

## 1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 Castles & Coasts Housing Association (**CCHA**) is committed to providing excellent services to our customers. In order to continually review services in line with our Customer Service Standards, we rely on feedback to help us to monitor how we are doing, and how we can improve.
- 1.2 The purpose of this policy is to clarify our approach to managing, and encouraging feedback. This policy has been developed in line with the Homes and Communities Agency (**HCA**) Standard for Tenant Involvement & Empowerment and best practice guidelines from the Housing Ombudsman.
- 1.3 The policy sets out how we will manage and encourage feedback, and is devolved into two categories:
  - Resident Involvement
  - Compliments & Complaints.

## 2. Policy Aims

- To provide clarity on the range of ways customers can provide us with feedback regarding our services
- To set out how we will gain feedback through a Resident Involvement Framework
- To confirm how we will use feedback to shape and improve services
- To provide clarity on how we will manage and respond to any complaints received
- To provide a simplified approach to complaints, ensuring customers can provide us with feedback in an easy and open way, which is accessible to all
- To demonstrate that we take complaints seriously and ensure high levels of ownership from our officers when dealing with, and investigating, complaints
- To do our best to put things right in a timely manner and apologise when we get things wrong
- To provide clarity on what customers can do if they are not happy with the outcome of a complaint we have managed
- To provide clarity on how we will manage and respond to any compliments received
- To provide clarity in relation to compensation, where we have failed to meet a required standard
- To be polite, helpful and respectful when dealing with feedback from customers
- To clarify how we will publish outcomes from resident involvement activity and compliments and complaints received.

### **3. Definitions**

- 3.1 Customer: A customer is defined as anyone who is affected by the services delivered by CCHA.
- 3.2 Resident: A resident is defined as a person who has a legal right to reside in a CCHA property.

### **4. Feedback through Resident Involvement**

- 4.1 CCHA is committed to providing opportunities to review and shape services alongside residents. This is achieved through the delivery of a clear and flexible involvement framework, which allows residents to feedback on how we are doing and how we can improve, in a way which suits their individual needs, interests and lifestyles.
- 4.2 Our Resident Involvement Framework is underpinned by our Customer Service Standards; residents will be provided with the opportunity to be involved in shaping services alongside us.
- 4.3 There are 4 tiers to our framework, as outlined below. Each tier is developed to enable residents to get involved when we are shaping new services and to let us know how we are doing in the delivery of our existing services and our service standards.
- 4.4 A dedicated officer will be responsible for working with service managers to coordinate the delivery of the framework, and to monitor outcomes as a result of feedback received. A dedicated manager will have overall responsibility for ensuring the framework is implemented and in working with other managers to ensure service improvements are implemented as a result of feedback.
- 4.5 **Resident Involvement Tiers:**

#### **Tier 1 – Resident Scrutiny Panel (RSP)**

The RSP will lead specific work streams to look at particular areas of service in detail and to make recommendations for improvements. The panel will report findings and recommendations to the association further to reviewing a particular service.

Terms of Reference and mechanisms for reporting outcomes will be agreed with the RSP. The panel will have a membership of no more than 10 members in order for it to be effective, and will meet quarterly. The agenda for scrutiny will be set based on resident feedback from tiers 2-4 of the framework.

Panel members will be provided with specialist training to help them to fulfil this role, if required.

#### **Tier 2 – Resident Feedback Groups (RFGs)**

RFGs are ‘task and finish’ groups who will work with us to provide feedback on existing services, new services or where a change in service is proposed, and also in helping to review our operational policies.

RFGs will have a membership of no more than 10 members to be effective, and Terms of Reference will be agreed. The RFGs should meet just once, with a clear remit of providing feedback on a specific service or policy. Members can attend in person, over the phone or can provide feedback via email. A dedicated officer will work with service area managers to set up groups. A timetable will be developed with managers to deliver 6 feedback groups per year, covering a diverse range of services from across CCHA.

Findings of the RFGs will inform detailed service reviews for the RSP to undertake.

### **Tier 3 – Continual Service Feedback**

A dedicated officer will work with managers of each service area to ensure we have mechanisms in place to continually gain feedback on our services and service standards. This will be delivered in a range of ways, including:

- Mystery shopping (customer services)
- Service Feedback Surveys (reinvestment, repairs, neighbourhoods & lettings, grounds maintenance, sheltered & supported, anti-social behaviour, rent).

We will ensure that feedback can be provided in a range of ways to suit our customers' needs: by telephone, in writing, by email or by text.

Findings of continual feedback will inform detailed service reviews for the RSP to undertake.

### **Tier 4 –STAR surveys**

STAR surveys are tenants and residents' satisfaction surveys which are used by social landlords to measure the satisfaction of residents, and to gain feedback on our services. CCHA will conduct a STAR survey every 2 years.

Findings of the STAR survey will be presented to the association, and will inform detailed service reviews for the RSP to undertake.

## **4.6 Inviting residents to be involved**

We will provide all of our residents with the opportunity to become involved in providing feedback. Our involvement framework will be advertised via front line teams, our website and our quarterly magazine.

We will maintain a record of customers who wish to be involved and whether they have a specific service area of interest.

## **5. Complaints**

- 5.1 A 'Complaint' is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction, where a customer is dissatisfied with a service or services delivered by CCHA, where there has been a failure to deliver a CCHA service standard or promise, or where a customer has been dissatisfied by the behaviour of an officer or contractor associated with CCHA.

5.2 CCHA takes complaints from customers seriously; we ensure these are used as a learning opportunity to understand where we need to improve. We are dedicated to resolving any issues quickly, fairly and transparently and to ensuring customers are kept up to date at each stage.

### 5.3 **Ways in which customers can make a complaint**

A complaint can be made to the association in a number of ways:

- By email to: [cs@castlesandcoasts.co.uk](mailto:cs@castlesandcoasts.co.uk)
- In writing to: Customer Services, 3 Castle Street, Carlisle, CA3 8SY
- By telephone: 0800 085 1171
- Via our website: [www.castlesandcoasts.co.uk](http://www.castlesandcoasts.co.uk)
- In person at one of our offices
- Via an advocate authorised to act on behalf of the resident, i.e. a nominated power of attorney.

5.4 Complaints will be coordinated by a Dedicated Complaints Manager (**DCM**), who will keep a record of complaints, the stage a complaint reaches and the outcome of the complaint. The DCM will work with a Nominated Complaints Manager (**NCM**) at each stage of the process to ensure a thorough investigation of the complaint is undertaken, and an outcome is provided to the customer, in line with the timeframes set out within our Customer Service Standards.

### 5.5 **Timeframes for responding to complaints**

In line with our Customer Service Standards, we will acknowledge the receipt of a complaint within 1 working day. We aim to provide an outcome to a complaint within 5 working days. If we cannot provide an outcome during this period, we will write to the complainant to provide them with an update as to when they can expect a detailed response from us.

### 5.6 **Timeframe for raising a complaint**

A customer can raise a complaint within 6 months of an issue occurring.

### 5.7 **Complaints escalation process**

Complaints will follow the 3 stage escalation process below and will be coordinated by the DCM. At each stage of our process, an NCM will be appointed to investigate and manage the complaint:

#### **Stage 1 - Quick Fix Complaints**

Receipt of complaint acknowledged by our Customer Services Team within 1 working day and passed to the DCM. The complaint is then passed to the manager within the service area that the complaint refers to, who will act as the NCM. The NCM will make contact with the complainant, ideally face-to-face or over the phone, to establish what the complainant would like us to do in order to resolve the issue without the need for escalation. Based on feedback from the complainant, the NCM will investigate the nature and background to the

complaint, with the aim of resolve the complaint at this stage. The NCM will provide a written outcome to the complainant within 5 working days. If an outcome cannot be provided within 5 working days, they will provide the complainant with a timeframe for resolution. The complainant will be informed of the escalation process to follow if they are not in agreement with the communicated outcome. (Please note, where the complaint relates to the manager of the service area, the complaint would immediately escalate to stage 2 of the policy).

## **Stage 2**

Should resolution not be achieved during stage 1, the complaint will escalate to stage 2. This will occur if the complainant does not agree resolution within stage 1 and makes contact with us to escalate. The Customer Services Team will acknowledge receipt within 1 working day and will pass the complaint to the DCM who will record the escalated complaint and will assign the relevant member of the Senior Management Team (**SMT**) to carry out a review of the complaint; they will become the NCM for this stage. The NCM will carry out a review, taking into consideration the outcome and findings of stage 1.

Upon carrying out a review, they will seek to resolve the complaint and to provide an outcome to the complainant within 5 working days. If an outcome cannot be provided within 5 working days, they will provide the customer with a timeframe for resolution. The complainant will be informed of the escalation process to follow if they are not in agreement with the communicated outcome.

## **Stage 3**

Should resolution not be achieved at stage 2, the complaint will escalate to the Complaints Hearing Panel (**CHP**). The Customer Services Team will acknowledge receipt within 1 working day and will pass the complaint to the DCM, who will record the escalated complaint and will assign the complaint to the CHP to carry out a review of the complaint; they will become the NCM for this stage.

The CHP is chaired by a member of CCHA Board; the Chair of CCHA will appoint a chair and a panel for the CHP, consisting of 3 Board Members. Where possible, one of the representatives should be a resident of CCHA. The complainant will be informed of this outcome within 5 working days and may be invited to attend the panel should the panel require further information.

### **5.8 Format for the Complaints Hearing Panel**

The CHP will review the evidence collated as part of stages 1-2. Should they require further information regarding the complaint; the complainant will be invited to the hearing panel. If the panel feel that sufficient evidence is available to review the complaint, they will do so without inviting them to attend.

The CHP will contact the complainant within 5 working days to provide details of outcomes reached as a result of the panel. They will also include further details of how the complainant can further escalate their complaint to a designated person and/or the Housing Ombudsman should they wish to further escalate, as outlined within section 5.9.

## 5.9 **Process for further escalation**

CCHA is committed to resolving complaints and to reaching an agreed outcome with the complainant. However, if a complainant feels we have not managed their complaint adequately, and are not in agreement to the outcome, there are ways in which they can further escalate upon exhaustion of the CCHA process.

As part of the Localism Act 2011 a complainant can contact a designated person to help resolve issues. A designated person can be:

- A local MP
- A local Councillor
- A recognised Tenant Panel

A complainant can make contact with a preferred designated person, sending the details of their complaint, why they remain dissatisfied and what they feel CCHA could do to resolve the issue. The designated person can then deal with the matter in a way they think will resolve the complaint or they can refer straight to the Housing Ombudsman. There must be a period of 8 weeks between the outcome of stage 3 being conveyed to the complainant and a referral to the Ombudsman.

If the designated person refuses to deal with the complaint, the complainant can refer the complaint to the Ombudsman directly. Again, they must wait 8 weeks after the outcome of stage 3 in order to contact the Ombudsman. Details of how to contact the Ombudsman can be found by visiting [housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://housing-ombudsman.org.uk) or by calling 0300 111 3000.

## 5.10 **Anonymous complaints**

Anonymous complaints will only be investigated where the complainant provides sufficient information to identify an issue of concern. In some cases it may be necessary to refer issues raised to our Whistleblowing, Safeguarding, Anti-Social Behaviour or Anti Fraud Policies, if appropriate. If this is not necessary, then the complaints procedure will be followed.

An anonymous complaint precludes any response to the complainant. The DCM will refer anonymous complaints to the service manager to investigate and to agree the most appropriate action in relation to the complaint.

## 5.11 **Unreasonable, persistent complaints**

We are committed to dealing with complaints fairly and impartially; however, on some occasions, we may receive complaints which are unreasonable or persistent, and where it is not possible to reach a reasonable solution through our complaints process.

As outlined within our Unacceptable Behaviour & Unreasonable Demands Policy, what we consider to be unreasonable demands on our service will depend on the circumstances surrounding the behaviour of the complainant, but could include:

- Demanding a response within an unreasonable timescale.
- Demanding to be dealt with by a particular member of staff.
- Continual phone calls, letters or emails.
- Changing the material of their complaint, or ‘masking’ the real issue, by raising unrelated matters.
- Unwillingness to accept that CCHA cannot help them any further than it already has and persistently contacting us to complain or remonstrate about our action or decision or explanation.

We consider these demands and this behaviour to be unreasonable if they take up a disproportionate amount of officers’ time. If we consider a complaint to be unreasonable, persistent or vexatious, the relevant member of SMT will agree how best to deal with the complaint, and how best to communicate to the complainant.

## 6. Compensation

6.1 We aim to provide excellent services and to deliver the standards set out within our Customer Service Standards. However, there may be occasions where we have failed to achieve these standards. Where this is the case, we will apologise, and will have suitable compensation in place for inconvenience caused.

6.2 The NCM will agree compensation with the complainant and will communicate and agree the compensation within 5 working days.

6.3 Levels of compensation:

Situation	Compensation Value (up to the value of)
Emergency repairs not attended within 24 hours.	£50
Where it is agreed that repairs have not been carried out to an acceptable standard.	£50
Accidental damage caused to resident’s personal possessions as a result of a contractors work, we will repair or replace the damaged items and provide compensation (note that it is the resident’s responsibility to move/remove their personal belongings to facilitate any works that we or our contractors have to do).	value of replacement or repair
Damage is caused to resident’s personal possessions due to failure to complete a repair within our communicated timeframes; we will repair or replace the damaged items and provide compensation.	value of replacement or repair
Full loss of both heating and hot water during the period 31 October and 1 May, if we fail to provide an alternative heating source within 24 hours.	£50 per day
Loss of facilities for which a service charge is paid.	£25 - In cases of long term loss of service a larger value may be awarded; this value is dependent upon the type of service and the length. SMT will evaluate

	this and award a discretionary value of compensation.
Removal expenses – where a resident has to move out of their property to allow for major works to be undertaken by CCHA, the following will be reimbursed within reasonable costs.	Removal company Disconnection/reconnection of services, i.e. utilities/television services Redirection of mail Any penalty charges incurred as a result, i.e. home content insurance is increased as a result. Other legitimate costs at the discretion of a member of SMT
If a member of staff or contractor fails to keep an appointment without prior notification to the resident.	£20
We aim to respond to correspondence from residents within 5 working days, where we fail to meet our standard, we will apologise, make a compensation payment and will undertake to provide a reply as soon as is practicably possible.	£16
Exceptional circumstance compensation may be made on a discretionary basis by a member of SMT in cases of severe inconvenience or hardship as a result of a failure to deliver services.	Dependent on the nature of the complaint and the inconvenience and hardship caused to the resident.

6.4 Where a resident is in arrears or has outstanding recharges, the compensation value awarded will be credited to the resident's rent account.

## 7. Compliments

7.1 A 'Compliment' is defined as an expression of satisfaction from someone affected by a service delivered by CCHA,

7.2 Customers can register a compliment regarding our services in a number of ways:

- By email to: [cs@castlesandcoasts.co.uk](mailto:cs@castlesandcoasts.co.uk)
- In writing to: Customer Services, 3 Castle Street, Carlisle, CA3 8SY
- By telephone: 0800 085 1171
- Via our website: [www.castlesandcoasts.co.uk](http://www.castlesandcoasts.co.uk)
- In person at one of our offices

7.3 Compliments will be recorded by the DCM, who will keep a record of compliments and will forward the compliment to the officer or officers it relates to. They will also contact the customer within 5 working days to thank them for providing us with feedback.

## 8. Reporting Resident Feedback

CCHA is committed to reporting how we are doing. Outcomes as a result of our involvement framework, complaints and compliments will be published as part of the annual report.



Feedback from resident involvement will also be published within our quarterly magazine to outline how we have worked alongside residents to shape and improve our services.

## **9. Cross References**

This policy and the associated procedures should be read in conjunction with the following CCHA policies and procedures:

- Equality & Diversity
- Data Protection & Confidentiality
- Customer Service Standards
- Unacceptable Behavior & Unreasonable Behavior Policy