



## Group Complaints Policy

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST	
Policy Guardian:	Business Services Director
Author:	Business Services Officer
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Governing Body Approved:	April 2016
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Diversity compliant:	Yes
Equality Impact Assessment required:	No
Data Protection compliant:	Yes
Health & Safety compliant:	Yes
Procedure implemented:	Yes
QL system changes made:	Yes
KPIs / reporting arrangements implemented:	Yes
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Business Services – Implementation Review:	

This document can also be provided in large print, braille, audio or other non-written format, and in a variety of languages.

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 This policy relates to the Caledonia's Group Complaints Handling Procedure. The Group comprises of Caledonia Housing Association as the Group parent organisation; and Cordale and Bellsmyre Housing Associations as its subsidiaries. For the avoidance of doubt, in Cordale's Rules Caledonia Housing Association is described as the 'partner'.

In addition, the use of the word 'Group' in this policy documents is used to describe Caledonia, Cordale and Bellsmyre Housing Associations.

1.2 The relationship we share with our tenants and other customers is one we value and we are similarly committed to ensuring it remains open and positive. The array of feedback we receive plays a vital part in helping us achieve this. It confirms the high expectations placed upon us, and whether or not we are meeting these.

1.3 We recognise the particular importance of complaints, in enabling us to identify areas where we need to make changes to or improve our approach. This brings a requirement to have in place robust systems and effective procedures to ensure complaints are properly managed and acted upon.

1.4 This policy underpins our corporate commitment to valuing complaints and sets out how we will fulfil regulatory expectations in relation to their handling based on the following core set of complaints handling principles that underpin the organisations complaint handling procedure (CHP):

- User-focused
- Simple and timely
- Thorough, proportionate and consistent
- Objective, impartial and fair
- Seeking early resolution
- Delivering improvements

## **2. Policy Context**

2.1 The Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 provides the basis for standardised complaints handling across the public sector. It empowered the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) to develop a series of sector specific Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) models. The overall aim was to improve how complaints are handled across the public sector, and provide a consistent process for customers to follow.

2.2 In legislative terms, Registered Social Landlords (RSL) are defined as one of the "listed authorities" over which SPSO can exercise its powers. Consequently, SPSO developed a model CHP for the RSL sector. First published in April 2012, this model applies to and requires to be adopted by all Scottish RSLs.

## **3. Complaints Handling Procedure**

3.1 Caledonia Group shall adopt the model CHP for the RSL sector in full. We will develop and maintain appropriate business support systems to enable us to record, manage and respond to complaints. We will also develop the necessary systems that reflect and enhance a culture of commitment to excellence.

3.2 We note the CHP comprises two documents. The first explains to staff how to handle complaints; the second provides information on this for customers. We shall ensure all staff

are fully aware of the procedure and receive appropriate training on its use and our associated management systems. As part of this we will aim to embed an organisational culture of valuing and learning from complaints, in the context of identifying service improvements.

3.3 We shall similarly promote and publicise our procedure to ensure, as far as possible, that all tenants and other customers are aware of their right to complain and the arrangements for doing so.

#### Specifics

3.4 The model CHP aims to provide a quick, simple and streamlined process for resolving complaints. In adopting the model we acknowledge its key features, including:

- A single, clear definition of a complaint, with guidance on and examples to aid identification.
- A defined two stage internal process for resolving complaints at either the ‘frontline’ (as close to first point of contact as possible) or through ‘investigation’ where the matter is more complex, serious or high risk.
- Defined timescales for resolution at either stage; including examples of the limited circumstances under which these can be extended.
- Detailed guidance on handling and processing complaints and communicating with complainants during the process.
- Definition of the scope for customers to approach the SPSO if they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint.
- Definition of roles and responsibilities, including those relating to the Group Governing Bodies, Chief Executive and senior officers.
- Minimum requirements for recording complaints, their outcomes and any resulting action.

## **4. Roles and Responsibilities**

4.1 Our CHP sets out detailed arrangements for the governance of complaints handling. This includes distinct roles and responsibilities for the Group’s Governing Bodies and staff members.

4.2 In summary, each Governing Body is responsible for approving adoption of the Group CHP and this Policy; monitoring our performance in handling complaints through receipt of KPI information; and approving changes to any of our other policies to reflect learning from complaints.

4.3 The Chief Executive shall oversee implementation and on-going operational deployment of our Complaints Handling Procedure, in conjunction with the other senior officers in the parent and subsidiary entities. This will include ensuring management systems are in place and working effectively to properly record all complaints; investigation processes are suitably robust; and performance reports are produced and submitted to the respective organisational Management Boards.

4.4 The Chief Executive will have a direct role in reviewing and signing off investigation stage complaints, and in handling complaints that are identified as being high risk or high profile.

4.5 For complaints relating to Caledonia Housing Association service provision, the Business Services Director will co-ordinate and handle all complaints at investigation stage, with the exception of those involving an activity or service that falls within their functional responsibility.

In these cases another senior officer from the Caledonia Executive Management Team (EMT) will assume this role.

- 4.6 For complaints relating to Cordale and Bellsmyre Housing Associations' service provision, the Area Director will co-ordinate and handle all complaints at investigation stage, with the exception of a complaints relating directly to the actions of the Area Director. In these cases a senior officer from the Caledonia Housing Association EMT will undertake this role
- 4.7 The senior management teams within the parent and subsidiary entities will actively monitor and analyse complaints handling performance. In order to facilitate this, we will develop and implement a system of reviewing complaints and their outcomes and capturing learning from these. They will also be responsible for proposing policy changes required as a result of complaints and for putting these into practice.
- 4.6 All other staff may be involved in receiving and resolving frontline stage complaints, including recording and responding to them in accordance with our CHP.

## **5. Compliance and Performance**

- 5.1 Outcome two within the Scottish Social Housing Charter relates to Communication. The accompanying note specifies that it *"...covers all aspects of landlords' communication with tenants and other customers"* and that *"...It also covers making it easy for tenants and other customers to make complaints and provide feedback on services, using that information to improve services and performance, and letting people know what they have done in response to complaints and feedback."*
- 5.2 This provides the basis for compliance with the CHP being monitored by the SHR. In particular, we note that it has featured as part of the Annual Return on the Charter from 2013/14.
- 5.3 We will continue to sustain and as necessary develop and implement a comprehensive performance management system, which is designed to meet Charter requirements and includes relevant performance measures. We will abide by regulatory expectations in relation to complaints monitoring and reporting, embedding complaints as a measure in self-assessment exercises. We will continue to develop practices around trend and root cause analyses; as well as methods for analysis and reporting of qualitative as well as quantitative information.
- 5.4 We shall aim to keep abreast of emerging good practice in the sector and remain open to adopting this. This may include for example, providing a role for tenants in reviewing complaints and the way they were dealt with.

## **6. Equalities Issues**

- 6.1 We acknowledge the relevance of the CHP to all our tenants and customers, and their respective rights to complain about something we have or have not done; or our standards of service.
- 6.2 In accordance with our commitment to equality and diversity, we shall:
- Ensure information about our complaints handling procedure is easily and widely available. This will include using our various publications to make tenants and customers aware of their right to complain. Leaflets and other relevant information will be displayed and freely available in our office reception areas.

- Publicise arrangements about how to make a complaint. This will include providing clearly displayed links on our website.
- Treat all complainants fairly, respectfully and as individuals and, as far as practically possible, accommodate any specific needs they may have.
- Support and assist any customer who wishes to make a complaint. This will include, for example:
  - Explaining our procedure and its application
  - Providing our procedure in formats or languages other than written English
  - Offering a range of methods of complaining
  - Providing other practical assistance, such as help with scribing or articulation.

## **7. Risk Management Implications**

7.1 The principal risk addressed by this policy is that of non-compliance with the SPSO's Complaints Handling Procedure. This policy, and the implementation of its associated procedures and practices, should minimise this risk .

7.2 Accordingly, and as required, we will continue to review our management systems and monitoring framework, and provide training for all staff.

7.3 We also recognise that certain types of complaints may be categorised as serious, high risk, or high profile. Our CHP details our approach to handling these.

7.4 We further acknowledge an individual's right to present their complaint to the SPSO, in the event that they remain dissatisfied with our handling of their complaint.

7.5 We will also provide our tenants and customers with the appropriate signposting and information to enable them to contact the Scottish Housing Regulator if they believe there has been a significant performance failure or failure to handle their complaint effectively. We will ensure any material produced by the SHR is prominently displayed and readily available in all locations open to the public. A significant performance failure can be defined as a failure by the landlord to meet its legal requirements or tenant commitments.

7.6 In accordance with the CHP, we aim to ensure complaints are properly managed and investigated, and have robust systems and methods in place for this purpose. Our handling will focus on tenant needs and we will make every effort to understand their desired outcome. We will keep complainants informed as we process and investigate their complaint, and otherwise work in accordance with the CHP and its principles in all regards.

## **8. Redress Policy**

8.1 We acknowledge the role of complaints in providing customers with a form of redress, where we fail to meet their expectations. We note the SPSO guidance on redress, which advises service providers to, where possible, seek to re-instate an individual to the position they were in prior to the event which is the subject of the complaint.

8.2 This can include compensating for direct financial loss. In such cases we shall make an informed judgement of the level of financial hardship resulting from the event, and experienced by the complainant in making and pursuing their complaint. Where the complainant appears to have unrealistic expectations or submits a claim that we consider unreasonable, we may ask them to provide some form of substantiating evidence.

8.3 We note however that redress can similarly involve providing an explanation and apology through personal contact; and that often complainants may seek this, rather than a financial

payment. In such cases, we will aim to find the most appropriate way of providing this, and meet particular communication requests complainants may have.

## **9. Policy Review**

9.1 We note the intention of SPSO to review the model CHP on a three year cycle. By implication this is likely to present a requirement to adopt future procedural revisions and amend the Group's complaints handling procedure.

9.2 This policy shall accordingly be reviewed every three years in conjunction with any procedural changes. Where flexibility in the model permits, we will seek to engage tenants and tenants groups in this review work.

## **10. Other Regulatory Bodies**

10.1 We have chosen to adopt the SPSO CHP for the RSL sector as the framework for its complaints policy. However, we are aware that customers may contact and register complaints with other external regulatory agencies. These include:

**The Scottish Housing Regulator**  
Europa Building, 450 Argyle Street, Glasgow, G2 8LG  
On line form: [www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk](http://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk)  
Phone: 0141 271 3810  
Fax: 0141 221 5030

**The Care Inspectorate**  
Compass House, 11 Riverside Drive, Dundee DD1 4NY  
On line form: [www.careinspectorate.com](http://www.careinspectorate.com)  
Phone: 0845 600 9527  
Fax: 01382 207289

**Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR)**  
2nd Floor, Quadrant House, 9 Riverside Drive, Dundee DD1 4NY  
On line: [www.info@oscr.org.uk](mailto:www.info@oscr.org.uk)  
Phone: 01382 220446  
Fax: 01382 220314.

**Homeowner Housing Panel**  
Europa Building, 450 Argyle Street, Glasgow G2 8LH  
On line: [www.prhpscotland.gov.uk](http://www.prhpscotland.gov.uk)  
Phone: 0141 242 0175  
Fax: 0141 242 0141

10.2 Often the agencies listed in 10.1 will refer complainants to the organisational complaints procedure or to the SPSO. However, we will communicate and co-operate with all external agencies where they have received a complaint and confirm that they intend to undertake an investigation.