



COMPLAINTS POLICY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This policy describes Almond Housing Association Limited's (AHA Ltd) overall arrangements for handling complaints. It is supported by detailed procedures and complies with:
- a) the Statement of Complaints Handling Principles produced by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) under the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 and published in January 2011, following approval by the Scottish Parliament;
 - b) the SPSO's Model Complaints Handling Procedure for Registered Social Landlords, published in January 2020 following approval by the Scottish Parliament.
- 1.2 The policy is also supported by guidance to employees on handling and recording complaints, and a public information leaflet containing advice on what is and is not a complaint, how to complain, and how we will deal with and respond to complaints.
- 1.3 In accordance with AHA Ltd's Equality & Diversity policy, we will where necessary produce our complaints leaflet in minority ethnic languages, or in Braille or audio tape. AHA Ltd will also provide translation facilities where required to assist at interviews and meetings.

2.0 COMPLAINTS HANDLING - PRINCIPLES

- 2.1 In implementing this policy and the supporting procedures AHA Ltd aims to comply with the SPSO Statement of Complaints Handling Principles, which states that an effective complaints handling procedure is:
- user focused,
 - accessible,
 - simple and timely,
 - thorough, proportionate and consistent,
 - objective, impartial and fair, and should
 - seek early resolution, and
 - deliver improvement.
- 2.2 AHA Ltd values complaints, seeks to resolve customer dissatisfaction as close as possible to the point of service delivery and seeks to conduct thorough, impartial and fair investigations of complaints so that, where appropriate, we can make evidence-based decisions.

2.3 AHA Ltd recognises that complaints can:

- provide employees with a first-hand account of the service user's views and experience,
- give us valuable information we can use to improve customer satisfaction and prevent the same problems that led to the complaint from happening again, and
- highlight problems we may otherwise miss.

2.4 AHA Ltd also recognises that resolving complaints quickly, and sorting them out as close to the point of service delivery:

- can save costs and create better customer relations,
- means they are less likely to escalate to the next stage of the procedure,
- can minimise the overall workload involved in dealing with complaints,
- can improve relationships with our service users, and
- can enhance the public's perception of AHA Ltd.

3.0 COMPLAINTS HANDLING – RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 Board of Management

- To ensure that AHA Ltd has approved and implemented a complaints policy that complies with current regulations and guidance.
- To monitor performance against target response times.
- Where appropriate, to agree any action required as a result of complaints received, and monitor the implementation of that action.

3.2 Management

- Chief Executive: To ensure that all employees are trained in and follow the approved complaints procedures and that any action agreed following a review of complaints is implemented.
- Director of Corporate Services:
 - To ensure that appropriate processes are in place for recording the receipt, progress and outcome of each complaint.
 - To arrange training on complaints handling.
 - To submit the required reports on complaints to the Senior Management Team, Board of Management and Scottish Housing Regulator.
 - To report to tenants and other customers on the range of complaints received, their outcome and the actions being taken to deal with areas of service identified as requiring improvement.

- Directors:
 - To ensure that their staff are aware of what should be recorded as a complaint.
 - To review current complaints regularly to ensure current response targets are met.
 - To identify any action required and ensure it is implemented.

3.3 Employees

- When dealing with complaints, to ensure they comply with this policy and the supporting procedures, so that all complaints are recorded accurately, investigated thoroughly and responded to promptly within the target timescales.

4.0 COMPLAINTS - DEFINITION & STAGES

Definition

- 4.1 A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by AHA Ltd, or on our behalf.

For further details, and information on what is not a complaint, see the supporting procedures.

- 4.2 In most cases it will be clear if the individual is making a complaint which should be dealt with in accordance with this policy, but there will be occasions when it is not. AHA Ltd will provide relevant training to employees to help them to identify complaints that should be recorded and followed up in accordance with this policy.

Stages

- 4.3 There are two stages for handling complaints:

Stage 1: Frontline resolution

Stage 2: Investigation

- 4.4 Stage 1 complaints will be:

- a) issues that are straightforward and easily resolved, requiring little or no investigation;
- b) dealt with at the front line, ie, by any appropriate employee who can deal with the complaint quickly;
- c) replied to with an apology, explanation or other action to resolve the complaint, either right away or within five working days, unless there are exceptional circumstances and an extension is agreed with the complainant. An extension should not be longer than five working days, ie, the complaint should not take longer than 10 working days to complete.

4.5 Stage 2 complaints will be:

- a) issues that have not been resolved at Stage 1;
- b) issues that are complex, serious or 'high risk', normally requiring thorough investigation (these will include complaints against the attitude or behaviour of employees);
- c) unless exceptional circumstances exist, brought within six months of learning about the problem or within two months of receiving the stage 1 response – whichever is latest;
- d) passed to the Director of Corporate Services for investigation and reply;
- d) acknowledged within 3 working days and replied to in 20 working days, unless there are exceptional circumstances and an extension is agreed with the complainant.

4.6 For full details of the processes for recording, investigating and responding to complaints, see the procedures supporting this policy.

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

4.7 If the complainant is still dissatisfied following the Stage 2 reply, they will be advised that they may appeal to the SPSO and will be given information to assist them to do so, including that any appeal should be submitted within 12 months of their complaint first being raised with AHA Ltd, although the SPSO has discretion to waive this time limit in special circumstances

Recording complaints

4.8 Full details of each complaint, the outcome and any action required or lessons learned will be recorded on QL at each stage in the process. All correspondence relating to the complaint will be saved in Invu, so that the details are available should the complainant remain dissatisfied and further investigation or action is required.

Assessing satisfaction

4.9 When a complaint is closed and through other surveys AHA Ltd will assess and record the level of satisfaction, both with the outcomes and with how we have dealt with the complaints.

Publicising outcomes

4.10 We will publish summary information on complaints received, their outcome and any resulting action on our website and in our newsletter *Almond View*.

5.0 REDRESS

5.1 Where the complaint is upheld, either in whole or in part, AHA Ltd will offer appropriate redress. This may be an apology or recompense for actual loss or damage, or a goodwill payment in compensation for inconvenience or distress.

5.2 Where compensation is to be offered, managers will have delegated authority to award this.

6.0 VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS

- 6.1 AHA Ltd recognises that when making a complaint, there may be upsetting or distressing circumstances which can result in people acting out of character. Where a complainant is forceful or determined this will, in itself, not be a reason to view the behaviour as unacceptable. Being persistent may be a positive factor in pursuing a complaint.
- 6.2 However, where the actions of those making a complaint result in unreasonable demands on our facilities and resources, and/or behaviour towards our employees, AHA Ltd will take the required action as detailed in the procedures supporting this policy.

7.0 CONFIDENTIALITY & DATA PROTECTION

- 7.1 Wherever possible AHA Ltd will respect the confidentiality of complainants and those being complained about. Where it is necessary to reveal a name, we will only do so with the individual's agreement.
- 7.2 AHA Ltd will process all personal information in accordance with current data protection legislation and our Openness & Confidentiality policy.

8.0 IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW

- 8.1 The Director of Corporate Services will ensure that the Complaints Procedure is publicised to all who need to be aware of it, and that any training required is provided.
- 8.2 Managers meet the Business Improvement Officer weekly to monitor progress with dealing with current complaints, and will consider any action required as a result of emerging trends. Lessons learned are also discussed during this meeting as well as during team meetings.
- 8.3 Every three months, the Director of Corporate Services will submit the required details on performance against response target times to the Board of Management as part of the performance report.
- 8.4 The Director of Corporate Services will ensure that the Board of Management reviews this policy at least every five years.

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