



Housing Services Complaints Policy

Last updated November 2023

Complaints

INTRODUCTION

This policy sets out RHP's approach to dealing with complaints, ensuring it is fair, consistent and accessible.

We have a two stage complaints process. We log and acknowledge our customers complaints within five working days of receipt and set out our understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the customer is seeking. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the customer must be asked for clarification and the full definition agreed between both parties.

We aim to reach a resolution, agreed with the customer at stage one of the process within ten working days. We will aim to resolve all second stage complaints (known as appeals) within twenty working days. If we are unable to meet these timeframes at either stage, we will let the customer know by explaining the reasons for the delay and our extension will not exceed an additional 10 working days. We can extend by an additional 10 days in extreme circumstances, provided a detailed reason is provided to the customer with the agreement of both parties. When an agreement has not been made, we will provide the customer with the Housing Ombudsman contact details.

Complaint Definition

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by RHP, our colleagues, or those acting on our behalf, affecting a customer or group of customers.

Who can complain?

The policy is aimed at all existing RHP customers or anyone directly impacted by the services we provide. We accept complaints on behalf of our customers through anyone that has their permission. For the purpose of this policy the terms customer, tenant and resident are used and the policy applies to all 3 groups.

All CSC employees are responsible for resolving complaints.

The Head of CSC is responsible for reviewing this policy on an annual basis.

All complaints must be logged on our customer management system and are investigated and resolved by the Complaints Team. If the Complaints Team cannot resolve the complaint themselves, they will work with the most appropriate team to help with their response and investigation.

A named Complaints Advisor will manage the case from point of acknowledgement through to resolution. This, we feel, works well to rebuild a working relationship with our customers, when things haven't gone as expected.

Complaints relating to an RHP employee's conduct will be fully investigated in line with our HR policies, but we cannot divulge the outcome of these investigations for reasons of confidentiality. We will, however, explain what our investigation involved.

The Complaints Manager or another manager within the CSC will review all incoming complaints and prioritise a response from the Complaints Team depending on the situation. Whilst always within the ten-day response turnaround, we recognise that certain types of complaints warrant a far swifter response.

Tenants' Champion enquiries (for the LBRuT) will be overseen by the Complaints Manager who will manage the relationship with their office and provide regular updates on the cases which they are supporting our customers on. The case will be logged and managed through our customer management system.

All appeals will be managed by a Manager and reviewed by a Head of Service.

All Ombudsman complaints will be sent to the Customer Service Centre and will be logged on our customer management system. The CSC must send all Ombudsman complaints to the Complaints Manager, Head of CSC and the Director of Housing Services who will respond accordingly.

Complaints

RHP'S APPROACH

We know things sometimes go wrong, so we look carefully at complaints and take steps to learn and improve from them where we can. We will respond clearly, discuss what has happened, with no jargon, and set a clear way forward on how we plan to appropriately put things right in partnership with the customer.

How to Complain:

By Phone: 0800 0322 432 Mon-Fri 8am-5pm

By Letter: 8 Waldegrave Road, Teddington, Middlesex TW11 8GT

Face to face: 8 Waldegrave Road, Teddington, Middlesex TW11 8GT

By Email: customer.services@rhp.org.uk

By Web Chat: www.rhp.org.uk/rhpui/chat-panel

By Facebook: www.facebook.com/groups/MyRHP/

By Twitter: www.twitter.com/RHP_UK

Stage 1 Complaint:

We'll try to fix what's gone wrong, explaining what's happened and giving you an apology for any problems we've caused. We will aim to reach an agreement to resolve your complaint in ten working days. If we can't, we'll let you know why and give you a revised timescale. We will acknowledge a complaint and log within five working days.

If we are unable to meet these time frames, we will let the customer know by explaining the reasons for the delay. And our extension will not exceed an additional 10 working days. We can extend by an additional 10 days in extreme circumstances, provided a detailed reason is provided to the customer with the agreement of both parties. When an agreement has not been made, we will provide the customer with the Housing Ombudsman contact details.

Stage 2 Complaint (Appeal):

If you're not happy with this, clearly tell us the reasons why and one of our managers will investigate and respond within twenty working days. If we are unable to meet these timeframes, we will let the customer know by explaining the reasons for the delay. And our extension will not exceed an additional 10 working days. We can extend by an additional 10 days in extreme circumstances, provided a detailed reason is provided to the customer with the agreement of both parties. When an agreement has not been made, we will provide the customer with the Housing Ombudsman contact details.

If our customer raises additional complaints during the investigation, these should be incorporated into the stage one response if they are relevant, and the stage one response has not been issued. Where the stage one response has been issued, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the complaint should be logged as a new complaint.

Where the problem is a recurring issue, we will consider any older reports as part of the background to the complaint if this will help to resolve the issue for our customer.

If you remain unhappy, we'd still like to hear from you so we can try to fix things, but otherwise, the next stage is for you to approach the Tenants' Champion / your local councillor or MP, as set out below. Alternatively contact the Housing Ombudsman Service after the prescribed timeframes set out below.

Social Media Complaints:

We accept complaints from customers across all customer channels, this includes our social media accounts, Facebook and Twitter. These are captured and administered in the same way as detailed above. We will however ask that customers private or direct message us to protect the anonymity of others involved, where appropriate.

We will regularly inform our customers of their rights of escalation throughout their complaint with us.

Tenants' Champion/ Councillor/ MP:

If a customer remains dissatisfied after going through our 2 stage complaints process, they may wish to contact The Tenants' Champion (if you live within the Richmond Borough) a local Councillor or your MP if you live in Kingston, Hillingdon or Hounslow.

If you live in London Borough of Richmond, The Tenants' Champion supports tenants and leaseholders who rent or lease their property from a Housing Association (www.richmond.gov.uk/services/housing/housing_contact/tenants_champion).

If you live in Kingston, Hounslow or Hillingdon, you can contact your local councillor. These individuals can also act on your behalf at any point during our complaints process.

Complaints

Housing Ombudsman Service:

We are committed to following the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling code to support a positive complaint handling culture, we support the Housing Ombudsmans key areas in the code which are:

- ▶ Universal definition of a complaint.
- ▶ Providing easy access to the complaints procedure and ensuring residents are aware of it, including their right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service.
- ▶ The structure of the complaints procedure - only two stages necessary and clear time frames set out for responses.
- ▶ Ensuring fairness in complaint handling with a resident-focused process.
- ▶ Taking action to put things right and appropriate remedies.
- ▶ Creating a positive complaint handling culture through continuous learning and improvement.
- ▶ Demonstrating learning in annual reports.
- ▶ Annual self-assessment against the code.

We carry out an annual self-assessment against the code to ensure our complaint handling remains in line with its requirements and we will publish results.

The Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) can independently and formally review your complaint if you've been through all stages of our complaints process. That said, you have the right to engage with the HOS at any stage during your complaint investigation with us.

The Housing Ombudsman is an independent body set up by law to review housing complaints. Visit their website for more details:-

Phone: 0300 111 3000

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Postal address: Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool L33 7WQ

Complaints to RHP may be resolved in a number of ways. Any resolution to a complaint will be in partnership with the customer and reflect the extent of the situation based on its own merit, and the impact caused to the customer as a result.

These may include:

- ▶ Acknowledging where things have gone wrong
- ▶ Providing an explanation
- ▶ Apologizing
- ▶ Taking action if there has been a delay
- ▶ Reconsidering or changing a decision
- ▶ Amending a record
- ▶ Providing a financial remedy
- ▶ Propose procedural changes if appropriate
- ▶ Signpost to supporting agencies

When considering a resolution, RHP will consider a range of factors including

- ▶ The length of time that a situation has been ongoing
- ▶ The frequency with which something has occurred
- ▶ The severity of any service failure or omission
- ▶ The number of different failures
- ▶ The cumulative impact on the customer and/ or customer's particular circumstances or vulnerabilities.
- ▶ Consider any quantifiable losses in any financial settlement for the complaint, alongside any discretionary payment to acknowledge service failure more broadly.
- ▶ Any discretionary payment will be offset against a tenant's rent arrears. Compensation for financial loss will be reimbursed directly to the tenant.

There will be some instances where we won't accept a complaint for investigation or escalate complaint. Whilst we will not unreasonably decline a complaint or a request to escalate a complaint, the reasons where this may be appropriate are captured below. If we are not accepting a complaint, we will clearly set out the reasons why, and signpost the customer to the Housing Ombudsman Service for further advice or support.

Complaints

- ▶ A complaint will need to be received by RHP within 6 months of the problem occurring. We will always review any request outside of this timeframe and discretion may be applied. If it does fall outside of this time we may decide, after understanding the customer's personal circumstances, to investigate.
- ▶ A customer should respond to their stage 1 complaint within 6 months of us issuing our formal reply. A reasonable adjustment to this approach may be considered depending on the customer's personal circumstances.
- ▶ If a complaint is regarding Nuisance or Anti-social Behaviour, this will be managed in accordance to our Anti-social behaviour policy and procedure. If, however the complaint is about the management of the case, this will be investigated as a complaint.
- ▶ If a complaint relates to an active legal claim against RHP, such as disrepair cases or insurance claims, or where a customer is taking RHP to court.
- ▶ If a complaint relates to the calculation or amount of homeowner service charges, this should be handled as a service charge query via our homeowner team. If a dispute is unable to be resolved then the homeowner has the right to escalate to the First Tier Tribunal.

Unreasonable or Vexatious Complainants / Complainants Representative

There may be occasions where we will not investigate a complaint and may consider taking action against the complainant or their representative, this may happen when:

- ▶ A complainant or their representative refuses to speak with or allow appropriate employees to investigate and resolve complaints, without providing sufficient evidence or reason to do so.
- ▶ A complainant or their representative is considered to be malicious, unsubstantiated, discriminatory, or deliberately Repetitious.
- ▶ A complainant or their representative shows unacceptable behaviour towards our employees or other customers by behaving in a threatening, aggressive, violent, or abusive manner.
- ▶ A complainant's or their representative's actions or behaviours take up a disproportionate amount of RHP's time and resources, or adversely affect our ability to provide services to other customers, we may exercise our right to restrict or change contact arrangements.

We will consider and review whether there are any matters that may be contributing to the way the customer is choosing to do business with us and may consider appropriate reasonable adjustments and review whether the customer is being appropriately supported, in how we manage their complaint prior to us deciding whether to refuse to investigate their concern.

We know that some customers may have difficulties in accessing our services to appropriately express their dissatisfaction with us. We will support those customers, and any approved third party acting on their behalf, who require assistance and will make reasonable adjustments (in compliance with the equality act 2010) where practical. This may include customers whose first language is not English, or customers with a learning or physical disability such as a visual or hearing impairment. We can also signpost customers to external agencies for independent support or advocacy were deemed appropriate. This may include, but not limited to reasonable adjustments to complaint management and resolutions and customer documentations and communications.

We know that it's not just about putting things right when things have gone wrong, it's key to us to learn from any mistakes by us, to ensure we learn from them in the hope of preventing the same issue from occurring again. Complaints are a real opportunity to drive long term service improvements for our customers and for us as a business.

We will seek to involve our residents to scrutinise our complaints performance and service. Complaints are monitored and reported on within RHP. We regularly monitor compliance with policy and procedures and seek to address any weaknesses with business areas as appropriate.

Tenants and Leaseholders are appointed as directors of RHP and are members of the Board's Service Delivery & Transformation Committee (SDTC) which routinely reviews RHP's complaints performance and action taken.