



## **CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS & FEEDBACK POLICY 2022 - 2025**

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<b>Title</b>	<b>Customer Complaints &amp; Feedback Policy</b>	
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## Homes in Sedgemoor – Complaints & Feedback Policy

### 1. **Policy Statement**

Homes in Sedgemoor (HiS) wants to ensure that our customers receive a consistent and reliable service.

Customer feedback and complaints are an opportunity for HiS to learn and improve their customer experiences for the future, and to encourage good practice across all service areas.

Our policy has been reviewed alongside the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code 2024 and Guidelines with customers and aims to be customer focused so as to improve customer satisfaction, ensure continuous improvement of services, and to recognise success and failings alike to enable a lesson learned approach.

### 2. **Purpose of Policy**

The purpose of this policy is to ensure customers and partners have a clear, simple and accessible process to express dissatisfaction with our service delivery or to provide feedback so we can enable a Customers First and continuous improvement approach.

### 3. **Scope of the Policy**

This policy will be applicable for any expression of dissatisfaction or complaint about a service provided by HiS, a member of staff or partner contractor.

This policy will not apply for informal day to day matters that can easily be resolved or for reporting of such matters as anti-social behaviour, fly-tipping or general neighbour disputes.

The Housing Ombudsman recognises that for matters such as safeguarding or health and safety concerns, other policies and processes may be more appropriate to use.

HiS also welcomes and encourages positive feedback and compliments can be submitted about a member of staff, a team, or the organisation and its partners as a whole.

Compliments are logged and passed onto staff so we can identify areas of good practice.

#### 4. **Principles**

We want to ensure that our Complaints and Feedback policy and process is:

- ✓ Clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint or provide feedback on our services
- ✓ Accessible and available to all and that customers and partners are aware of our policy and procedure
- ✓ Consistent in approach for all HiS staff
- ✓ Based upon resolution at initial contact

#### 5. **Legal Requirements**

##### **Accessibility**

HiS enables customers to log a complaint in a variety of ways, to ensure that no individual or group of tenants are excluded from accessing the process.

All HiS staff can accept a complaint in the first instance, even if relating to a different service area to that which they are directly working within.

A copy of this policy is available by request or can be viewed via our website [www.homesinedgemoor.org](http://www.homesinedgemoor.org)

Information and advice can also be obtained from the Housing Ombudsman Service - [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

##### **Equality and Diversity**

HiS will be consistent in their approach to complaints and treat all customers who access the complaints process in a fair and equal manner allowing for reasonable adjustments as necessary.

HiS will offer appropriate support to all complainants and consider any sensitive or special needs.

Consideration will be given to sign-posting customers to suitable agencies for additional support and guidance throughout the complaints process.

Where necessary, additional support will be provided, such as translation of documents or the use of language line.

6. **Responsible Persons**

Customer Focus Manager (CFM)

Director of Communities & Customer Service (DCCS)

7. **Performance Monitoring**

The CFM will collate all initial and formal complaint communications on a monthly basis.

All service requests, enquiries and failures will be logged and monitored by the CFM.

All complaints received will be shared at Senior Management meetings, and at bi-annual Board meetings, and broken down into service areas.

No personal information will be shared and the complaints will be shared on a case study basis.

Anonymised information will also be available to the wider organisation for discussion and training at team meetings and via internal newsletter to ensure a lessons learned, continuous improvement approach.

In order to ensure we maintain a Customers First approach, our Sedgemoor Tenants Assurance Committee (STAC) will be presented with a quarterly update so that their feedback can be gathered.

8. **Approval Process**

Any amendments or review of policy to be agreed by Board.

9. **Review**

2-yearly basis in line with Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

10. **Associated Policies/Procedures**

Unacceptable Behaviour policy

Partnership Pledge policy

## 11. Homes in Sedgemoor – Complaints & Feedback Policy

### **What is a complaint?**

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.

The customer does not always have to use the word “complaint” in order for it to be treated as such, but we do also have to distinguish between a service request, survey feedback and a formal complaint. Whenever a customer expresses dissatisfaction then HiS will offer them the choice to log a complaint.

### **Initial contact if you are unhappy with our service**

All initial contacts are logged by our Customer Services team, who will always aim to deal with your enquiry at that first point of contact. Alternatively, a customer is able to raise a complaint with any staff member or colleague who will attempt to resolve.

Where this is not possible, the complaint will be logged, and passed to the CFM in the first instance, who will then evaluate your query, and decide on the most appropriate course of action.

In the absence of the CFM, enquiries will be dealt with by the Customer Services Team Leader (CSTL) or relevant Service Lead.

Your enquiry will be assessed and processed as either –

- A request for service
- A request for further information or follow-up action
- A service failure and complaint

### **What will not be treated as a complaint?**

HiS will strive to resolve all initial contacts at the first point without the need for further escalation.

Example of enquiries that will not be treated as a complaint include:

- Repeat officer contacts for rent arrears
- Reports of fly-tipping or anti-social behaviour
- Repair requests

All requests for service or further information will be logged as an in-bound communication and will be dealt with accordingly, without the requirement for further escalation.

A complaint will not be accepted for consideration in the following circumstances –

- ! Where the issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over 12 months ago
- ! Where legal proceedings have already been started
- ! Matters contained within the complaint have already been considered and the internal complaints process exhausted

Where a complaint is not accepted, the CFM will provide an explanation, setting out the clear reasons behind the decision.

The customer can challenge this decision via the Housing Ombudsman.

### **What will be evaluated as a complaint?**

Any initial contact that expresses dissatisfaction with our services will be logged as an initial, Stage 1 complaint. This will include dissatisfaction with the standard of service received from HiS or a member of HiS staff or our contractors.

Example of initial, first time contacts that will be treated as an initial Stage 1 complaint will include –

- Non-attendance by a contractor to complete a reported repair
- A repair being completed to an unsatisfactory standard
- A member of HiS staff or contractor behaving in an inappropriate or unprofessional way

All initial, Stage 1 complaints will be acknowledged within 5 working days, and where we are unable to deal with at first point of contact, a full response given within 10 working days of this acknowledgement.

All Stage 1 complaints will be overseen by the Customer Focus Manager, and the investigation and response provided by the relevant Service Lead.

Please note that initial complaints must be received within 12 months of the issue causing the customer dis-satisfaction, and will not be considered if out of this timescale.

If a customer states that they do not wish the matter to be treated as a formal complaint, the contact will still be logged as an initial expression of dissatisfaction and dealt with accordingly but noted that no further escalation is required.

## **Formal Complaint – Stage 2**

If a customer has received a response to their initial, Stage 1 complaint, and they are still dissatisfied, they can ask for their complaint to be escalated.

The Stage 1 response will be reviewed by the CFM, and then requests for additional information may be submitted, and further detail as to why the customer remains dissatisfied.

Complaints will not be escalated simply because a customer does not agree with or like an outcome, but all requests will be given consideration, and in the majority of cases, will be accepted.

The customer does not have to provide any additional information or explain their reasons for requesting that their complaint is escalated.

All requests for escalation of a complaint to the next stage for review, should be directed to the CFM, and will be acknowledged within 5 working days.

If accepted, the case will be reviewed by a panel, consisting of a member of our Executive team, a member of our Senior Leadership team, our CFM, and a tenant, either as member of one of our involved customer groups or Tenant Board member.

The response will then be sent from the Chair of the Panel or CFM.

A full response to a Stage 2 formal complaint should be issued within 20 working days, and where this isn't possible, the CFM will clearly communicate this to the customer.

If an escalation request is not accepted, HiS will provide a full explanation to the customer and information on referral to the Housing Ombudsman.

## **Housing Ombudsman Service**

If a customer remains unhappy with our response, they can refer their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman, but cases will only be accepted if our internal complaints process has been followed and exhausted.

However, help and advice can be sought from the Housing Ombudsman service at any point in the process.

Customers can contact the Housing Ombudsman service as follows –

Email – [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)



Phone – 0300 111 3000

In writing – Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool L33 7WQ

Website – [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint)

This policy will be publicised on our website and within communal notice boards, Homes in Sedgemoor colleagues will also make customers aware of this policy if they express dissatisfaction with our service delivery.

**APPENDIX A - Complaints Process** to this Policy provides a brief outline on how to log a complaint.

### **Partnership Pledge**

A customer has the right to refer their complaint to a 'designated person'. This could be a MP or Councillor, who can then agree to act on behalf of the customer to resolve the issue with ourselves or support with taking to the Housing Ombudsman.

### **When a complaint may be refused**

In exceptional circumstances, HiS may refuse to treat the matter as a complaint. These would include such instances as:

- The complaint is about the same subject matter that has already been considered
- The resolution requested by the complainant is out of the remit or responsibility of HiS
- The complainant is seeking excessive recompense disproportionate to the service failure
- Where a complainant is persistent or unreasonable as per our Unacceptable Behaviour policy

### **Compensation**

Compensation is not automatically given and is not appropriate in most cases.

HiS will always seek to resolve the issue at first point of contact with no escalation or compensation requirement.

Where something has gone wrong, HiS will acknowledge this, and provide an apology, and then seek to take the appropriate action to address.

Where applicable and appropriate, compensation can take the form of replacement of damaged items, remedial works if damage to decoration, a reduction or payment to the rent account or a one-off financial payment.

Any remedy offered will reflect the extent of service failure, and level of detriment caused.

If awarding compensation, HiS will consider whether any statutory payments are due, if there has been any quantifiable loss incurred, and the extent of distress and inconvenience caused to the customer.

We will not consider any monetary compensation, for cases where we have not been given an opportunity to rectify matters first.

Compensation may be offset against rent arrears, where this is deemed fair and reasonable, and is appropriate to the circumstances.

All awards of compensation will be agreed within the guidelines, set by the Housing Ombudsman Code.

Awards below £1,000 can be agreed by CFM, Service Lead and Director of Communities & Customer Service. Any amount sought above this limit, will need agreement from our Executive team.

Customers should be aware that for most cases of damage to personal effects and belongings, the customer would be expected to claim for these costs on their household contents insurance, as per their tenancy agreement.

*Complete loss of heating and hot water – in the event that we are unable to complete a repair we will endeavour to provide you with temporary heaters*

*If you are provided with electric fan heaters, we will reimburse for the additional running costs at a rate of £2.50/day*

*If you are also left without a source of hot water you will be paid an additional £2.50/day towards additional costs*

*Communal charges – in the event that you are without an element that forms part of your service charges, e.g. passenger lift, laundry, etc. this will be considered on a case by case by basis by our Executive team.*

HiS will not accept liability for damage to personal effects, unless we have failed to respond to a repair request in a timely manner.

It is the responsibility of the tenant to report any property defects and to allow access to carry out repairs.

Any requests for repairs should be logged with HiS as soon as the customer becomes aware of the issue so as to avoid any further damage to property.

### **Complaints about a member of staff**

If you are unhappy with the behaviour of a member of HiS staff, you can submit a complaint to the CFM in the first instance.

The matter will be brought to the attention of the Service Lead and Head of People and Communications, and you will receive an apology and response within 10 working days, as appropriate.

If your complaint relates to the CFM, this can be addressed to the Director of Communities & Customer Service or Head of People and Communications.

### **Complaints about a Board member or CEO**

Any complaint relating to a Senior Member should be directed to the Head of People and Communications, and the Audit Committee.

### **How we will deal with repeat or habitual complaints**

Repeated or persistent contacts which hinder the ability of HiS staff to carry out their roles, may be classed as unacceptable, and contact from that customer may be restricted.

This will be at the discretion of the CFM, and if deemed unacceptable, the terms of contact will be communicated to the customer in writing.

Customers behaviour may be considered unacceptable when they meet at least one of the following -

- Persist in pursuing a complaint where HiS procedures have been fully and properly implemented, or have been exhausted
- Change the substance of a complaint or continually raise new issues or seek to prolong contact by raising further concerns or questions upon receipt of a response whilst the complaint is being addressed (Any new issues that are significantly different from the original complaint will be raised as a new case and addressed separately)
- Are unwilling to accept documented evidence as being factual, or deny receipt of an adequate response in spite of correspondence specifically answering their questions

- Do not clearly identify the precise issues they wish to be investigated, despite reasonable efforts by HiS staff and others to help them specify their concerns
- Where the individual will not accept that HiS does not have a role in investigating their issue, for example the service is not delivered by HiS
- Focus on a trivial matter to an extent that is out of proportion to its significance and continue to focus on this point
- Have, in the course of pursuing their issue, had an excessive number of contacts with HiS (by telephone, e-mail, letter, in person or social media) placing unreasonable demands on staff

Display unreasonable demands or expectations and fail to accept these may be unreasonable, for example, insist on immediate responses from staff when they are not available and this has been explained

It should be noted that contact should only be restricted regarding stated subject matters, and it should not leave the customer unable to access vital services, such as emergency repairs.

This will be reviewed at agreed periods, and when this review period expires the CFM will review the customers' behaviours and contacts. If behaviour has improved to the required level, the CFM will write to the customer advising the persistent or vexatious status has been removed.

If behaviour has not improved at the end of the review period, or escalates during this period, the CFM will notify the customer specifying a further restrictions and review period.

On-going behaviour that is deemed disruptive or unacceptable may constitute a breach of tenancy and legal or non-legal measures could be taken.

Any restrictions placed upon a customers' contact will be considered with regard to the Equality Act 2010 and our Unacceptable Behaviour policy.

### **Other feedback and compliments**

As a Customers First organisation, we welcome feedback on our services, and customers are invited to provide this via their preferred communication method as detailed earlier in this policy.

All customer feedback and compliments will be directed to the CFM or Service Lead in the first instance, for validation and recording.

Customer feedback and compliments will not afford a formal response, unless specifically requested by the customer.

### **What is a compliment?**

A compliment is an unsolicited contact from a customer to offer praise and positive feedback for our service delivery. This can be directed towards an individual member of staff, one of our contractors, or our general customer experience.

A customer thanking us for helping them at the end of an interaction will not be recorded as a compliment, as this should be deemed our role anyway.

### **Feedback surveys**

In order to ensure our service remains customer focused, we reserve the right to contact customers for feedback at regular intervals, via telephone, text message, email or other means. Customers will be asked a short set of questions and are not under any obligation to participate in these surveys, and can opt out at any time.

Any negative responses to survey questions, will be referred to the Customer Focus Assistant, who will contact the customer within 10 working days to discuss their feedback and take further action as appropriate.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **COMPLAINTS PROCESS**

#### **Contacting Homes in Sedgemoor to log a complaint**

All initial contact should be directed to the Customer Services Team within HiS or if preferred you can log your complaint with any member of staff and they will pass to the Customer Service Team to process

If preferred a third party or representative can communicate with us with regards to your complaint, and attend any meetings as necessary.

You can contact us by whichever is your preferred method –

Email – [customer.services@homesinsedgemoor.org](mailto:customer.services@homesinsedgemoor.org)

On-line – via your OPEN Access account or HiS website – [www.homesinsedgemoor.org](http://www.homesinsedgemoor.org)

Facebook or Twitter – via direct private message to ensure confidentiality and privacy for customer

In person or write to – Homes in Sedgemoor, Bridgwater House, Kings Square, Bridgwater TA6 3AR

Telephone – 0800 585 360

All initial contacts will be logged by our Customer Services team, who will always aim to deal with your enquiry at that first point of contact.

The contact will be reported as an initial Stage 1 complaint and will be acknowledged within 2 working days.

A full response will be sent within 10 working days, or where this is not possible, a holding letter with explanation for delay will be sent.

If you are unhappy with this response and feel that your complaint has not been dealt with effectively, then you can request to escalate to Stage 2, where it will be reviewed by our panel.

At the completion of each stage of the complaints process, HiS will write to the customer and advise them of the following:

- the complaint stage
- the outcome of the complaint
- the reasons for any decisions made
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right
- details of any outstanding actions
- details of how to escalate the matter if dissatisfied.

The designated responsible person for overseeing all complaint handling is the CFM.

All customers have the right to early advice from the Housing Ombudsman Service and can contact them for help at any point.

Email – [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

Phone – 0300 111 3000

In writing – Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool L33 7WQ

Website – [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk)