

Northampton Partnership Homes



Complaints & Feedback Policy



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1. Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to set out our approach to complaints and feedback for NPH tenants and customers.

Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH) will provide high quality services to our tenants and customers and it is our aim to provide early resolution to prevent complaints where possible. However, we recognise that sometimes things go wrong and we need to respond speedily to put them right.

This policy will help us to achieve our strategic objective to deliver high quality and tenant and customer focussed housing services. It will also help us show commitment to our values, which are about being an organisation that:

- Is open and strong
- Listens and responds

2. Policy Aim

We welcome and encourage all tenants and customers to tell us when we've got it wrong, to give us their views and opinions and to praise us when our team members do things well or go the extra mile.

We aim to maximise the opportunities to gain this type of feedback by:

- Encouraging tenants and customers to provide feedback and make it as easy as possible to do this
- Clearly defining what we consider a complaint, comment and compliment
- Having a clear and simple complaints process
- Ensuring all tenants and customers can access our complaints service and provide support when needed
- Investigating and resolve complaints as quickly as possible
- Learning from complaints
- Telling tenants and customers how well we are doing in dealing with their complaints
- Involving tenants and customers in reviewing our overall performance
- Encouraging tenants and customers to tell us when we have exceeded their expectations
- Ensuring our team members are well trained and supported to handle complaints effectively

3. Definition of a complaint

For NPH a complaint is when a tenant or customer is not satisfied with the standard of service they have received from NPH or anyone acting on our behalf. This includes an action we have taken, or failed to take.

Examples of a complaint include:

- Failure to do something that should have been done
- Not meeting our service standards or policy time scales
- Treating a tenant or customer unfairly

3.1 What is not a complaint?

For the purposes of this policy we do not define any of the following as complaints:

- A request for service, information or an explanation
- Complaints that have not been brought to our attention within 6 months of an incident or issue arising
- An issue that has already been resolved through our complaints process
- Matters for which there is an alternative appeals process in place such as the right to review the decision to terminate an introductory tenancy
- Cases where a tenant or customer is pursuing their issue through legal proceedings such as a disrepair claim or an insurance claim
- Requests for compensation
- Issues raised in petitions recently or within the previous 6 months
- Reports of anti-social behaviour or neighbour nuisance
- Complaints about bodies or persons over which NPH has no control

4. Who can complain?

We define a complainant as a tenant or leaseholder who has exercised the right to buy, stakeholder or any person who receives a service from NPH. This includes future tenants and customers such as applicants and any person acting on behalf of a tenant or customer.

Any member of the public can make a complaint to NPH but only tenant and leaseholders have full access to all identified stages of the Complaints Policy. Other customer complaints will only have access to certain stages of the complaint process.

Only tenants and leaseholders can progress their complaint to Stage 3 of NPH complaints process and beyond with the use of external recognised bodies.

For other customers, the complaints process finishes at the end of Stage 2 and does not offer further action to any external body.

Any tenant or customer with vulnerabilities or would like help to make a complaint can have the support of an advocate at any stage of the process. For example, a friend, relative or professional whom you confirm you are happy to speak with us on your behalf. However, legal representatives such as solicitors are not accepted by NPH.

4.1 Anonymous complaints

Anonymous complaints will be recorded as a complaint and will be considered, but restricted to Stage 1 of our complaints process. We may not investigate an anonymous complaint where it would be impractical or not within our remit. To be able to consider the complaint further the complainant would need to make themselves known.

5. How we handle feedback

5.1 Compliments

We encourage compliments as they help to continuously improve services. They provide positive feedback to employees and boost morale and motivation. Compliments will be recorded centrally, acknowledged and referred to the manager of the individual concerned.

Compliments will be published using our website, newsletters and social media and used in publicity materials and reception areas.

5.2 Comments and informal complaints

Comments and suggestions for improvement will be used to inform the development and delivery of our services.

When a tenant or customer expresses initial dissatisfaction with something we have done or failed to do we will deal with the issue on the spot. This will be treated as an informal complaint. We will record informal complaints internally and use this information to make improvements to our services. However, informal complaints will not be recorded as complaints for monitoring statistics.

5.3 Complaints

Where it is not possible to resolve an informal complaint or request for service at the first point of contact, we will operate an escalated 3 stage formal process which consists of:

- **Stage 1** – Quick resolution: A complaint will be investigated by the most appropriate service manager. The service manager will do all they can to resolve a complaint and respond to the complainant within 10 working days.
- **Stage 2** – Formal investigation: If a complaint cannot be resolved at Stage 1 it will be reviewed by a Head of Service. The Head of Service will look at the handling of the complaint at Stage 1 and make sure that all the issues have been properly looked into. A full response will be given to the complainant within 10 working days of the complaint being escalated.
- **Stage 3** – Formal review: A review by our Complaints Panel. The Panel is made up of 3 persons:
 - a) Tenants Complaints Panel representative
 - b) Member of Executive Team and
 - c) an NPH Board member

The Review Panel will hear the complaint within 20 working days of the request to escalate it, and will respond to the complainant within 10 days of the Panel hearing.

Complaints will be acknowledged with 48 hours.

5.4 Requests to escalate complaints between stages

Where a complainant is not satisfied with the response they receive at either Stage 1 or Stage 2 of our complaints process, they can request that the complaint is escalated to the next stage but must do so within 28 days of receiving our response. Escalation of a complaint **is not automatic** and is subject to consideration of the reasons put forward by the tenant or customer. If the complainant does not provide enough additional information in the first instance, they have 7 days in which to do so.

As highlighted in section 4 the full Stage 3 process does not apply to all customers.

5.5 Designated person and Housing Ombudsman

Where a tenant or leaseholder exhausts the NPH complaints process and they do not consider it resolved we will inform the tenant that they can either:

- Refer the matter to a designated person, which can be an NPH recognised Tenant Complaint Panel member, a local MP or local councillor, or
- Wait 8 weeks and refer the matter directly to the Housing Ombudsman

6. Responsibilities

6.1 NPH responsibilities

It is the responsibility of all NPH staff to ensure that we deliver the best possible complaints service. We will treat our tenants and customers with respect at all times and we will do all we can to resolve a complaint.

Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation rests with the Strategy and Performance Team, which will ensure that we achieve the objectives of this policy.

6.2 Tenant / customer responsibilities

To deal with a complaint effectively we want a tenant or customer to:

- Provide us with full details of their complaint, why and how they believe NPH have failed and what action they would like to see to resolve the issue.
- Tell us if they have any individual needs that will require additional support from the start of the process and help us when dealing with their complaint
- Inform us of their current contact details and if their contact details change
- Respond to us when we ask for more information
- Sign a form of authority when they want a third party to act on their behalf
- Pursue their complaint in a reasonable way and be respectful to our staff

7. Exceptions to the Complaints Procedure

7.1 Unreasonable complainant behaviour

We will not accept unreasonable behaviour from complainants. We understand that tenants and customers will consider that they have a justified complaint that they wish to pursue. However, when the way that they do this becomes unreasonable, we may refuse to consider their complaint.

NPH will treat a complainant as unreasonable if:

- The complaint is pursued in an inappropriate manner
- The complainant is abusive, insulting or aggressive towards staff or other tenants and customers
- If NPH believe the complainant has previously made the same complaint, which has been responded to and resolved
- Where necessary, as a result of investigations, it is decided that the complaint is without merit or substance
- The complainant makes an excessive number of complaints
- The complainant places unreasonable demands on NPH in terms of the amount of information they want from us or the nature and scale of service they expect

In the event that we consider a complainant to be unreasonable we may close a complaint and not allow the complainant to take their complaint to the next stage. We may also limit the means the tenant or customer is allowed to communicate with us. Where a complaint is not escalated we will clearly explain the reasons why.

7.2 Petitions

Petitions are complaints by a group of individuals about the same issue. Petitions will not be dealt with under our complaints process. Petitions will be investigated and we will work with the petition lead contact to try to resolve the issues raised.

7.3 Enquiries from Councillors and MPs

If a complaint is received from a Councillor or MP, on behalf of an NPH tenant or customer, we will deal with this through the procedures that are currently in place. We will respond within established policy timescales for this type of enquiry.

If the Councillor or MP is acting in the capacity as a 'designated person' this is addressed in section 11 below.

8. Mediation

We are committed to using all possible means to resolve a complaint. This could include using mediation or arbitration as alternative ways of resolving disputes.

Where appropriate, we may engage the services of an independent third party to investigate a formal complaint.

9. Monitoring and learning

We recognise that complaints, comments and compliments provide a valuable source of information to help us improve our services. We will ensure that our complaints service is working by:

- Monitoring and reporting our performance including the number of complaints received and performance against target response times
- Displaying performance information on our website and in our tenant and customer newsletter and reporting regularly to our Tenant Complaints Panel
- Testing the satisfaction of tenants and customers with our complaints service
- Analysing the types of complaints we receive across all our service areas
- Recording the lessons learned from complaints and using this information to change and improve services

10. Consultation and tenant involvement

We recognise the importance of working in partnership with our tenants and customers to develop and continuously improve our services. We will consult with tenants and customers on the content and operation of this policy.

We will also involve our tenants and customers in reviewing and learning from complaints and use this information to improve services.

Tenants and customers can help to resolve disputes, through Tenant involvement in the Complaints Panel at Stage 3 of the NPH process and via their role as Designated Persons.

11. Legal and regulatory compliance

When we operate this policy we will have regard to all relevant legislation, regulation and good practice. In particular we will comply with all regulatory requirements.

The Consumer Standards – this policy contributes towards achieving the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard by:

- Adopting an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible
- Ensuring that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly

Localism Act 2011 – tenants have a legal right to request that their complaints is considered by a 'designated person' once our internal procedure is complete. Such a person can be an MP, a local councillor or a recognised group of tenants or customers. The complainant may also approach the Housing Ombudsman directly if more than 8 weeks have elapsed since the completion of our internal complaints process.

This Complaints and Feedback Policy statement satisfies our regulatory and statutory obligations.

12. Links to other NPH documents

- Complaints toolkit
- Compensation Policy and procedures
- Customer Service Standards
- Petitions Policy

13. Document management

Policy title	Complaints and Feedback Policy
Policy group	Tenant and customer services
Delivery Plan 2015 – 20 Strategic objective	Strategic objective 2: Deliver high quality and Tenant and customer focussed housing services
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Document management		
Version	Date amended	Amendments
1	February 2016	Updated document when agreed and signed off will replace post transfer policy document.

NPH Complaints Procedure

Appendix 1

