Complaints policy

Objective

The purpose of this policy is to describe the Charity's principles and approach to dealing with complaints and appeals about decisions.

1. Principles

1.1 The Charity welcomes complaints and treats them as opportunities to improve the service it provides.

1.2 This policy is available on the Charity's website and will be printed out on request.

1.3 Complaints will be dealt with promptly, fairly, and effectively, and resolved as quickly as possible.

1.4 The Charity operates a two-stage complaints procedure, allowing complainants to request a review if not satisfied with the outcome of the first stage.

1.5 Our aim is to leave the complainant feeling satisfied that they have been dealt with fairly, even if they do not agree with the outcome.

1.6 The Charity is a member of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme and will act in accordance with the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. Information about support available from the Housing Ombudsman Service will be provided to complainants.

2. Definition of a complaint and exclusions

2.1 A complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the Charity, its volunteers, contractors, or others acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.

2.2 The Charity will accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason for not doing so in which case a written explanation will be given to the complainant. Reasons could include: the matter has already been dealt with under the complaints procedure; the event or decision complained of happened more than six months previously; legal proceedings are underway. A resident will be told they have the right to go to the Ombudsman to challenge the Charity's refusal to deal with the complaint (see section 7).

2.3 A request for a service, e.g., telling us a repair is needed, is not a complaint.

2.4 A report of anti-social behaviour will be dealt with through our Anti-Social Behaviour policy and will not be treated as a complaint.

2.5 The Charity reserves the right not to accept vexatious complaints (a vexatious complaint is one that is pursued, regardless of its merits, solely to harass, annoy or subdue somebody). In such cases, the Chair will write to the complainant explaining why their complaint(s) will not be dealt with.

3. Who can complain

3.1 Complaints will be accepted from anyone who is affected by the Charity's services. That includes our residents, applicants and neighbours at Mabel Luke Place.

4. How complaints may be made

4.1 Complaints may be made to the Clerk or to any Director of the Charity.

4.2 Complaints will be accepted in person, over the telephone, by letter or email. We will accept complaints made by an advocate on behalf of a complainant, provided we can confirm that the complainant has authorised the advocate to act for them. An advocate might be an MP, councillor, friend or relative.

4.3 Under the Equality Act 2010, reasonable adjustment will be made to accommodate a complainant's needs.

4.4 Anonymous complaints will be logged but cannot be investigated.

5. Responding to complaints

5.1 The Chair acts as the Complaints Officer for the Charity. If the Chair is the subject of the complaint s/he will pass responsibility to another Director or the Clerk.

5.2 When a complaint is received, we will endeavour to understand the complainant's point of view and will:

- Ask them what they would consider to be a suitable solution or outcome
- Explain what we can do and what is not possible
- Tell the complainant who is dealing with their complaint and the timescales for responses
- Keep the complainant informed during the investigation • Inform the complainant as quickly as possible of the outcome, providing advice and information as necessary

5.3 Every effort will be made to put things right to the satisfaction of the complainant. If that is not possible, the complainant will be given an explanation. An apology will be made if appropriate and recompense will be considered if the complainant has been left out of pocket by an action of the Charity or one of its contractors.

5.4 Complainants will be told how to contact a Designated Person and/or the Housing Ombudsman if they remain dissatisfied with our response at the end of stage two of the Charity's procedure.

6. Designated Persons

6.1 We encourage complainants who have completed our complaints procedure but remain dissatisfied, to contact a Designated Person. That would be a West Berkshire councillor or the complainant's MP. The Charity is too small to have a recognised tenants' panel.

6.2 A Designated Person may try to resolve the complaint themselves or refer the complaint straight to the Housing Ombudsman. If they refuse to do either, the complainant can contact the Housing Ombudsman directly.

6.3 The complainant must provide written permission for the Designated Person to review the complaint. More than one Designated Person may be used, although they may only communicate with one another if the complainant has given permission to do so.

6.4 If the complainant chooses not to involve a Designated Person, they must wait at least eight weeks before they may appeal to the Housing Ombudsman.

7. The Housing Ombudsman Scheme

7.1 The Charity is a member of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme. Complainants canask the Ombudsman to investigate their complaint if they have completed the Charity's two-stage procedure and remain dissatisfied. They may also ask the Ombudsman for support with making their complaint to the Charity.

7.2 The contact details are:

Housing Ombudsman Service
PO Box 152
Liverpool L33 7WQ
Tel: 0300 111 3000
Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk
Website: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

8. Learning from complaints

8.1 All complaints and their outcomes will be recorded by the Clerk. A report will be made to the Board by the Chair of the Residents Committee at least once a year, stating the number of complaints received, the nature of the complaint and the outcomes. Any trends will be identified. The Board will use the information to review its services and policies, making and recording changes as required.