



Complaints Policy

Procedure owner/author:	Housing Manager
Approved by:	Stoke on Trent Housing Society Board
Date approved:	11th April 2017
Next review date:	April 2020

1. Policy Statement

Stoke on Trent Housing Society aims to provide great homes and a high-quality customer focussed service to its customers. Occasionally things may go wrong and our performance or services will not meet our customers' expectations and so they might wish to make a complaint.

This policy aims to provide customers and staff with clear guidance on complaints, ensuring that complaints are dealt with in a fair and consistent manner. It also aims to ensure that we use all feedback from complaints as an opportunity to put things right and to improve services.

The Society has considered the regulatory code and the good practice procedures for complaints handling issued by the Housing Ombudsman Service when designing this policy.

2. Definition of a Complaint

We will encourage customers to get in touch with us straight away if something has gone wrong and to give us the opportunity to put it right. This is often the quickest and easiest way to achieve a satisfactory outcome.

If we cannot resolve the problem informally within an agreed timescale, or if the issue is complex or significant, we will record and investigate it as a complaint.

A complaint is defined as any dissatisfaction expressed by a customer after they have received a service from Stoke on Trent Housing Society, or following an action by the Society which affects them. In addition, a complaint may also be about a lack of action or standard of service by the Society or person/organisation acting on its behalf.

3. Circumstances not Covered by the Complaints Policy

The following circumstances **will not** be considered a complaint:

- A resident complaining about the behaviour of another resident – this would be dealt with under the Society's Anti-Social Behaviour Policy (ASB). Only where the Society fails to respond adequately to the report of ASB, would this be dealt with under the Complaints policy.
- A request for service, e.g. a repair. However, if the resident subsequently feels the need to complain about the service, this would be dealt with under the Complaints policy.
- There is ongoing legal action or legal action is subsequently taken about the complaint which could cause confusion or duplicate/ complicate the case.
- The complaint is received more than six months after the matter came to the complainant's attention.
- The complainant refuses to reasonably engage with the Society and or the process after making the complaint, is abusive to staff or acts unreasonably.
- Complaints made by Society staff – these are dealt with under the grievance procedure through HR. However, the policy will apply if the member of staff is a Society resident making a complaint about the Society's service and not a colleague.

The Society reserves the right to refuse to deal with complaints, or to deal with them differently, if they are pursued unreasonably or could be handled more effectively in a different manner. Additionally, a complaint will not be re-opened at the complainant's request if it is established that no new evidence relevant to the complaint has been provided.

Any decision not to progress a complaint to the next stage or to deal with it differently from the Complaints policy and/or procedure will be made by the Housing Manager in conjunction with the Society's Company Secretary.

4. Making a Complaint

The Society will give customers clear information about how they can make a complaint. Complaints can be made in person, by phone, by e-mail, by letter or via the Society's website.

Where requested, the Society will assist the complainant to submit their complaint or we may suggest contacting someone independent to assist in making a complaint. We will also tell customers about other steps that they can take if they think that their complaint is not resolved.

All letters and telephone calls raising complaints directly with any Society Board Members will be forwarded to the Housing Manager to deal with as per this policy. This will ensure that residents receive an equal service and do not bypass the complaints process.

Complaints received through signed petitions will be treated in the same way as all other complaints. Where it would be helpful, a meeting will be held to discuss the complaint with the petitioners as well as responding to the individual signatories and/or all residents affected by the issue raised.

Anonymous complaints may not be investigated under this policy, although they will always be passed to the Housing Manager for investigation.

At all times the Society will maintain the confidentiality of complainants and the content of their complaints. Only those Society staff that are designated to do so, will investigate complaints.

5. Complaint Process

There are two stages to the complaints process and we aim to resolve the complaint at the earliest stage possible:

Stage 1 (resolution/decision made within 21 days of receipt of the complaint)

The complaint will be investigated by the Housing Manager who will liaise with the complainant to propose a suitable resolution.

Where the complainant is not happy with the resolution/decision made at stage 1 they will have the opportunity to appeal (within 10 days of the stage 1 decision) and to take their complaint to -

Stage 2 (resolution/decision made within 28 days of receipt of appeal)

This appeal of the stage one investigation and decision will be reviewed by the Society's Company Secretary with guidance from the Board being sought where necessary.

At the end of this process, if the complainant does not think that their complaint has been fully resolved and if the complainant is a tenant, leaseholder or housing applicant of the Society, they will be advised that they can refer their complaint to their local Councillor or MP who will try to help resolve the complaint locally or they will refer the complaint immediately to the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS). Alternatively, the complainant can wait for 8 weeks (from the date of their stage 2 decision letter) and then go directly to the independent Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS).

The Society will comply with all recommendations made by the Housing Ombudsman Service.

If it is not possible to comply with any of the response timescales, the complainant will be advised of the reasons and given a revised target date.

6. Complaint Resolution

The Society aims to focus on staff and customers working together and communicating clearly to resolve the complaint positively. We will ask customers to tell us what resolution they are seeking and if we are unable to resolve the complaint through taking the action that the customer requests, we will explain the reasons for this and discuss alternatives.

We will apologise where the Society is at fault and where necessary we will consider compensation where such award is warranted.

7. Unreasonable Complaints

Occasionally, the Society may be contacted by a customer who makes abusive, unreasonably persistent or repetitive complaints. These may be characterised by:

- Repeated complaints on an issue where the complaints procedure has already been fully implemented and exhausted
- Unwillingness to accept documented evidence
- Threatened or actual physical violence or verbal abuse towards staff or their families or associates

In these instances, the Society reserves the right to refuse to deal with complaints, or to deal with them in a different manner.

8. Monitoring and improvement.

The Society aims to learn from complaints and will use this feedback on service delivery to drive change and improvement and to improve customer experience.

Complaints will be recorded and monitored to identify any issues or trends and the number and outcome of complaints will be reported to Stoke on Trent Housing Society Board on a bi-monthly and or annual basis.