



S4B Complaints Procedure

Introduction

S4B will provide a high quality responsive service to residents. Our primary aim is to resolve customer concerns at the first point of contact without unnecessary delay. Where this is not possible S4B will follow a clear staged procedure to address complaints about its services or activities. The procedure will remedy faults within a reasonable time and ensure that comments, compliments and complaints are recorded and monitored to help S4B to learn and continually improve.

S4B will maintain best practice in Complaints handling for business and legal reasons as well as for the benefit of residents. Failure to maintain good practice exposes the organisation to reduction in customer satisfaction, risk of litigation and maladministration, and loss of reputation as a service provider.

Aims

The aim of this procedure is to:

- Provide opportunities to receive and use feedback
- Make it easy for people exercise their right to complain when they are dissatisfied
- Ensure all complaints are dealt with quickly and consistently
- Improve services
- Value complaints as opportunities to learn
- Ensure that principles of equal access to services and respecting the diversity of our customers are applied
- Turn dissatisfied customers into satisfied customers

Resources

The S4B Operations Manager will be responsible for collating and presenting information on the number, type and processing of complaints to the S4B Board. They will also be responsible for implementation of the S4B complaints procedure including the subsequent management, monitoring and liaison with complaints co-ordinators and Service Managers. Performance will be reported to the S4B Board within the monthly reports.

We will ensure that all staff are aware of our policies through training, induction, team briefings, work reviews and appraisals. We will test this by using mystery shoppers and providing relevant feedback to relevant managers to brief staff.

All employees have a responsibility to ensure the positive application of the policy.

Definition

We will adopt a broad definition in relation to complaints. A complaint shall be where a customer advises us that they are dissatisfied with the service they have received from any part of S4B or its subcontractors. The complaint could be about the way a person was treated, staff conduct, or the standard of service they received. In general our complaints



procedure will be used when customers think we have done something in the wrong way or have not done something that they think we should have.

Who can complain?

The complaints and appeals procedure will be available to any person who receives a service from S4B, is affected by a decision or action taken by S4B or anyone who represents such a person.

For example:

- Tenants, Leaseholders, licensees and ex tenants of S4B
- Neighbours of S4B managed properties
- Contractors or consultants
- Community based organisations working in the area
- Applicants for employment

The above may be represented by, for example-

- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Solicitors or other advisers
- Members of Parliament and Local Authority Councillors
- Members of the PFI Board

S4B will need to be satisfied that representatives have permission to act on behalf of the complainant. In cases where the representative could access potentially sensitive information about the complainant, S4B will seek written permission from the complainant that they have agreed to be represented.

Procedure

Complaints can be made in the following ways

- Verbally at one of our offices
- Over the telephone
- On the S4B website
- By post
- By fax
- By e mail
- By another person on behalf of a complainant with their permission.

The following items will not be treated as complaints or appeals-

- Requests for a service, such as the first report of a repair or reports of neighbour nuisance
- An initial request for information or an explanation



- An appeal against action resulting in Court proceedings or matters subject to ongoing court proceedings.

If S4B receive a complaint we will accept the complaint without hesitation. We will act swiftly and follow a clearly defined process. We will receive it in a positive manner and use it as constructive feedback on our service. We will record all complaints and ensure we learn from them by reviewing our policies and procedures where appropriate.

We will provide a full written response to the complainant within 10 working days. If a complaint is complex and further investigation is needed then a holding response will be sent within 5 working days and a full written response within a further 10 days.

At all stages the complainant will be provided with information about how to escalate the complaint to the next stage if they are not satisfied with the outcome.

The full written response will always ask for confirmation that the complainant considers their complaint to have been dealt with, or whether they wish to take the matter further.

If the complainant does not reply within the agreed period the complaint will be marked as 'closed without the customers' confirmation'. Where the complainant indicates they are content that the matter is resolved the complaint will be closed and marked as such.

At stage 1 the complainants will be provided with information about our complaints procedure and offered assistance to complete any forms (if required) or offered an advocate if the resident is vulnerable.

If the complaint is made in person, the staff member will make a record of the complaint and ensure it has been communicated properly by checking back with the customer to make sure they have got it right.

The Framework

The complaints procedure has three stages and aims to complete within 8 weeks overall (in line with Housing Corporation Guidance)

Stage 1 Initial service failure or expressed dissatisfaction. This aims to be resolved immediately by front line staff, or within 10 working days. A record will be made of the complaint and a full written response will always be provided.

Stage 2 If the customer's initial complaint has not been resolved, this will be investigated by the manager of the service area responsible and a written reply made within 10 working days. A meeting will be offered to the complainant where they can bring a representative if they want to. The S4B Operations Manager will determine the outcome of the complaint.

Stage 3 If the customer continues to be dissatisfied, they may make an Appeal. We would normally expect this to be made in writing and guidance will be given on how the information should be presented. This will be investigated by the S4B Operations Manager, if not previously involved in the matter, and will be determined by an Independent Appeal Panel consisting of:

- A Board Director from S4B



- Two senior members from the S4B organisations (who are not directly involved in the service delivery of the contract)

Appellants will have the right to make representations in person or in writing. They will meet and a reply will be made within 20 working days setting out the reasons for the panel decision.

If the customer is still dissatisfied following Appeal they have the right to take the matter to the Independent Housing Ombudsman. They will be advised of this and supplied with a copy of the Ombudsman’s complaints leaflet.

The Process

Complaint	What we will do	How long will this take?	What should the complainant do if they are not satisfied with the outcome
<p>Stage 1</p>	<p>We log the details of the complaint onto our computer system, then we will either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deal with the complaint fully • Refer the complaint to a member of staff who is able to deal with the complaint <p>We will provide a full written response to the complaint within 10 working days or for more complex issues we will acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days and provide a full written response within a further</p>	<p>This should normally take no longer than 10 working days. We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advise them of the outcome within this period. • Advise them if the investigation is likely to take longer. • Advise of any rights of appeal 	<p>They should let us know if they are unhappy with the response.</p> <p>We will refer the case to Stage 2.</p>



	10 working days.		
Stage 2	The appropriate service area Manager will investigate. We will acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days.	This normally takes no more than 10 working days. We will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform the complainant of the outcome within this period • Let the complainant know if it is likely to take longer 	They should let us know if you are unhappy with the decision. If they inform us that they are unhappy with the decision, we will refer their complaint to an independent Appeal Panel.
Stage 3 - Appeal	The complainant will be asked to put your appeal in writing. We will provide assistance upon the complainant requests An Independent Appeal Panel will meet to hear a final appeal. This will comprise of members of the PFI Board. Complainants may make representations to the panel in person or in writing.	This process, including a final decision normally takes no longer than 20 days to achieve.	The complainant should let us know if you are unhappy with the decision made by the panel. If they are still dissatisfied following the appeal you have the right to take the matter to the Independent Housing Ombudsmen , and will be advised of this.

Exceptions from Typical Procedure

- Consultants, contractors and Partnership agencies may have additional features and steps to the complaints procedures contained in their Agreement of Practices and Management Agreements. These will take precedence whenever they conflict with the procedure
- Complaints about a member of staff will be fast tracked to a stage in the procedure after the one they would normally supervise



- Appeals against a decision to end an Introductory Tenancy will be dealt with outside this procedure
- Anonymous complaints will be treated on a case by case basis according to the severity of the allegations made

Equality of Access

S4B will ensure that there is equal access to this service by meeting all reasonable requests to address specific needs resulting from a complainant's disability or cultural background. S4B will always respect requests for confidentiality. Documents will be available in other languages on request, in large text or audio format.

Performance Monitoring

All complaints are input into our IT system and standard reports will be provided at agreed appropriate intervals to resident groups, the Authority, and S4B Board.

We will report on the number, type, category and actions/outcomes of the complaints, as well as those responded to in time. We will report on the sex, age, ethnic origin and any disability of the resident raising the complaint.

The number of live complaints at each stage (including Ombudsman) and those resolved at each stage will be monitored. Complaints closed with resident confirmation and without resident confirmation (after a period of time has elapsed with no response) at each stage will be monitored and reported.

Information on the previous year will be provided as a comparator.

Targets will be established to resolve complaints at each stage of the process.

Experience

S4B respective organizations have approved complaints policies. The Independent Housing Ombudsman and the Housing Corporation have both reviewed and approved the policy and procedure utilized by Contour Housing Group.

Continuous Improvement

We will use information from comments, compliments and complaints to ensure that we continuously improve our services. For that reason information about complaints is reported to the S4B Board and to the local management team.

After a complaint has been resolved we may do a number of things including:

- Changing or providing a service to an individual resident
- Provide information to them
- Review our policies, procedures, information or leaflets for residents
- Arrange training or feedback for staff
- Offer compensation in appropriate circumstances