



We want our Customer Service to
stand out from the rest

Not Happy?
Then please let us know

Introduction

We want to ensure that the services we provide meet both our published standards and the needs of our customers. All customer feedback is important.

Every organisation occasionally gets things wrong. If we have not provided a proper service, or you feel that you have been treated unfairly, then please let us know. We aim to resolve these as quickly and efficiently as possible.

All complaints are taken seriously. We use complaints to learn lessons as to how things might have been done differently and to improve the services we provide in the future.

What is a complaint?

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction about a service provided, whether justified or not, requiring a response. This might include, for example, where we:

- Fail to provide a service to a published standard
- Unreasonably delay providing a service
- Fail to follow our own policies, rules or procedures
- Provide a poor quality service
- Remove or withdraw a service from a customer without consulting them
- Cause distress to a customer through our behaviour
- Unreasonably disadvantage a customer or unfairly discriminate against them

Complaints not covered by this procedure

It is not normally possible to take complaints through this policy where:

- They are submitted anonymously (although we may still investigate).
- The complaint is directly linked to legal action already started by either party or has already been considered by ourselves, a court or another body.
- They are submitted more than 6 months after the event being complained of.
- The complaint concerns employment matters.
- The complaint concerns the content of an approved policy. Although issues will be considered on their merits it is not normally appropriate for them to be dealt with under this procedure.
- There is an alternative mechanism for complaints handling set out in a contract or other agreement.

WHO CAN COMPLAIN

Anyone receiving a service from us or from those acting on our behalf, including:

- Current and former residents (including tenants and leaseholders)
- Other service users and ex-service users
- People applying for accommodation or other services
- Neighbours of our properties
- Tenants associations or resident groups (a lead contact is normally required)
- Organisations or businesses receiving a service from Estuary
- Any member of the public directly affected by our activities



We know that some people may need support in making a complaint and will accept complaints made by advocates if we have evidence that they have been authorised by the complainant to represent them. This will normally take the form of a signed statement from the complainant. Where this cannot be provided, we will seek other evidence that the advocacy is legitimate.

Complaints brought to our attention by MP's or Councillors will be handled in the same way as any other complaint. Enquiries from MP's and Councillors will be dealt with in accordance with our usual correspondence standards.

HOW TO COMPLAIN

A complaint can be made:

- In writing (e.g. letter, fax, email)
- By completing the complaints form (hard copy or online)
- In any language or in Braille
- By telephone, in person or by bringing the matter to the attention of a member of staff at a meeting (verbal)

We may refuse to consider a complaint, or may deal with it in a different way from that outlined in this policy, where it is pursued unreasonably or where circumstances merit it. Where we decide to do so, we will advise you of the reasons for taking that decision and the route forward if you wish to pursue the matter further.

The Complaints Process

We will only consider your *initial complaint*, you may not add additional items to a complaint as it progresses through the stages. Any new complaint if not relevant to the ongoing one must be logged as a new one.

You may wish to raise a problem or issue you are experiencing, but at this time you may not want to use the formal complaints process but simply want a speedy solution to the problem.

Once you have raised this with a member of staff they must make all possible efforts to resolve the matter at this early stage. It is sometimes more appropriate to discuss these matters with yourself in person or by telephone rather than to communicate in writing.

Your issues will be logged onto our informal complaints database which will create an automatic reference number, all notes will be logged onto this and against your file. You will be informed of the outcome by letter, email or verbal communication. At every stage, we keep records about your complaint to make sure that we deal with it as efficiently as we can.

We hope to deal with the majority of complaints in this way. However we recognise that you may be unhappy about the outcome or have a complaint of a more serious nature for which our formal complaints process, which has three simple steps may be more appropriate.

Stage One (Manager)

Upon receipt of your complaint it will be logged on our database and within 2 working days you will receive written acknowledgement advising you of who will be dealing with the complaint.



A Manager will investigate the complaint and will issue a final decision within **15 working days** of initial receipt of the complaint

The investigation may take longer when the complaint is complex or detailed. If this does happen we will write to let you know.

Stage Two (Director)

If your original complaint is unresolved at Stage One or you remain unsatisfied you may wish to pursue it further to Stage Two. Should you decide to do this the request must be made within **3 weeks** of the final stage one decision.

A Director will investigate the complaint and will issue a final decision within **10 working days** of initial receipt of the Stage Two request.



Stage Three (Appeals Panel)



You may appeal against our decision at Stage Two of your original complaint if you remain unsatisfied and proceed to Stage Three. If you wish to do this you should make this request within **three weeks** of the final stage two decision.

Upon receipt of the Stage Three request our database will be update and within 2 working days you will receive an acknowledgment advising you of the Panel process.

Your appeal will be considered by an appeals panel. The panel will consist of 3 members and can include:-

- Board or sub-committee members (at least one on each panel)
- Independent member e.g. volunteer from the community
- Senior staff members with no previous involvement in this matter (one on each panel)

Within 3 weeks of receipt of the request to appeal the date of the hearing will be confirmed.

You may attend the Panel meeting to present your case and if you wish you can be accompanied by an advocate or interpreter (**but not by a legal representative**).

Papers will be prepared for Appeals Panels and sent to you at least two weeks before the hearing. You will have a week in which to provide any additional evidence or make comments on the papers prepared. Final appeals panel papers will be sent to the panel, and copied to you, a week before the hearing. The relevant Director will attend the hearing to present the management case.

Taking your complaint further



The Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) exists to investigate residents complaints about Housing Associations and other registered landlords. It will consider your complaint if you remain unhappy about our final decision.

You must have gone right through all stages of our complaints procedure before HOS will consider your case.

You can contact these services at:

The Housing Ombudsman Service Tel: 020 7421 3800
81 Aldwych Fax: 020 7831 1942
London
WC2B 4HN
Calls from text phone users via typetalk are welcome

Monitoring and Learning

Details of all complaints will be logged and monitored. Any recommendations made, lessons learnt or feedback received will be shared across the organisation and actioned according to their priority to help improve services and prevent recurring complaints.

We will ensure all staff members are aware of how important complaints are and how they contribute to service improvement. Complaints will be discussed in individual and team meetings and all relevant staff will be appropriately trained.





FEEDBACK FORM



Full name

Address

Telephone

Home

Mobile

Email

Please use the space below to describe what your complaint is about. If you need more room please attach another piece of paper.

Have you reported this complaint before, and if so who did you report it to?

On what date did you do so?

Signed

Date

Please send this form to Kirsty Malyon, Estuary Housing Association, FREEPOST RM1221, Southend-on-Sea, SS2 6BR

It would be helpful if you could also complete the equal opportunities questionnaire enclosed

www.estuary.co.uk

Central Office telephone number: 01702 462246

Residents Line: 0845 6340635 (charged at your local rate)

Estuary Housing Association Ltd
FREEPOST RM1221
Southend-on-Sea
SS2 6BR
F:01702 616716

Estuary is a housing association with Charitable Status
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CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE