

Complaints Policy



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1. Scope

This policy outlines our approach to complaints. It ensures we consistently work towards meeting our complaints service standards and deliver against them in line with our values.

It applies to anyone who has been affected by us, our homes or our services which includes:

- current, former and potential customers (including shared owners and leaseholders) and service users
- owner occupiers
- suppliers and contractors
- partner agencies
- family members, health workers, local councillors or other advocates making a complaint on someone's behalf, providing the customer has authorised (in writing) for them to do so

Any customer who lives in an agency managed property should refer to the agent's complaints policy first. The agency will refer the complaint to us if appropriate.

Any staff should refer to our HR policies, including the grievance policy, if they have an issue relating to their employment.

2. Aims and service standards

Each year GreenSquare provides services for thousands of customers. We recognise that sometimes things can go wrong and our customers may not always be happy with the level or type of service they receive from us. How we manage complaints when we receive them is important to improving our

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service delivery, and achieving high levels of customer satisfaction in all we do.

We encourage, welcome and value complaints as a form of customer feedback.

We want to put things right that have gone wrong for our customers as soon as possible, say sorry when we need to and learn from our mistakes.

We want the service we offer to be fair, consistent and easy to access for all of them.

In order to achieve our aims we will follow and meet a set of service standards which are:

- encouraging customers to let us know when they are unhappy with the service they have received
- ensuring staff and customers know about and have access to this policy
- giving customers clear information about how they can make a complaint. This includes making it easy for them to give us feedback by accepting complaints in a range of ways including in person, by phone, by email, through our customer website, by social media or by letter or form. We will investigate complaints in the same way regardless of what channel a customer uses to report them.
- supporting customers who ask for or need help in making their complaint. Customers can be supported by anyone they choose; an advocate, friend or family member for example. With the customer's permission this person may complete forms and attend meetings with the customer
- accepting the customer's view that they have a genuine complaint and make them feel we are taking it seriously; considering the individual circumstances and understanding what the customer wants to see happen as a result of their complaint
- empowering our staff to take responsibility for and to respond to complaints positively, quickly and fairly by offering apologies and resolutions at the first point of contact wherever possible
- keeping customers informed of how their complaint is progressing, any action taken and the outcomes following our investigations
- respecting confidentiality and ensuring we manage complaints in accordance with Data Protection legislation

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- ensuring good, clear records of complaints are made and kept, actions taken and lessons learnt using all feedback to improve our future service delivery
- monitoring, analysing and publishing information on complaints performance to customers and staff
- delivering customer service training to all staff which highlights the importance of complaints and includes how to respond to them and how we can learn from them

3. Definitions

We define a complaint as any expression of dissatisfaction with the services we provide or have failed to provide.

A customer might contact us to complain about being unhappy because we have:

- done something badly or wrong
- done something we should not have done
- failed to do something we should have done
- treated them unfairly or without respect
- failed to deliver what was promised

And we will treat all as a complaint unless there is a valid reason for us not to.

4. Exclusions

We will not treat the following as a complaint:

- A request for a service, information or an explanation of how a decision has been made
- A report of neighbour nuisance or disputes between neighbours. These are usually dealt with under our Anti-Social Behaviour Policy, unless the complaint relates to how the policy has been applied
- A claim for damages that should be handled as an insurance claim
- Anonymous reports, although these may be investigated if they are a cause for concern and in order to protect our interests
- A matter which is expected to be, is or has been the subject of legal proceedings
- A dispute or appeal in relation to decisions made in accordance with other GreenSquare policies
- A complaint about something which is outside our control; legislation, government or local authority policy, a contract, tenancy agreement or lease for example

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- A complaint that is a disagreement with our legal requirements rather than the way something has been carried out
- A consultation petition or objections to building work or planning applications
- A complaint which has or is similar to one that has already been responded to and closed without new evidence or information

We will not normally consider complaints that relate to things that happened more than six months ago. Discretion can be used if there is a valid reason for the delay.

When a decision is made not to deal with an issue through our complaints process, the full reasons for this will be clearly explained.

5. Unacceptable behaviour

We believe that all customers have the right to be heard and understood. We will always treat them with respect and we expect our staff to be treated in the same way. Whilst we recognise that circumstances relating to a complaint may be distressing and cause some people to act out of character, we will not tolerate unacceptable behaviour.

If a customer continues to contact us about a closed complaint, or a complaint that is very similar to the closed complaint, we will acknowledge the contact but will take no further action unless there is new evidence or information to consider.

When a customer's contact becomes excessive or increasingly demanding we may consider putting a contact management plan in place in line with our Unacceptable Behaviour Policy; contact by email only no more than once every two weeks unless it is an emergency, for example. When a decision is made to do this, we will explain to the customer why we are doing this and what the conditions are.

We may also consider a customer to be vexatious. This will usually relate to frequent contact about one or a range of issues, in a persistent or demanding manner. The decision to identify a customer as being vexatious will be made by an Executive Director and any changes to how we manage their contact will be in line with our Unacceptable Behaviour Policy.

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6. Monitoring and review

We monitor and analyse the types of complaints we receive and the way they have been handled. The monitoring and analysis we do helps us to ensure that:

- our process is being managed in a fair, consistent and appropriate way
- our process does not discriminate against any group in society
- our complaint service standards meet customer needs and reflect demand
- our policy and procedure are fit for purpose
- complaint volumes and resolution stages are tracked and trends are identified
- we are achieving our timescales
- we deliver against our resolution promises
- lessons learnt are shared and used to avoid future similar complaints and improve services
- our staff training programme is appropriate
- we can give staff feedback on good and bad areas of performance

We regularly report on complaints performance to our leadership and management teams, Boards and Customer Service Committee. A summary of the performance reports produced, complaints outcomes and improvements made is included in our customer magazine and our Annual Report.

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis, unless there are significant changes in legislation or there are found to be any deficiencies or learning points from a complaint, or findings from any independent organisation.

7. Diversity and inclusion

We will ensure that this policy is applied fairly and consistently to all of our customers and in accordance with our values and the principles contained in our Diversity and Inclusion policy. In summary this means that no person or group of persons will be treated less favourably than another person or group of persons on account of any diversity strand.

We will also ensure that customers have fair access that suits their individual needs to our complaints service. This could include providing translations for community languages and additional support for customers who have difficulty reading and writing when required for example.

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8. Value for money

As part of our commitment to deliver economical, efficient and effective services, we will use external benchmarking services and best practice groups to monitor our costs and service outcomes.

9. Consultation

This policy has been written and reviewed in consultation with our management and leadership teams and Customer Service Committee.

10. Legal and regulatory framework

The 2012 Homes and Communities Agency Regulatory Framework under the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard sets out the following expectations for us in relation to Customer service, choice and complaints:

1 Registered providers shall:

- provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of their tenants in the delivery of all standards
- have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly

1.2 Providers shall offer a range of ways for tenants to express a complaint and set out clear service standards for responding to complaints, including complaints about the performance against the standards, and details of what to do if they are unhappy with the outcome of a complaint. Providers shall inform tenants how they use complaints to improve their services. Registered providers shall publish information about complaints each year, including their number and nature, and the outcome of the complaints. Providers shall accept complaints made by advocates authorised to act on a tenant's/tenants' behalf.

The Government introduced designated persons as part of the Localism Act 2011. The intention is to improve the chances of complaints about housing being resolved locally and to involve local politicians and local people in resolving local housing issues.

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Date approved	October 2020	Date of Next Review	October 2021
Date of Last Review	June 2020	Review Frequency	Annually
Policy Owner	Head of Customer Services		
Approved by	Customer Service Committee Leadership Team		
Linked documents	Complaints Procedure (for customers) Complaints Procedure (for staff) Compensation Policy Compensation Procedure (for staff) Unacceptable Behaviour Policy Diversity and Inclusion Policy The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England from April 2012 The Localism Act 2011		

October 2020 - Summary of updates since last review Changes made by Customer Insight Manager – SW

Why	Section	Change
Review following Audit	2 – Aims and Service Standards	Addition of text in yellow <ul style="list-style-type: none"> giving customers clear information about how they can make a complaint. This includes making it easy for them to give us feedback by accepting complaints in a range of ways including in person, by phone, by email, through our customer website, by social media or by letter or form. We will investigate complaints in the same way regardless of what channel a customer uses to report them.
Review following Audit	3 - Definitions	Addition of text: And we will treat all as a complaint unless there is a valid reason for us not to.