

# Complaints, Compliments and Feedback Policy

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## 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 including **Anti-social Behaviour and Unacceptable Behaviour policies** that are provided to help direct their concerns and approaches appropriately. These are available online via the SHA website - visit: [spitalfieldsha.co.uk/about-sha/policies](http://spitalfieldsha.co.uk/about-sha/policies)

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.

# Complaints, Compliments and Feedback Policy

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We will respond to all recorded complaints from residents within set timescales and ask complainants to tell us about their complaint as soon they arise. As a small housing provider our officers' time is valuable, so we can receive **3 complaints at one time**. More than 3 complaints received at one time will take longer to investigate, respond to and remedy - please speak with a member of SHA staff if you are thinking about submitting more than 3 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 that 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, and this policy covers other forms of feedback from residents that helps us assess and improve the service we provide.

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. A resident does not have to use the term 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. SHA will offer any resident who expresses dissatisfaction the opportunity to make a formal complaint, unless the matter falls within our list of excluded complaint subjects. Making a complaint will not prevent or stall impact on actions needed to resolve any immediate issues, eg. a recurring repair request that is under way.

## Definition of terms:

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

# Complaints, Compliments and Feedback Policy

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**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 residents. Feedback and compliments can be provided online, by email, via the online form, over the phone or directly to a staff member.

**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). SHA will accept complaints referred to them within 12 months of the issue occurring - residents are expected to make a complaint in a timely manner.

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

- A first request for a service, information or an explanation of SHA's policies and procedures.
- Repairs that are due to be completed or partially completed but still within published completion timescales (See Service Standard policy. Does not exclude complaints about repairs, eg. delays in timescales by contractors)
- 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 - refer to SHA's Unacceptable Behaviour policy.

# Complaints, Compliments and Feedback Policy

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- A previous complaint that is over 12 months old that has been responded to (Unless a repeat or ongoing issue)
- Matters that have previously been considered under the complaints process.

## When a complaint is not upheld

SHA will explain the reason for the complaint not being accepted. The complainant has the right to take the decision to the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS).

## Responsibilities

Overall responsibility for implementation of this policy rests with the Senior Management Team (SMT) and Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC) 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 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 for assistance.

We may in very extreme cases refuse to deal with complainants where the complaint is made in a vexatious, aggressive or unreasonable manner (see SHA's Unacceptable Behaviour policy), 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.

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 all staff can learn from.

## Monitoring, reviewing and evaluation

There will be key performance indicators to report actions, targets and progress on

# Complaints, Compliments and Feedback Policy

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complaints to the Board. This will be done on a quarterly basis. Recommendations may be made through a resident's panel. SHA will publish complaint statistics annually.

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

In some cases the process to resolution may take longer, e.g. where the issue is complex, there are more than 3 complaints received at one time, or a missing part is taking longer to be delivered. Some delays are out of our hands. If this situation arises, an extension to the stage complaint will be sought, and explanation given. SHA staff will inform the complainant of the delay and the anticipated timescales involved, and agree with the complainant suitable intervals for keeping them informed about their complaint, communicating back in their preferred mode of contact, eg. by email.

If another complaint arises during a complaint being investigated, if related, the response will be incorporated into the response at the stage it is at. If unrelated, it is usually treated as a separate complaint.

SHA will endeavour to provide the complainant a response to any issues when they are known at Stages 1 and 2, rather than when all outstanding actions are completed. SHA tracks complaints and chases actions in a timely manner, and will let the complainant know of any updates and outstanding actions. A complaint will progress directly from Stages 1 and 2 if all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the customer's satisfaction. SHA may contact the complainant for any clarification on a complaint.

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 are not dealt with under this complaints procedure, however SHA will take reasonable steps to look into any concerns raised as far as we are able 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.

# Complaints, Compliments and Feedback Policy

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SHA's 2 stage complaints procedure comprises of:

## **Verification of complaint at Stage 1 (5 working days of the complaint being received)**

This is where the complaint is acknowledged, defined, logged, the identity of complainant checked and the complaint validated. SHA will write to the complainant to verify the receipt and validity of the complaint, listing the understanding of the complaint, the outcomes the complainant seeks, with details of what SHA is not responsible for. The complainant may be asked further questions for clarification and remedial actions if it's unclear.

## **Stage 1 (10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged)**

**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 of the complaint being acknowledged. If SHA staff require more time to investigate and resolve the issue, an extension will be sought.

## **Stage 1 Extension (10 working days following Stage 1 response)**

**Additional time to resolve** - This stage is optional to the Complaints Officer. If a complaint is complex or requires more time to resolve, a stage 1 extension can be sought. SHA staff will inform the complainant of the delay, the anticipated timescales involved, and the rationale for the extension. SHA may write to the complainant to agree timescales that are reasonable to the complainant. If extension timescales are exceeded, the complainant can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS). If needed, please refer to the HOS guidance. HOS contact website link: [housing-ombudsman.org.uk/contact-us](https://housing-ombudsman.org.uk/contact-us)

## **Verification of complaint at Stage 2 (5 working days of the request being received)**

# Complaints, Compliments and Feedback Policy

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This is where the complaint is acknowledged, defined, logged, the identities of complainants checked and the complaint validated. SHA will write to the complainant to verify the receipt and validity of the complaint at Stage 2, listing the understanding of the complaint, the outcomes the complainant seeks, alongside SHA's responsibilities. The complainant may be asked further questions for clarification and remedial actions if it's unclear.

## **Stage 2 (20 working days following Stage 2 being acknowledged)**

**Review, investigate and resolve** – The same complaint will be reviewed and investigated again by an SMT member and the MRC. The stage 2 complaint should correspond with the stage 1 complaint. A complaint escalation from stage 1 to stage 2 can happen automatically if SHA determines that the complainant remains dissatisfied on any outstanding issue. The complaint will under normal circumstances be investigated within 20 working days following stage 2 acknowledgement. If SHA staff requires more time to investigate and resolve the complaint, an extension can be sought. Following the completion of the investigation a written response will be sent to the complainant.

## **Stage 2 Extension (20 working days following Stage 2 response)**

**Additional time to investigate and resolve** - This stage is optional and available to the officer via the MRC. If a complaint is complex or requires some more time to resolve, a stage 2 extension can be sought. SHA staff will let the complainant know about the extension, and the rationale for it. SHA will write to the complainant to agree timescales that are reasonable to the complainant. If extension timescales are exceeded, the complainant can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service. If needed, please refer to the HOS guidance. HOS contact website link: [housing-ombudsman.org.uk/contact-us](https://housing-ombudsman.org.uk/contact-us)

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 complainants within these two stages. A stage 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 will write to the complainant to agree timescales that are

# Complaints, Compliments and Feedback Policy

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deemed reasonable to the complainant, with outstanding actions tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the resident.

## Taking matters further

If the complainant 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 Ombudsman Service. The HOS will not be able to investigate complaints until SHA's two-stage complaints process has been completed.

## Details for the Housing Ombudsman Service

Address: PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston PR2 0ET

Website: [housing-ombudsman.org.uk/contact-us](https://housing-ombudsman.org.uk/contact-us)

## Options available to the Complainant

### Early resolution process

This is not an extra stage but an alternative process to a formal investigation. The HOS will work with you and SHA 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 HOS 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 HOS will set out the terms in an Ombudsman's determination and ensure that any agreed actions are carried out.

### Publication of complaint outcomes

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 regarding complaints to ensure that staff understand the policy, internal procedures and are appropriately trained and supported. The nature of your complaints is published on the SHA website through the annual Complaints Performance report and relevant webpages, discussed during the staff training and meetings, in accordance with HOS compliance requirements and our Data Protection policy. SHA does not disclose your personal details.

# Complaints, Compliments and Feedback Policy

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## **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.