we propose a remedy, we will seek to agree this with the complainant. We will set out what will happen and by when and ensure this is followed through to completion. In awarding compensation, we will have regard to our Compensation Policy.

3.7 Continuous learning and improvement

When we look at the circumstances of a complaint, we will consider whether anything needs to be put right in terms of our processes or systems for the benefit of all tenants and customers.

We will report back to tenants and customers on the wider learning and improvements that flow from complaints.

4. Monitoring and performance

- 4.1 Monitoring of the implementation of this policy will be the responsibility of the Senior Management Team and the Operations Committee. Board members will receive regular updates on complaints that provides insight into Unity's complaints handling performance.

- 4.2 We will adopt performance measures that enable us to track volumes, types of complaints and trends. We will also provide our board members with performance information provided by the Ombudsman and details of individual complaints handling outcomes.
- 4.3 Any themes and trends will be assessed and reviewed by senior managers and the information used when reviewing policies and procedures.

5. Consultation and customer involvement

- 5.1 Unity recognises the importance of working in partnership with our tenants and customers to develop and continuously improve our services. We have consulted with customers and will ensure that our complaints service complies with the requirements of the Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code.
- 5.2 We will ask complainants to provide us with feedback on the way we have handled their complaint and provide information to all customers on how we are performing in delivering our complaints service.

6. Associated documents

- Compensation Policy