

# CUSTOMER FEEDBACK (COMPLAINTS) POLICY



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<b>Policy Grouping/Directorate(s)</b>	Transformation
<b>Policy Title</b>	Customer Feedback (Complaints) Policy
<b>Author/Reviser/Owner</b>	Gina Tomlinson (Customer Insight Lead)
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Rochdale Boroughwide Housing Limited is a charitable community benefit society.  
FCA register number 31452R.

Registered Office: Sandbrook House, Sandbrook Way, Rochdale OL11 1RY.

Registered as a provider of social housing. RSH register number: 4607

## **1. Introduction**

1.1. This policy outlines Rochdale Boroughwide Housing's approach to offering a simple and accessible process for providing feedback which ensures that any complaints are dealt with in a timely, fair, impartial and consistent manner. It sets out how we welcome feedback regardless of how it comes in (letter, telephone, email, online, via social media) and how we will not only respond to individual concerns but look to learn and use that learning to improve services for all our customers.

## **2. Context**

2.1. This policy document has been re written following an extensive review which took place in 2019 which involved a number of tenants, individual employees and teams from across the Society. It takes into account good practice guidance from the Independent Housing Ombudsman and Housing Quality Network. It also reflects findings documented in the 2018 Housing Green Paper and the National Housing Federation's Together with Tenants initiative regarding what's important to customers when providing feedback and in particular making complaints.

## **3. Aims & Objectives**

3.1. The aims of the policy are:

- To encourage feedback – both positive and negative
- To ensure complaints are resolved quickly and sensitively
- To ensure complaints are resolved at first point of contact wherever possible
- To ensure that we learn from comments, complaints and compliments and use that learning to improve services
- To ensure we provide customers and other stakeholders with information about how we are performing in relation to the service standards we have set with regards to feedback and to demonstrate how we have learnt from the feedback we receive.

## **4. Scope**

4.1. This policy applies to all feedback received from any person using or directly affected by a service RBH deliver (either directly or via contractors).

4.2. We are happy to receive complaints from Councillors/MPs made on behalf of their constituents. In these instances we will record the complaint as having been made by the Councillor/MP but will treat it in the same way as we do other complaints. We will not be able to discuss the business of individual customers unless they have given their permission for us to do this.

## **5. COMPLAINTS**

### **5.1. Definition of a complaint**

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by a customer when something has gone wrong. This could be:

- You are unhappy with what we do or the way we do it
- You consider that we have not done something which we should have or have taken too long to do something

- You feel that we have not followed our policy or procedures and wish to challenge their suitability
- You are not happy with the standard of service you have received from us
- You are unhappy with the attitude, behaviour or way you have been treated by one of our employees or people acting on our behalf

A complaint is not:

- When you are making a first request for a service from us (e.g. the first time you report a repair).
- When you are requesting information or clarification about our services, policies, service standards or procedures
- If you have a problem with your neighbour or another resident living in your neighbourhood. These will be dealt with under the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and Procedures
- If you are wanting us to review a decision about your housing application (e.g. the banding you have been given on applying for housing)
- Where there is a legal solution (e.g. a claim for damages that should be handled as a public liability insurance claim)
- Where you have a complaint about decisions taken or services provided by other organisations (e.g. Rochdale Borough Council) over which RBH has no control
- Complaints relating to the actions or conduct of RBH Board members and tenant members of the Representative Body. These will be dealt with in accordance with the codes of conduct that apply to each body.

## **5.2. Making a complaint**

All RBH colleagues are trained to welcome and handle complaints. You can make a complaint via any of the different ways we offer for you to contact us – by telephone, email, online, in writing, visiting our offices or by posting on social media platforms. We just ask that you tell us rather than telling others as that way we can look to resolve the issue as quickly as possible.

If you require support to make a complaint then you could ask a family member or friend to act as advocate for you, or alternatively ask us and we will find someone within RBH or from an external organisation to support or act as advocate for you. We know that some of our customers take their complaints to their local MP or ward Councillor. Whilst it is fine for you to do that, this does not mean that your complaint will be treated any quicker or differently to what's described below. If you are using an advocate, you will need to give us permission to speak to them about your complaint to ensure we remain compliant with Data Protection legislation (GDPR).

## **5.3. Resolving service issues promptly (Informal)**

On initial contact the employee who has taken your complaint will try to resolve the service issue promptly or pass it to an individual or team who can. If this is not possible then it will be logged as a formal complaint and passed to one of our Complaints Investigators who will lead on investigating your complaint and getting back to you with a resolution.

We record all such contact on our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to identify underlying causes and emerging trends in service failure or dissatisfaction.

#### 5.4. Investigation (Formal – Stage 1)

If your complaint is complex and was not able to be resolved at initial contact, or if the solution offered did not result in you being entirely satisfied, it will be referred to one of our Complaints Investigators and logged as a formal complaint. You will receive an acknowledgement within 2 working days providing you with a reference number and the name of the investigating officer who will be your key contact. The investigator will contact you to ensure we fully understand your complaint, what you want to see happen, how you want us to communicate with you and to ensure you are clear about what will happen next.

It is expected that most complaints at this stage can be resolved within 10 working days. If it looks as though your particular complaint is going to take longer then we will agree with you a longer timescale.

We will provide a full and thorough response within 10 working days or within the agreed timescale. This will usually be in writing, although we will take note of how you've said you want us to communicate with you.

#### 5.5. Review (Formal – Stage 2)

Our aim is always to deal with your complaint thoroughly and to your satisfaction. If you feel that we have not properly considered the complaint then you can take it to review. We ask that you do this within 28 days of receiving your response letter so that it is still fresh in everyone's minds. We also ask that you explain the reason(s) you remain dissatisfied and wish for the matter to be considered by us again.

We will acknowledge your request to review within 2 working days. The review will be undertaken by an independent Head of Service or senior manager (i.e. someone who does not manage the service you initially expressed dissatisfaction with).

At this stage we want to ensure that a thorough review is carried out but would expect this to take no longer than 15 working days. Again if more time is needed this will be agreed with you.

As at investigation stage, we will provide you with a full and thorough response within 15 working days or within the agreed timescale.

#### 5.6. External appeal

If, having been through our complaints process, you are still not happy with the outcome of your complaint, you can choose to refer your complaint to a 'designated person'. This can be an MP or local councillor or it can be our Complaints Panel made up of RBH tenants. The 'designated person' can try to resolve the complaint themselves or refer directly to the Independent Housing Ombudsman. Alternatively, you can contact the Independent Housing Ombudsman directly but please be aware that they will only start to consider the case once 8 weeks have passed since you received your final response from us. Further information on 'designated persons' and the work of the Independent Housing Ombudsman can be found on their website [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk).

#### 5.7. Unreasonable or frequent complaints/complainants

Generally the complaints we receive are made in good faith because a customer is genuinely unhappy with the service we have provided or lack of service. In raising a complaint most

customers want to work with us to find a solution to the issue raised. On occasions though the behaviour of the customer making the complaint may become unreasonable or unacceptable and has, on occasion, impacted on our ability to continue delivering services to other customers. In these rare instances we reserve the right to restrict or change the way in which a customer makes contact with us. See Complaints Procedures.

Examples of behaviour that RBH would consider unacceptable are

- Aggressive or abusive behaviour towards our employees or contractors including threats, physical violence, personal verbal abuse, harassment or derogatory remarks
- Unreasonable demands which impact on our employees time and ability to carry out their duties e.g. continually making calls, changing the content of their original complaint or insisting on dealing with a particular employee
- Unreasonable persistence in refusing to accept an explanation or decision and continuing to pursue their complaint without providing any new information that may have a significant impact

#### **5.8. Compensation or Good Will Gesture payments**

Compensation or good will gesture payments may be considered where appropriate. See separate Compensation Policy.

### **6. COMPLIMENTS OR COMMENTS**

We love to hear about when we've given you particularly good service so that we can celebrate it and also learn what we need to do more of as well as what we need to stop doing. We also genuinely want to hear any thoughts you have on how we can improve services. Compliments and comments can be made through any of our employees who will tell you what they are going to do with that information and ensure that it is logged in our CRM system so that we can analyse across our services what, or who, is working well and learn from that.

### **7. Monitoring**

7.1. We will develop a hierarchy of reporting and regularly report on the following to customers, management teams, Board and Representative Body

- Number of complaints broken down by informal/formal, stage reached, whether they were upheld or not and by type and service area
- Number of compliments and comments broken down by type and service area
- Number of Councillor/MP enquiries broken down by type and service area
- Performance against timescales set out in this policy and in the associated service standards
- What we have learnt and how we have used this learning to improve services

7.2. On a monthly basis the Complaints Panel will review a number of anonymised, recently closed formal complaints to see if they think we could have done anything better and feedback recommendations to the relevant service area(s).

7.3. On resolution of a formal complaint we will send out a survey to check satisfaction with how the complaint was handled and with the final outcome and publish the results of this survey.

**7.4.** Our Customer Panel Continuous Improvement Group (CIG) will undertake regular monitoring as part of their role with regards to providing assurance that RBH is adhering to the consumer standards in relation to customer feedback and complaints.

## **8. Review**

8.1. All RBH strategies, policies, service standards and procedures are reviewed on a regular basis in order to ensure that they are 'fit for purpose' and comply with all relevant legislation and statutory regulations.

8.2. This policy will go through the full policy approval process every 3 years and will undergo a desktop review annually.

## **9. Links with other RBH Documents**

This policy links to the following policies and strategies:

- Compensation Policy (in development)
- Customer Experience Strategy (in development)
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Allocations Policy
- Code of Conduct for Employees
- Code of Conduct for Board
- Code of Conduct for Representative Body