



Customer Complaints Policy

Introduction

- 1.1 We aim to deliver a consistently good customer experience through the services that we provide. We recognise that we may not always achieve this and that there will be times when our customers wish to express their dissatisfaction. We will deal with complaints effectively, with empathy and within set response targets.
- 1.2 This policy ensures we provide a high-quality complaint handling service that promotes a positive complaint handling culture, using learnings to drive improvement, and meet the requirements of the regulatory Tenant Involvement and Empowerment consumer standard and the Housing Ombudsman’s complaints handling code.

Policy

2.0 What we view as a complaint

2.1 The Housing Ombudsman is an independent, and impartial service which investigates complaints and resolve disputes involving the tenants and leaseholders of social landlords. We use the Ombudsman’s complaint definition (Housing Ombudsman code 1.2) which is:

‘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.’

Therefore, any complainants do not need to use the word complaint for it to be treated as such by us. If further enquiries are needed to resolve the matter, or if the resident requests it, the issue must be logged as a complaint.

2.2 How to make a complaint

2.3 Complaints can be made through the following channels:

- By phone
- Online using our app, website or social media channels
- Via Live Chat
- By e-mail
- In person
- By post

Any issues or enquiries received via a MP or local councillor that meet the complaint definition will also be resolved using our complaints process.

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2.4 We will help people through the complaints process and make any reasonable adjustment(s) they need to ensure everyone can access this service. We will ask the complainant if they need any additional support at the point of receiving the complaint and ensure we comply with Equality Act 2010.

3.0 What is not classed as a complaint

3.1 We will accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so. There are circumstances in which a matter will not be considered to be a complaint. For example:

- The issue occurred over six months ago (unless the concern was around safeguarding or health and safety).
- Concerns where legal proceedings have commenced. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court.
- Concerns that have previously been dealt with under the complaints policy; however, where the problem is a reoccurring issue, we will consider older reports as part of the background to the complaint.
- If a customer continues to complain about issues that have already been responded to where no additional information or actions can be take. (Please refer to Vexatious Complaints Policy).

If we do not accept a complaint, we will explain why and provide information about how to take the matter to the Housing Ombudsman.

4.0 How we deal with complaints

4.1 We will deal with customer complaints effectively and empathetically using the Housing Ombudsman Services' Dispute Resolution principles:

- We will recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint. A Service request is where a resident may be unhappy with a situation that they wish to have rectified while and a complaint is about the service they have/have not received.
- We will be fair, put things right and learn from complaints to improve customer experience.
- We will provide an easy and accessible ways for customers to make a complaint and will communicate with customers in their preferred way, making any reasonable adjustments, where appropriate.
- Throughout the complaint's process we will continue to remind the customer of how to contact the Housing Ombudsman Service for any advice and guidance.
- We will provide advice and support for customers and deal with issues at the earliest possible opportunity.

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- We will log all complaints and provide customers with a complaint reference number, and details of who is managing their complaint. The investigating Manager will be responsible for keeping the customer informed throughout the investigation progress.
- If we find that we have failed a customer, we will apologise. We will agree and implement a solution with them, and provide compensation, where appropriate.
- Full details of all complaints and concerns will be recorded and analysed so we can learn from them and make improvements.
- We will make every effort to keep to the timescales at each stage of the complaint process, however, there may be times we may not be able to do this and therefore, reserve the right to work outside these timescales. If this happens, we will, let customers know why and set out the revised timescales and keep them updated on the progress.

5.0 Our complaints process

5.1 We operate a two stage complaints approach:

Acknowledgment

When we receive a complaint, we will acknowledge it within 5 days of receiving it. We will share a summary of the complaint, details of the Investigating Manager and the resolution sought from the customer, as well as a copy of our complaints policy. Customers are reminded of their right to contact the Housing Ombudsman throughout their complaint.

Stage 1

The Investigating Manager will contact the customer to discuss the issue, thoroughly investigate the complaint with support from the Customer Complaint and Liaison Officer and will aim to provide a response within 10 working days from the date of acknowledgement.

If this timescale is not achievable, the Customer Complaint and Liaison Officer/ Investigating Manager will keep the customer informed of the reasons and provide and agree a revised timescale with the customer. This will not exceed a further 10 working days without a good reason and in agreement with the customer.

The customer will be advised that they can escalate their complaint to stage 2 if they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the process and will need to notify the Customer Complaint and Liaison Officer of this within 10 working days of receiving their stage 1 investigation response. The customer must provide reasons or alternative solution for their request for escalation.

Should the complaint be escalated to stage 2 of the process the complaint will be assigned to a Head of Service. We reserve the right to decline complaint escalation, should this be the case we will provide reasons for this and will offer Housing Ombudsman Service details.

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Within the stage 1 resolution response we will always make the customer aware of their right to escalate their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman if they are still unhappy with the decision and how to do this.

Stage 2

If the customer is dissatisfied with this response or the issue is complex and needs further investigation, the complaint will be assigned to a Head of Service who will contact the customer within 5 working days of the stage 2 complaint being logged.

The Head of Service will contact the customer to discuss the complaint and have a response to the complaint within 20 working days of complaint escalation. If longer is needed to investigate the complaint the customer will be informed of the reasons, and we will agree a revised timescale with the customer. We will not exceed the further 10 working days without a good reason.

If an extension beyond 10 working days is required to enable us to fully respond to customer's complaints, this will be agreed by both parties.

Within the stage 2 response we will always make the customer aware of their right to escalate their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman if they are still unhappy with the decision and how to do this.

All complaints will be recorded on our contact management system and a full record will be kept of the complaint; including the original complaint details, date received, all correspondence, reports, and communication (including third parties), any review and the outcomes at each stage.

Complaints related to Building Safety

A 'building safety risk' is defined as- risk to the safety of people in or about the building (18 metres or 7 floors) arising from either the spread of fire or structural failure; and the performance by an accountable person with regard to their duties.

Complaints in relation to Building Safety will only be investigated at stage one of IVH's complaint process before being escalated directly to the Building Safety Regulator.

6.0 Compensation

6.1 We have a separate compensation policy for complaint handling. In awarding compensation, we will consider whether any statutory payments are due, if any quantifiable losses have been incurred, the time and trouble a customer has been put to as well as any distress and inconvenience caused.

7.0 Housing Ombudsman Service

7.1 If the customer remains dissatisfied after our internal complaints process has been exhausted, they can refer the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service. Details of how to do this will be provided at each stage of our complaint process. Customers have the right to go to the Housing Ombudsman Service at any point.

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7.2 Should any findings or recommendations be made by the Housing Ombudsman Service we will ensure that we comply with these within timescales determined by the Housing Ombudsman Service.

Performance Reporting

- 8.1 We will use complaints to drive continuous learning and improvement. Complaints will be reviewed to identify any common themes and areas for learning. Although, we will actively highlight any major service failures as a matter of urgency and without delay. Any issues identified will be raised with the relevant service area and/or contractor to aid service improvement
- 8.2 We will proactively use learning from complaints to revise policies and procedures, to train colleagues and contractors and to improve communication and record-keeping.
- 8.3 We will report back on wider learning and improvements by publishing information to customers, our Resident Scrutiny Panel, our Customer Offer Panel, colleagues, and stakeholders, as well as providing evidence on our website and annual report.
- 8.4 We will complete an annual self-assessment against Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code, which will be shared with our Board and published on our website.
- 8.5 Performance information relating to complaints is reported on a quarterly basis to the Board. Trends, learnings, and actions are reported to board twice yearly in the form of a board paper. An appointed member of the board oversees complaint learnings and ensures best practise is shared with other members.
- 8.6 Performance updates include details of complaint volumes, arising issues and trends from complaints handling, outcomes in terms of learning and future improvement plans: as well as updates on compliance with the Housing Ombudsman’s orders.
- 8.7 The Board will receive individual outcomes from Housing Ombudsman’s determinations and will be presented on an annual basis with the outcomes from our self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman’s code.

Roles and Responsibilities

- 9.1 The following colleagues oversee the Complaint Policy:
 - Head of Customers and Customers has overall responsibility for ensuring the policy is adhered to by all colleagues and learnings reported to Leadership and Board.

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- Rents and Complaints Manager oversees the day to day running of the complaints team, ensuring the policy is adhered to and performance is monitored
- The Customer Complaints Officer is responsible for ensuring all complaints are handed in accordance with the Housing Ombudsman guidelines.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 10.1 The Association is committed to treating people with honesty, dignity, respect, and trust. This applies to colleagues, customers, and board members; all of whom undertake not to discriminate directly or indirectly or victimise because of race, gender, gender reassignment, disability, sexual orientation, age or religion and belief.
- 10.2 IVH is committed to equality, diversity, and inclusion and such will make reasonable adjustments to the policy to recognise, accommodate and support customers' individual needs, where needed. All information can be made available in other formats or translated on request.
- 10.3 The complaints policy theoretically impacts all customer's and all services we provide, so it potentially impacts areas with known inequalities. We will help people through the complaints process and make any reasonable adjustment(s) they need to ensure everyone can access this service.
- 10.4 When applying this policy IVH will consider all the protected characteristics covered in the Equality Act 2010 and make reasonable adjustments, where appropriate.
- 10.5 To be read in conjunction with the complaints policy EIA.

Associated Documents and Good Practice

- 10.1 This document is to be read in conjunction with the following documents:
- Housing Ombudsman Service self-assessment
 - Complaints Handling Code
 - Compensation Policy
 - Equality Impact Assessment for Customer Complaints Policy
 - Tenancy Policy
 - Tenancy Agreements
 - Equality and Diversity Framework
 - Vexatious Complaints Policy
 - Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Standard
 - Customer Strategy 2022/25
 - HOS spotlight reports

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Version Control

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| Policy Author: | Ross Powell- Head of Customer and Communities |
| Policy Owner: | Executive Director of Customer and Communities |
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| EIA (Equality Impact Assessment) Date and Link to EIA | June 2023 |
| Safeguarding Impact | This does not apply to this policy |
| Lead Team | Communities Team |

The latest version of this policy should be viewed online from The Hub area of the IVH intranet, and any printed version cannot be relied on as the most current version

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