

Compliments and Complaints Policy

Board/EG Approval: September 2021

Responsible Board: Ocean Housing Group Ltd

Next Review: September 2023

Responsible Executive: Managing Director of Ocean Housing Ltd

1.0 Policy Statement

1.1 Ocean Housing is committed to learning from all 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.

For the purpose of this policy the term 'customer' refers to tenants, leaseholder's, shared-owners and housing applicants. The main aims 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 and in accordance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Code. We want customers 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.

2.2 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, 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 our services in the future.

- 3.2 Feedback is shared with the individual where known and heads of service concerned and nominations may be made for the annual 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 which are defined as:

- tenants
- leaseholder's
- shared-owners
- housing applicants

- 4.2 Any other individuals or organisations who wish to express dissatisfaction will be referred to our customer experience team who will identify an appropriate member of staff to deal with their issue and it will be addressed outside of this Policy.

- 4.3 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.

- 4.4 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.

- 4.5 The Housing Ombudsman defines a complaint 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.”

- 4.6 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

- 4.7 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

- 4.8 Complaints which involve any of the above will not be progressed under this policy and the customer will be advised of the reason why.
- 4.9 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 two-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 together with signposting to the Housing Ombudsman for available advice and guidance.
- 4.10 Customers complaining to Ocean can expect us to:
- deal with complaints on their merits
 - act independently and have an open mind
 - take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest
 - consider all information and evidence carefully
 - keep the complaint confidential as far as possible, with information only disclosed if necessary to properly investigate the matter
- 4.11 We will assess each complaint on an individual basis identifying the following:
- what the complaint is about
 - what evidence is needed to fully consider the issues
 - what risks the complaint raises
 - what outcome would resolve the matter for the tenant or resident
 - any urgent action that we may need to take
- 4.12 Factors which we will consider in formulating a remedy can include, but are not limited to:
- length of time that a situation has been ongoing
 - frequency with which something has occurred
 - severity of any service failure or omission
 - number of different failures identified
 - the cumulative impact on the tenant or resident
 - a tenant or resident's particular circumstances or vulnerabilities
- 4.13 Complaints can be resolved in a number of ways and we will identify in our response that it is upheld or partially upheld, we will offer a remedy that reflects the extent of any and all service failures and the level of detriment caused. These may include:
- acknowledging where things have gone wrong
 - providing an explanation, assistance or reasons
 - apologising
 - taking action if there has been a delay
 - reconsidering or changing a decision
 - amending a record
 - providing a financial remedy
 - changing policies, procedures or practices

- 4.14 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'. A designated person can be a Tenant Panel, an MP or a local councillor.
- 4.15 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 direct.
- 4.16 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.
- 4.17 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 Housing Ombudsman can consider the case.

5.0 Compensation

- 5.1 There are two types of compensation, payments that Ocean are obliged to make by law and payments which are made at Ocean's discretion. Further details of how such payments are considered and applied is 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. There are however 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 customers complaints. All such cases will be assessed and addressed in accordance with our Reasonable Behaviour policy and may result in a restriction or limit on their contact with the organisation.

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.

8.0 Training

- 8.1 Our approach to customer feedback and complaints is part of the 'new starter' induction programme and is underpinned by our company values and behaviours framework.
- 8.2 Ocean fosters a positive complaint handling culture where 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 is provided to those staff who manage and administer the complaints procedure.

9.0 Learning from complaints

- 9.1 Ocean uses complaint feedback to inform learning and improvements in our policies and procedures. To support this aim, we survey all complainants to understand if they are satisfied with the process and the way the complaint was handled.
- 9.2 Feedback from this survey is regularly reviewed and published in our annual review of customer feedback.

- 9.3 The Head of Customer Experience completes a review of all complaint responses, complaint performance each quarter, meeting with the Managing Director and senior

managers to ensure that complaint performance is consistent, and that all learning from feedback is being applied across the organisation.

- 9.4 The Group Chief Executive provides a critical friend service for complex escalated complaints to ensure that all factors have been considered in reaching a determination and that this policy has been consistently applied.

10.0 Links to other policies and strategies

- Service Standard Commitments
- [Compensation Policy](#)
- [Tenant Partnership Strategy](#)
- [Reasonable Behaviour Policy](#)

11.0 Responsibilities and Monitoring

- 11.1 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.
- 11.2 We will report complaint and feedback performance to Together With Ocean (TWO) our tenants and residents panel, quarterly and publish the report on our website. All information will be presented confidentially and in a way so as to ensure that the customer cannot be identified.
- 11.3 The Managing Director of Ocean Housing will ensure that all complaints are monitored and that this information is reported to the relevant Board on an annual basis. The report will highlight any trends, which may suggest the need for improvements in areas of service provision or practices.

12.0 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 12.1 We will apply our Customer Compliments and Complaints Policy consistently and fairly, and will not discriminate against anyone regardless of their age, gender, transgender, disability, religion, belief, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity.
- 12.2 We will ensure that all our procedure and correspondence with complainants does not contain jargon and is written in plain English. The Head of Customer Experience reviews all complaint responses to ensure that they adhere 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.
- 12.3 The Ocean Housing Reasonable Adjustments Policy will be applied, where required, to ensure fair access for all.

13.0 Tenant and Resident Involvement

- 13.1 This policy has been developed with feedback from tenant representatives, in particular the process and timescales.
- 13.2 We will provide an overview of complaints received to Together With Ocean (TWO) monthly and report complaint and feedback performance to the group quarterly and publish the report on our website.

- 13.3 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

13.4 In addition, we will make available for scrutiny the Ombudsman's annual landlord performance report.

14.0 Communication

14.1 The policy is available on the intranet for employees of Ocean Housing and to all other stakeholders via the Ocean Housing website and Tenants Handbook.

14.2 Publication of the complaints procedure will be available in leaflet form and provided on receipt of all newly registered complaints.

14.3 The policy and process will also be regularly published on our social media channels and in our StreetTalk magazine.

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 to 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 experience 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 two 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 for an initial discussion as explained above 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 or senior member of staff nominated by the Managing Director will contact the complainant within 5 working days and provide a full response within 20 working days. Occasionally this may not be possible and we will agree a suitable timeframe for response with the customer when this happens which should not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason.

The Group Chief Executive will act as a critical friend for any complex escalated complaints to ensure that all factors have been considered in reaching a determination.

The response to the complaint will advise the customer that if they are still not satisfied they can:

- Refer the matter to a designated person OR
- Wait 8 weeks from the date of the stage 2 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