

# Complaints, Compliments and Feedback Policy

Note: There may be some adjustments made to this SHA policy to reflect the latest UK Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code of April 2024.

## Introduction

The mission of Spitalfields Housing Association (SHA) is to improve the quality of life for our residents. We welcome feedback to our services, whether positive, neutral or negative. It gives us the opportunity to learn, adapt, improve and provide better services. We believe that failure to listen to or acknowledge complaints will lead to an aggravation of problems and dissatisfaction, and so we aim to resolve issues as early as possible.

## Purpose

We aim to operate an open and accountable complaints system. This policy sets the steps for dealing with formal complaints so that we can respond consistently and well to service queries and so that residents feel confident that their complaints and worries are listened to and acted upon promptly and fairly.

## Scope

This policy encompasses all aspects of service delivery to residents and includes services provided by us and our contractors. However, residents should know that some incidents cannot be addressed under complaints for example, anti-social behaviour are not complaints and are subject to a separate policy. Residents are asked to familiarise themselves with SHA's policies that are provided to help direct their concerns and questions they may have.

We aim to get things right the first time and resolve service failures at the first point of contact where possible. We strive to provide the best service, though realise that sometimes the results might not be quite as we planned. We are open to complaints and see them as an opportunity to improve our relationship with residents, to recognise learnings so that our services improve.

We will respond to all recorded complaints from tenants within set timescales and ask

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residents to tell us about their complaint as soon they arise. If we receive more than three complaints at once, it will take longer to investigate, respond and remedy the issues - please speak with a member of SHA staff if you are submitting more than three complaints at one time. We accept complaints in person, by letter, over the phone, through the online complaints form or by email. SHA does not accept complaints via text messages, phone apps, social media platforms or surveys.

All complaints are managed through a process which has **two complaint stages**. Both stages can include an additional extension period for SHA to respond to you. The procedure which guides this process is set out below.

## Definition of a complaint:

Not all contact with SHA staff and customers results in a complaint and therefore it's important to define a complaint. SHA receives feedback and compliments from residents and members of the community too.

There is a difference between a **service request** and a **complaint**. For example, when a resident tells us their drain is blocked or that their communal lift is not working, they are making a service request. However, if a resident tells us we have failed to carry out a previously reported repair or that there have been excessive delays in a service request, this will be treated as a complaint. All forms of dissatisfaction will be treated as a complaint: SHA staff will ask residents to confirm whether they wish to make a formal complaint.

## Definitions of terms:

**Compliment:** an unsolicited expression of gratitude or praise for a member of staff or service area.

**Feedback:** information or statement of opinion about a specific service, performance, or task as a basis for improvement.

SHA welcomes feedback and compliments to continually improve processes and services it provides its residence. Feedback and compliments can be provided online, by email, via the online form, over the phone or directly to a staff member.

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**Complaint:** an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the landlord (SHA), its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a resident or group of residents (Source: Complaint Handling Code, Housing Ombudsman)

## Resolve a complaint informally

Complaints can be resolved informally prior to engagement of the formal complaints procedure. If a resident wishes to take this course of action, they should write or speak to a SHA staff member.

The following are some **invalid complaint** subjects:

- A first request for a service, information or an explanation of SHA's policies and procedures.
- Repairs that are either not completed or partially completed but still within published completion timescales.
- Residents chasing non-urgent repairs for the first time (refer to SHA's Service Standards Policy)
- Reports of harassment (refer to SHA's Anti-social Behaviour Policy)
- Reports of anti-social behaviour or neighbour disputes and related concerns of residents (refer to Anti-social Behaviour Policy)
- Requests for accommodation, mutual exchange or transfer applications.
- An older dispute against the amount of rent or service charge being charged.
- Complaints about staff outside of working hours or when not fulfilling a SHA function (this could be an employment matter and dealt with as a disciplinary matter)
- Issues where a resident has commenced legal action against SHA (defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court)
- Appeals against policy decisions.
- Vexatious complaints (ie. excessively argumentative, angry, worrisome, annoying or troublesome behaviour)
- The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over 12 months prior (may be considered at SHA's discretion)
- Matters that have previously been considered under the complaints process.

## Responsibilities

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Overall responsibility for implementation of this policy rests with the Senior Management at SHA.

SHA staff will consider the individual circumstances of each complaint. SHA will deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind; staff will:

- a. give the resident a fair chance to set out their position;
- b. take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest; and
- c. consider all relevant information and evidence carefully.

SHA will learn from the outcomes of complaints by; recording actions and decisions, sharing information, reporting on trends and by asking residents for feedback about their experience of its processes. SHA promotes a positive culture about complaints to ensure that staff understand the policy and internal procedure and are appropriately trained and supported.

SHA staff may ask for the complainant's preferred method of contact. **Reasonable adjustments** can be made for special circumstances eg. if disabled, we can arrange an online meeting or if you require translation we can arrange for a translator to be present - please speak to a SHA staff member.

We may in very extreme cases refuse to deal with complainants where the complaint is made in a vexatious, aggressive or unreasonable manner, or where the matter has already been fully considered at all stages of the process. Any such decision will be made and communicated in writing to the resident. If a complaint arises during the course of the complaints process, a new complaint will need to be submitted.

Residents can compliment a member of staff, a team or the organisation as a whole. Compliments are passed on to staff and their line managers. Learnings are used to identify areas of good practice that we can all learn from.

## Monitoring, reviewing and evaluation

There will be key performance indicators to report actions, targets and progress on complaints to the Board. This will be done on a quarterly basis. Recommendations may be made through a resident's panel. SHA will publish its statistics annually.

All complainants will be required to verify their identity and residence. A third person or representative of a resident will need written consent from the SHA resident - please

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Speak with SHA staff for advice.

In some cases, e.g. where the issue is complex, there are more than 3 complaints received at once or when persons required for an interview are not available, the process may take longer as some delays are out of our hands. If this situation arises an extension to the stage complaint will be sought. SHA staff will inform the complainant of the delay and the anticipated timescales involved.

Complainants will be requested to provide photo ID and proof of residence within the past three months of the date of the complaint. Anonymous complaints will not be logged nor responded to. Complaints received after 5pm on a working day will be considered on the next day (day 1). Complaints must go through SHA's two stage complaints process and will ordinarily be deemed closed at 40 working days, and with both stage extensions closed at 70 working days from initial response.

SHA's 2 stage complaints procedure comprises of:

## Verification of complaint at Stage 1 (5 working days)

This is where the complaint is acknowledged, defined, logged, the identities of complainants checked and the complaint validated. SHA will write to the customer to verify the receipt and validity of the complaint.

## Stage 1 (10 working days)

**Review to resolve** - Complaints can be made by email to [admin@spitalfieldsha.co.uk](mailto:admin@spitalfieldsha.co.uk), by telephone (020 7392 5400), through the online complaints form, in person or in writing to our offices (Spitalfields Housing Association, 1 Canada Square, London E14 5AA). Complainants should explain the complaint(s) clearly, providing dates, evidence (if applicable) and any remedial actions they would like to see.

The complaint will be fully investigated by a member of the SHA team (Complaints Officer) unless exceptional circumstances prevail, a full written response will be sent to the complainant within 10 working days. If SHA staff require more time to investigate the situation, an extension will be sought. Following a stage 1 extension, if the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they can request to escalate their complaint to stage 2.

## Stage 1 extension (10 working days)

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**Additional time to resolve** - This stage is optional. If a complaint is complex or requires more time to resolve, a stage 1 extension will be sought. SHA staff will inform the complainant of the delay and the anticipated timescales involved. If needed, please refer to the Housing Ombudsman - details are given further below.

## Verification of complaint at Stage 2 (5 working days)

This is where the complaint is acknowledged, defined, logged, the identities of complainants checked and the complaint validated. SHA will write to the customer to verify the receipt and validity of the complaint at stage 2.

## Stage 2 (20 working days)

**Review, investigate and resolve** – The complaint will be reviewed and investigated again by a senior staff member and Member Responsible for Complaints (“MRC”). The complainant may be asked further questions about the complaint and remedial actions. The complaint will under normal circumstances be investigated within 20 working days. If SHA staff requires more time to investigate and resolve the complaint, an extension will be sought. Following the completion of the investigation a written response will be sent to the resident.

## Stage 2 extension (20 working days)

**Additional time to investigate and resolve** - This stage is optional. If a complaint is complex or requires some more time to resolve, a stage 2 extension will be sought. SHA staff will let the complainant know about the extension. If needed, please refer to the Housing Ombudsman - details are given further below.

This is the final stage of the internal complaints procedure at SHA.

SHA staff will try their best to resolve any issues as soon as they can to the satisfaction of residents within these stages. A stage 2 extension gives further time to resolve an issue especially when delays are outside of SHA's control eg. when further specialist assessments are needed, or replacement parts are yet to arrive. SHA staff may write to the resident to agree timescales that are reasonable to the resident.

## Taking matters further

If the resident remains dissatisfied after stage 2 with the way their complaint has been handled, they can ask for their complaint to be determined by the Housing

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Ombudsman Service. The Ombudsman will not be able to investigate complaints until SHA's 2 stage complaints process has been completed.

Details for the Housing Ombudsman Service

Address: PO Box 152, Liverpool L33 7WQ

Website: [housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

## Options available to the Complainant

### Early resolution process

This is an alternative process to a formal investigation. The Housing Ombudsman will work with you and your landlord to help resolve the dispute as fairly and quickly as they can. They will look at what has already been agreed between you and your landlord to resolve the complaint and the issues that are still outstanding. The Ombudsman will use their experience of resolving complaints to explore the possible options and make suggestions if they believe there is a way to resolve the complaint. If you and your landlord agree on how to resolve the complaint The Ombudsman will set out the terms in an Ombudsman's determination and ensure that any agreed actions are carried out.

### Can this policy be improved?

SHA exercises a 'continuous improvement' approach to their policies and welcomes feedback so that we can improve services for our residents. If you would like to suggest changes to this policy, email [admin@spitalfieldsha.co.uk](mailto:admin@spitalfieldsha.co.uk)

We refer to the resident, tenant or customer meaning a person residing in an SHA-managed property.

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