

Group Complaints Policy

1.0 Aim / Purpose of the Policy

1.1 We are committed to providing a high quality service to all our residents, clients and customers in an efficient, effective and economic way, which meets their diverse needs. For the purposes of our Complaints Policy, the term “customers” will be used to represent any individual or organisation that has dealings with our Group.

2.0 Background / Introduction

2.1 While we strive to maintain the highest standards, we recognise that sometimes our services might fail to meet those standards. When a customer wishes to complain we will deal with the issues in line with Coastline’s values for delivering great customer service with passion and pride remembering the following principles

- Respect for the customer; not prejudge or stereo-type – ‘see the person’ and ‘do the right thing’;
- Rapport; we are here to help, be fair and break down the ‘authority barrier’;
- Everyone deserves a chance; get beneath the surface, take time to listen, understand and value what the customer has to say;
- The customer is central; act in the customer’s best interests and always remember the customer is why we are here.

2.2 Some complaints may be received which fall beyond the scope of our responsibilities and abilities, i.e.; a request for a service which the Group does not perform. In these circumstances we will aim to provide customers with the relevant information or signpost to other agencies who may be able to assist, such as Cornwall Council.

2.3 Complaints regarding Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) are subject to separate guidance and will be dealt with by the Tenancy Management Team, although complaints regarding our *handling* of ASB will be investigated via this Policy.

2.4 Complaints should be made as soon as possible and no more than 12 months after the event, except in exceptional circumstances, to enable a robust and thorough investigation to take place.

2.5 We ask that complaints are made direct to us for review to ensure a swift review and response rather than via social media platforms.

3.0 Overarching Principles

3.1 Complaints are acknowledged as a form of feedback and by investigating and acting on them we will learn from our customers. Where mistakes have been made and where grievances have arisen, we will ensure that these are rectified to the satisfaction of the customer, wherever possible and that the circumstances do not recur. We will also ensure that the customer is not financially worse off as a result of the complaint and will make amends where this has happened.

- 3.2 We will publish our two stage customer complaints procedure on our website.
- 3.3 Where possible, complaints will be resolved by front line colleagues, supervisors or managers responsible for service delivery as a 'potential complaint'. In practice most complaints are resolved in this way without the need to invoke the official Complaints Policy.

4.0 Complaint Mentors

- 4.1 At any point a customer can ask for a '*Complaint Mentor*' to help and support them through the process. Mentors will be from trained volunteers who are actively involved in the Customer Voice.
- 4.2 Use of a Complaint Mentor will be recommended where we believe this will positively help a customer.
- 4.3 Complaint Mentors will receive full training on the Complaints Policy and Procedure and will have successfully passed the mandatory staff online Data Protection training module.
- 4.4 Although Complaint Mentors will not be able to influence the investigation or outcome of a complaint they will be able to feed back to the Assistant Company Secretary on the customer experience journey for future service improvements.

5.0 Stage 1 Review

- 5.1 Where a customer is not satisfied with the initial response received from Coastline colleagues, a formal complaint can be made in any reasonable format such as; in person, in writing via a complaint form, by letter, email, through the website, portal or by telephone. Colleagues can also be made available to assist in the completion of complaints forms.
 - 5.2 Complaints will be acknowledged within two working days by the Assistant Company Secretary who will manage and oversee the process. The acknowledgement will confirm which senior manager will be dealing with the complaint within the 10 working day target timeframe from the date of acknowledgement.
 - 5.3 As part of the procedure and to ensure we take all relevant information into account a site visit will be undertaken by the investigating manager. If the customer does not wish to have a site visit they have the right to decline this although in the case of property complaints a site visit will be a vital part of the decision-making process.
 - 5.4 Once the site visit has taken place the investigating manager will provide the complainant with a full written response outlining what actions have or will be undertaken with expected timeframes.
 - 5.5 If it is not possible to send a reply within the 10 day timeframe we will ensure that the complainant is made aware and is kept up-to-date with progress. This should only take place where additional information has been requested from external third parties.
 - 5.6 The response will also highlight areas where the complaint has been used to improve, review or change services for the benefit of all our customers.
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5.7 Once the response has been sent by the investigating manager the Assistant Company Secretary will send a letter by post or email to the customer to advise that the process at Stage 1 has been concluded.

5.8 If the complaint has been rejected or the works / actions have been completed and the customer remains dissatisfied they will be advised they have 15 working days to request escalation to Stage 2. If works or actions are yet to be undertaken or completed the customer has the right to request progression to Stage 2 once these have been undertaken, if the customer remains dissatisfied.

6.0 Stage 2 Panel Review

6.1 If a complaint is escalated to Stage 2, it will be reviewed by a Panel consisting of one Executive Director, one Customer Member from the Customer Experience Forum and one Non-Executive Director who will chair the Panel.

6.2 The Panel will be convened within 15 working days from receipt of the request to progress to Stage 2.

6.3 At this stage the complainant will be given the opportunity to meet with the Panel to outline in their own words why they remain dissatisfied or think Coastline has not dealt with their complaint fairly or properly.

6.4 The Assistant Company Secretary will supply the complainant and Panel members with an executive summary and timeline of the complaint. The complainant is entitled to be accompanied by a Complaint Mentor, non-legal person acting or speaking on their behalf or for support, as long as the Assistant Company Secretary is advised in advance.

6.5 The investigating manager from Stage 1 will subsequently attend a meeting with the Panel to discuss any concerns and to advise why decisions were made. Following the Panel meeting the Chair will send a response to the complainant within 10 working days highlighting remedial actions to be carried out and any significant changes highlighted which will be used to improve future service delivery.

6.6 Once the response has been sent by the Panel the Assistant Company Secretary will send a letter by post or email to the customer to advise that the process at Stage 2 has been concluded and advising the customer of their right to refer their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) or Designated Persons for independent review. Contact details for the HOS will be included with a factsheet regarding Designated Persons.

7.0 Complaint Performance

7.1 On completion of each stage of a complaint a satisfaction form will be automatically generated by Customer Voice and sent to the customer for performance monitoring purposes. In addition a follow-up telephone call will be made by the Assistant Company Secretary, or other nominated individual, to seek feedback on the process which will be used to further improve the service going forward. Telephone calls will be made after the 15 days between a complaint investigation reply being sent and the end of the escalation period.

7.2 Statistics summarising customer complaints will be reported quarterly and annually to the Board and the Customer Experience Forum as well as regular performance updates to the

Customer Voice. Significant levels of customer complaints in relation to a particular service or contractor, whether through official or potential complaints, will result in a policy and service review.

- 7.3 Complaints will be monitored by the Assistant Company Secretary on a day-to-day basis and by senior managers and the Executive Team monthly to ensure that trends are picked up at the earliest opportunity.
- 7.4 Quarterly and Annual Complaints Analysis will be reported to the Board and Customer Experience Forum and an annual update will also be included in the Autumn Customer Newsletter. Assurance on the effectiveness of the policy is achieved by the Board and CEF receiving regular updates.
- 7.5 This Policy will be reviewed at least every three years and will be benchmarked against areas of current Best Practice.

8.0 Colleagues Complaints

- 8.1 Complaints received regarding specific colleagues will be reviewed by an appropriate senior manager and may, if found to be justified, be progressed via the Group's internal Disciplinary Procedures.

In the vast majority of cases it is likely that training will be provided along with an assessment of whether issues are systemic or isolated. Any systemic issues identified will be reviewed by the relevant Head of Service or Director to progress improvements.

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- 8.3 If a complaint is progressed via Disciplinary Procedures the customer will only be informed of this fact. No other information will be shared regarding outcomes in line with the Data Protection Act 2018.

9.0 Complaints relating to personal injury, property damage or other legal liabilities

- 9.1 There may be times when customer complaints relate to complex issues and in these circumstances the timescales may not remain appropriate. If this is the case it will be clearly communicated to customers to explain the potential complications and there will be an increased emphasis on keeping the customer informed.
 - 9.2 If a complaint contains several elements including any complex issues as per 9.1 the Group will progress all other areas in line with this policy.
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