

COMPLAINTS POLICY

1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 This policy sets out how a complaint can be made to Castles & Coasts Housing Association (**CCHA**), how CCHA will manage complaints received and, also, how CCHA will learn from complaints, to help us improve the services we deliver to our residents.
- 1.2 This policy has been developed in line with the Housing Ombudsman's (**HO**) Complaint Handling Code (**CHC**).

2. Policy Aims

- To provide clarity on how we will manage and respond to complaints received
- To ensure complaints are dealt with fairly, impartially and in a timely manner
- To provide a Complaints Process which is accessible to all, and makes it easy to raise a complaint with CCHA
- To demonstrate that we take complaints seriously and ensure high levels of ownership from our colleagues, 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 complainants can do, if they are not happy with the outcome of a complaint, we have managed
- To be polite, helpful and respectful when dealing with complaints
- To ensure that we learn lessons from complaints, to improve our services

3. Definitions

- 3.1 **Complaint:** A Complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by the Association, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf.
- 3.2 **Resident:** A resident is defined as a person who has a legal right to reside in a CCHA property.

4. Statement of Intent

- 4.1 CCHA welcomes complaints as a means of providing valuable feedback, and we are committed to addressing service shortfalls; ensuring feedback is used to implement service improvements, for the wider resident population, to enhance customer satisfaction.
- 4.2 A complaint can be made by anyone who has direct involvement in a service delivered by CCHA. CCHA will accept complaints within six months of an issue occurring.
- 4.3 For the purpose of this policy, a complaint is not any of the following:

- A request for a service, such as reporting a repair, unless you have already received a service and are not happy with how this service has been delivered
- A request for information, or an explanation of a policy or practise
- A complaint which has previously been investigated and responded to by CCHA, where the Complaints Process has been exhausted
- Neighbourhood disputes, including noise nuisance, drug-related activity or dog fouling. These will be managed in line with our Anti-Social Behaviour (**ASB**) Policy, except where you have informed us of ASB, and are not happy with how your case has been handled, or feel we have not followed our ASB Policy

5. How to Make a Complaint

5.1 CCHA takes complaints extremely seriously. If you wish to make a complaint, you should contact CCHA at the earliest opportunity of experiencing a service failure or dissatisfaction.

5.2 Complaints can be made in a range of ways, as follows:

- By email to: cs@castlesandcoasts.co.uk
- In writing to: Customer Services Team, 3 Castle Street, Carlisle, Cumbria, CA3 8SY
- By telephone: 0800 085 1171
- Via our website: www.castlesandcoasts.co.uk
- Via a direct message on social media: Facebook or Twitter
- Via an advocate, authorised to act on a person's behalf, i.e. a nominated power of attorney
- In person, during office opening hours

5.3 Complaints will be treated in the strictest confidence and in line with the General Data Protection Regulation 2018.

5.4 Complaints will be coordinated by the Customer Experience Team (**CET**). The CET will allocate the complaint to a dedicated Complaint Manager, normally the manager of the service area involved. The CET will work with the Complaint Manager, supporting them in a thorough investigation, ensuring a sensitive, balanced and objective outcome is achieved. The CET will also ensure that a thorough response is sent within the target timeframe and that any learning is captured and embedded.

5.5 CCHA accepts complaints from the following:

- An individual resident
- A group of residents
- Any individual, not a resident of CCHA, but who has accessed the services of CCHA, or has been directly affected by the services delivered by CCHA.

6. The Complaints Process

6.1 CCHA operates a two stage Complaints Process, as set out below.

6.2 Stage 1

6.2.1 CCHA will acknowledge the complaint within 1 working day of receipt. The complaint will be allocated to a Complaint Manager, who will provide a thorough response, within 10 working days of the initial receipt. During this period, the Complaint Manager may contact the complainant to establish what the complainant believes would be a reasonable resolution. If the issue is complex and requires further time to resolve, the Complaint Manager will keep the complainant informed and will let the complainant know when they can expect to receive a response. This should not exceed a further 10 working days, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

6.3 Stage 2

6.3.1 If the complainant remains unhappy with the outcome of their complaint at Stage 1, they can escalate their complaint to Stage 2 by contacting the Stage 1 Complaint Manager, stating why they remain dissatisfied. The escalated complaint will be acknowledged within 1 working day of receipt and will be allocated to a member of the Executive Leadership Team (**ELT**). This is usually the Director of the service area involved. A thorough response to the complaint will be sent within 20 working days, unless further complex investigations are required. The complainant will be informed of this and kept updated of when they can expect a response. This should not exceed a further 10 working days, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

6.4 Closed Complaints

6.4.1 A complaint will be considered as closed 10 working days after the dispatch of a response to either stage of a complaint if nothing further is heard from the complainant. A complaint can be re-opened within 12 months of the Association's final decision, at the discretion of the Complaint Manager at either stage, on the provision of new evidence being received, in relation to the original complaint. CCHA has the right to refuse that a complaint is re-opened if we believe the new evidence would not affect the Association's final decision.

6.4.2 A complaint will not be re-opened for new issues, which do not relate to the original complaint. However, if new issues do arise for the complainant, these can be raised as a new complaint, which will follow the Complaints Process from Stage 1.

6.5 Complaint Outcomes

- CCHA will inform each complainant of the outcome of their complaint
- CCHA may suggest/use mediation services at either stage of the complaint investigation, if this will improve the chance of reaching a satisfactory response to a complaint
- If appropriate, the complainant will be offered compensation; this will be considered on a case by case basis. If the complainant is in debt to CCHA, financial compensation will be credited to their account

- In the event that the complainant has accepted compensation, no further escalation of the complaint will be allowed

6.6 Further Escalation

- 6.6.1 If the complainant has exhausted the above two stages of the Complaints Process, the complaint can be referred to the HO. This can be achieved either through a Designated Person (a local MP, Councillor, or a recognised Resident Group) within eight weeks of the final decision, or directly by the complainant after eight weeks.
- 6.6.2 The HO considers complaints brought to them within 12 months of a landlord's final decision, for the final stage of their Complaints Process.
- 6.6.3 Details of how to contact the HO can be found by visiting: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk, or by calling 0300 111 3000.

6.7 Anonymous Complaints

- 6.7.1 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, ASB or Anti-Fraud Policies, if appropriate. If this is not necessary, then the Complaints Process will be followed.
- 6.7.2 An anonymous complaint precludes any response to the complainant. The CST will refer anonymous complaints to the manager of the service area the complaint relates to, to investigate and to agree the most appropriate action, in relation to the complaint. As the complaint is anonymous, CCHA cannot provide a response.

6.8 Unreasonable, Persistent Complaints

- 6.8.1 CCHA is committed to dealing fairly, honestly and openly. However, complaints may be considered to be unreasonable, persistent or vexatious, 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 and persistent 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 they already have, and persistently contacting us to complain or remonstrate about our action, decision or explanation

6.8.2 CCHA 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, a member of ELT will decide how best to deal with the complaint, and how best to communicate to the complainant.

7. Compensation

7.1 Where a complainant has suffered loss, inconvenience or disturbance, as a result of CCHA's actions, it may be appropriate to award reasonable compensation. This will be reviewed on a case by case basis and at the discretion of the Complaint Manager.

8. Monitoring, Reviews and Evaluation

8.1 CCHA is committed to reporting complaints in an open and honest way. The volumes and learning outcomes of complaints managed by CCHA, will be published in our Annual Report for Residents.

9. Cross References

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

- [Equality & Diversity Strategy](#)
- [Data Protection Policy](#)
- [Customer Service Standards](#)
- [Customer Experience Strategy](#)
- [Unacceptable Behaviour & Unreasonable Behaviour Policy](#)

9.2 In addition, the HO's CHC can be found here: <https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Complaint-Handling-Code.pdf>