

Compliments and Complaints Policy

Board/EG Approval: September 2019

Responsible Board: Ocean Housing Group Ltd

Next Review: September 2021

Responsible Executive: Managing Director of Ocean Housing Ltd

1.0 Policy Statement

1.1 Ocean Housing is committed to learning from all tenant, resident and customer feedback. We welcome compliments, comments and complaints and see them as an opportunity to improve the quality of our services and ensure that we are treating our customers with dignity and respect at all times.

The main aims of this policy are to:

- encourage customer feedback and learn from it to improve services to our customers
- promote and support the organisation to be open and accessible
- empower staff to view customer feedback in a positive way and act accordingly
- ensure a successful resolution of complaints, quickly and fairly, and at the first point of contact wherever possible
- ensure the learning is extracted from complaints and where necessary shared across all departments
- enable us to deal effectively with unreasonably persistent complainants

2.0 Customer Feedback

2.1 We have developed our approach to recording and reporting customer feedback in conjunction with our tenants and residents. We want our tenants and residents to feel comfortable in raising complaints with us without the fear of repercussion. We set out this approach in our Service Standards which outline our service commitments and provide details of the ways in which we will monitor and report our performance against them.

Customer feedback is a key indicator of our performance and is used across all of the Standards. We will support the feedback we receive through the implementation of this policy with customer surveys, tenant-led inspections, estate walkabouts and wider tenant involvement activities to ensure that all our residents and stakeholders are encouraged to provide us with feedback about our services.

3.0 Compliments, Comments, and Suggestions

3.1 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.

3.2 Feedback is given to the individual or department concerned and nominations may be made for the Ocean GEM (Going the Extra Mile) awards which recognises outstanding customer service. Compliments will be taken into account as part of our customer satisfaction monitoring.

4.0 Complaints

4.1 This policy considers complaints received from Ocean's customers: tenants leaseholders shared-owners and housing applicants. Other individuals or organisations who wish to express dissatisfaction at Ocean should be referred to our customer service team who will identify an appropriate member of staff to deal with their issue and it will be addressed outside of this Policy.

4.2 Other advocates acting on behalf of a customer can do so subject to the completion of a signed advocacy form as evidence of a complainant's authorisation or, if it is not possible for the complainant to authorise an advocate in this way, we will request other evidence that the advocacy is legitimate.

4.3 Ocean will accept complaints in person, in writing, by telephone, through our website, by email, using our social media channels, through Live Chat or using the Ocean smartphone app.

4.4 For the purpose of this policy, complaints relate specifically to instances where:

- we have failed to provide a service that we should have
- the quality of the service we have provided has been poor
- customers have waited longer than published timescales or than they think is reasonable for us to do something
- customers have not been treated fairly or with respect by a member of staff

It does not cover:

- a first request for a service
- any action or inaction required by law
- any suggestion that a failure in service has resulted in a personal injury or liability claim
- the action of an individual or organisation over which we have no control
- anti-social behaviour, harassment and domestic abuse (dealt with under separate policies and procedures)
- contractual disputes
- decisions taken to conform to Ocean's agreed policies such as rent increases
- something which is or could be dealt with by the court or a tribunal, or which is, or should be, being dealt with by Ocean's insurers

4.5 We aim to resolve all complaints at the first point of contact to minimise inconvenience for our customers. However, this is not always possible and to ensure fairness and transparency we follow a three stage complaints process which is detailed at Annex 1: The Complaints Procedure. At each stage of the procedure the complaint will be considered objectively, fairly and with empathy. The complainant will receive a written response to their complaint. The response will give a decision (whether the complaint is upheld, partially upheld or not upheld), the reason for that decision and explain who the complainant should contact if they wish to move to the next stage of the complaints process.

4.6 The final stage of the procedure provides for the complaint to be considered by the Group Chief Executive=

4.7 Customers complaining to Ocean can expect us to:

- treat them with dignity and respect
- deal with their complaint as quickly, fairly and effectively as possible in line with the timescales detailed within the complaints procedure
- appoint a case manager who will deal with their complaint and be their point of contact during the process. This should be the manager whose service the complaint mainly relates to but who has not been previously involved in the specific issues detailed within the complaint
- take their complaint seriously, look at all the points raised and provide an appropriate response
- deal with all complaints fairly and consistently and with due regard to confidentiality
- undertake a full and impartial review
- apologise when things have gone wrong
- keep them informed of progress using their preferred method of communication
- use their feedback to improve the way we provide services

4.8 If a customer remains unsatisfied with our response to their complaint at the end of our complaints process the Localism Act 2011 provides that tenants can ask for their complaint to be considered by a 'designated person'.

4.9 A designated person can be a Tenant Panel, an MP or a local councillor.

4.10 A designated person can help to resolve a complaint in one of two ways; they can try to resolve the complaint themselves or they can refer the complaint straight to the Housing Ombudsman. If they refuse to do either the customer can contact the Ombudsman directly.

4.11 The designated person can try to work with both the complainant and Ocean to find a solution. If the problem is still not resolved following the intervention of a designated person they or the customer can refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.

4.12 Complaints to the Ombudsman do not have to be referred by a designated person, but if they are not there must be at least 8 weeks from the end of our internal complaints process before the Ombudsman can consider the case.

5.0 Compensation

5.1 Where a customer has been inconvenienced by a loss of service, late repairs or staff failing to keep appointments they may be entitled to compensation from Ocean. Further details are included within our Compensation Policy.

6.0 Reasonable Behaviour

6.1 We are committed to providing a complaints service that is accessible to all our customers. However, there are a small number of complainants who, because of the frequency, nature and/or quality of their contact with us, hinder our consideration of theirs, or other people's complaints. We refer to such complainants as 'unreasonably persistent complainants' and, exceptionally, we will take action to limit their contact with the organisation. All such cases will be assessed and addressed in accordance with our Reasonable Behaviour policy

7.0 MP and Councillor Enquiries

7.1 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.

8.0 Training and Learning

8.1 Our company values and behaviours framework support excellent customer services and staff are trained and supported to achieve this. Our approach to customer feedback and complaints is part of the 'new starter' induction programme. Staff are encouraged to view all customer feedback including complaints, as a positive way to learn, improve and provide good customer care. More specific training will be provided to those staff who manage and administer the complaints procedure.

9.0 Links to other policies and strategies

- 9.1
- Service Standards
 - Compensation Policy
 - Tenant Involvement Strategy
 - Reasonable Behaviour Policy

10.0 Responsibilities and Monitoring

10.1 All members of staff have a responsibility to familiarise themselves with this policy, follow it and ensure any member of staff who reports to them does the same.

10.2 We will report complaint and feedback performance to the Tenant and Residents Panel quarterly and publish the report on our website

10.3 The Managing Director of Ocean Housing Ltd will ensure that all complaints are monitored and that this information is reported to the relevant Board on at least an annual basis. The report will highlight any trends, which may suggest the need for improvements in areas of service provision or practices.

11.0 Equality and Diversity

11.1 We will apply our Customer Feedback Policy consistently and fairly, and will not discriminate against anyone regardless of their age, gender, transgender, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity.

11.2 We will ensure that all our procedure and correspondence with complainants does not contain jargon and is written in plain English. Each quarter complaints resolved within the period will be reviewed by the Managing Director of Ocean Housing to ensure that it adheres to this policy. We will consider the communication requirements of all our customers and will make the complaints procedure and other correspondence available in other languages or formats as required.

12.0 Tenant and Resident Involvement

12.1 This policy has been developed with feedback from tenant representatives, in particular the process and timescales.

12.2 We will report complaint and feedback performance to the Tenant and Resident Panel quarterly and publish the report on our website.

12.3 Annually we will publish, for all our customers and wider stakeholders, information about:

- the number of complaints received
- the nature of the complaints
- the business area the complaint relates to
- the outcome of the complaints
- how we have changed the way we do things to improve services as a result of feedback

13.0 Communication

13.1 A copy of this policy will be given to every board member; Tenants and Residents Panel and Scrutiny panel members, is available on the intranet for employees of Ocean Housing and, is available to all other stakeholders via the Ocean Housing website and Tenants Handbook.

Annex 1: The Complaints Procedure

At Ocean we aim to provide the best possible service for all our customers but we recognise that we will not always get things right first time. If this happens we will always try and resolve problems informally at the first point of contact. However, there may be occasions when a customer wants to take the matter further, specifically, instances where:

- we have failed to provide a service that we should have
- the quality of the service we have provided has been poor
- the customer has waited longer than published timescales or than they think is reasonable for us to do something
- the customer has not been treated fairly or courteously by a member of staff

There are certain things that a customer may not be happy about that we would not normally regard as a complaint:

- a first request for a service
- any action or inaction required by law
- any suggestion that a failure in service has resulted in a personal injury or liability claim
- the action of an individual or organization over which we have no control
- anti-social behaviour, harassment and domestic abuse (dealt with under separate policies and procedures)
- contractual disputes
- decisions taken to conform to Ocean's agreed policies such as rent increases
- something which is or could be dealt with by the court or a tribunal, or which is, or should be, being dealt with by Ocean's insurers

This complaints procedure is for Ocean Housing customers: tenants, leaseholders, shared-owners and housing applicants. Other individuals or organisations who wish to express dissatisfaction at Ocean should be referred to our customer service team who will identify an appropriate member of staff to deal with this issue.

Other advocates acting on behalf of a customer can do so subject to the completion of a signed advocacy form as evidence of a complainant's authorisation or, if it is not possible for the complainant to authorise an advocate in this way, we will request other evidence that the advocate is legitimate.

Our complaints process has 3 stages:

Stage 1 – Registering a complaint

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 and asks us to register a formal complaint, we will do so 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 assigned to a case manager who will take responsibility for ensuring that all of the issues raised are responded to. This may require input from colleagues in other teams. The case manager will normally take responsibility for making contact with the complainant and arranging a phone call or meeting whereby the complainant will be able to voice their concerns in full.

The case manager will then be able to fully investigate the issues raised.

We aim to contact the complainant within 5 working days and provide a full response within 10 working days. Occasionally, despite our best endeavours or due to the need for detailed investigations, 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 10 working days 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, the Managing Director of Ocean Housing will complete an investigation and review of the complaint.

The Managing Director will contact the complainant within 5 working days and provide a full response 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 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 Ocean internal complaint process. This is conducted by the Group Chief Executive.

Stage 3 – The Final Stage

If the customer is still not satisfied they should advise Ocean at the latest within 10 working days of the date of our response. The Group Chief Executive will investigate and provide a full response within 10 working days.

Referral to a designated person

If a complaint is not resolved following Stage 3 of our complaints process a complainant can:

- Refer the matter to a designated person OR
- Wait 8 weeks from the date of the stage 3 determination and refer the matter directly to the Ombudsman

A designated person can be a Tenant Panel, an MP or a local councillor. The contact details for the Housing Ombudsman Service are as follows:

Housing Ombudsman Service
PO Box 152
Liverpool
L33 7WQ

Telephone: 0300 111 3000 (lines are open Monday to Friday 9.15am to 5.15pm)

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk