

Compliments and Complaints Policy

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Three Rivers aims to provide a high quality, effective and fair service in all areas of operation.
- 1.2 Feedback from customers, potential customers and other sources provides an excellent source of information on the strengths and weaknesses of Three Rivers services.
- 1.3 Compliments provide confirmation of areas of Three Rivers services that customers value.
- 1.4 Complaints and suggestions can be used to challenge and develop existing policies and procedures and to feed into the continuous service improvement planning process.

2.0 Policy Statement

- 2.1 The aim of this policy is to provide a fair, consistent and structured three stage process for our customers if they express any dissatisfaction, whether justified or not with a service they have received. The policy will be widely publicised and accessible in a variety of mediums and formats.
- 2.2 Three Rivers views feedback from customers as a valuable tool in maintaining and improving service standards. We welcome and encourage feedback from our customers and we view complaints as a valuable source of information to help us to: -
 - Improve the standard of the services we deliver
 - Put things right when they have gone wrong
 - Learn from our mistakes
- 2.2 In order to maximise the amount of feedback that reaches the Association, Three Rivers aims to make the process for customers to make complaints, suggestions and compliments as open and accessible as possible.
- 2.3 Emphasis will be placed on resolving complaints as quickly as possible by an officer from the Service area concerned. We will ensure our staff are equipped to deal with complaints efficiently and effectively and lessons

learnt from complaint investigations will be used to directly inform service improvements.

3.0 Complaints

- 3.1 A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not made about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the association affecting any individual or group of people.
- 3.2 An initial report of a neighbour problem, request for a repair or similar routine service query, is not a complaint. An issue of this nature would become a complaint if a customer reports that the matter has not been dealt with to their satisfaction.
- 3.3 Anyone who receives or is requesting a service from the Association or is affected by the activities of the Association can make a complaint. This includes:
 - Tenants, leaseholders, hostel residents, licencees, ex-tenants;
 - Advocates or representatives of any of the above;
 - Waiting list applicants;
 - Neighbours of Three Rivers properties who are not tenants of the Association;
 - Groups of tenants.
- 3.4 Complaints can also be made anonymously although in some instances this will impact on the effectiveness with which Three Rivers can deal with the issue.
- 3.5 What issues can be raised?
 - Any service provided by the Association;
 - The way requests for information have been handled;
 - The way staff or other agents or contractors acting on behalf of Three Rivers have conducted themselves;
 - The way that housing applications have been handled.
- 3.6 In order to make it as easy as possible for issues of concern and expressions of dissatisfaction to be raised with Three Rivers, complaints can be accepted by any Three Rivers officers in any format including:

- Verbally, over the phone, at a Three Rivers Office or any other location
- In writing, by letter, fax or e-mail
- Through the Three Rivers website

3.7 The customer should never be asked to contact another member of staff to make their complaint, phone back at a time when the appropriate staff member is available or put their complaint in writing.

3.8 When a customer wishes to complain about a service they have received, they can expect:

- Their complaint to be dealt with immediately if possible, or if further investigation is required within a maximum of ten working days;
- Their complaint to be progressed to the next stage of the procedure if they remain dissatisfied after the initial response;
- An acknowledgement of their complaint within two working days, informing them of who will be dealing with their complaint and when they can expect a response;
- To be kept informed if the investigation into the complaint falls outside of the agreed timescales;
- A full written response within timescales specified in this policy;
- Appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint

3.9 When dealing with complaints we will:

- Treat all complaints seriously and confidentially;
- Maintain an accurate database of all complaints received;
- Monitor the nature and location of complaints to identify any weakness in service delivery;
- Learn lessons from complaints to continually develop and improve our services;
- Monitor and report our performance in complaint handling against agreed targets

3.10 Three Rivers are committed to equal opportunities and our aim is to make our Compliments and Complaints Policy easy to use and accessible to all our customers. It will be widely publicised, available in a variety of formats and customer compliments/complaints leaflets containing a feedback form will be available on request.

3.11 Staff will provide information on the complaints procedure for customers wishing to make a complaint and provide any assistance they may require, for example:

- Assisting with a completion of a customer feedback form
- Completing a customer feedback form on behalf of a customer
- Making appropriate arrangements for customers who may have specific requirements

4.0 Complaint Stages

- 4.1 **Front line staff** – (Service level complaints) - Customers will be able to log their complaint with any member of staff, this staff member will then be responsible for the complaint until resolved, or if the customer wishes the complaint to be escalated to the next level. A response will be offered within 10 working days. If this is not achievable then the customer will be informed as to the reason why and with a proposed date for completion.
- 4.2 **Heads of Service** – (Service level review) - If the Customer is not satisfied with the proposed resolution to the complaint at the first level then it will be escalated to the appropriate Head of Service. The Head of Service will review the first level and if required carry out further investigation. A response will be offered within 15 working days. If this is not achievable then the customer will be informed as to the reason why and with a proposed date for completion.
- 4.2 **Review Panel** – (Overall review stage) – The final stage of the internal complaints process is referral to the review panel if the customer remains dissatisfied with the Head of Services' response to the complaint. The review panel will consist of Board members and the Managing Director of Three Rivers. The review panel will review the first two stages and investigate further if required. The complainant will be invited to the review panel. The complaint will be reviewed at the next available date which will be no longer than 20 working days from escalation to the final internal stage.

- 4.3 If the customer still remains dissatisfied with the situation following the response of the review panel then they will be referred to the Independent Housing Ombudsman.
- 4.4 If a complaint has been referred to the Ombudsman, a member of Three Rivers executive team will be assigned to liaise with the Ombudsman to ensure that Three Rivers meets all requirements and timescales in respect of requests for information.
- 4.5 All responses at whichever stage of the process should include details of any remedial action that has been taken or that is planned, (if it has not yet been undertaken the customer should be advised when it will be taken). If the complaint is not upheld the customer should be advised of this along with the reason for the decision.
- 4.6 If a complaint is made by a customer who is also a Three Rivers member of staff or Board member, special consideration will be given to who handles the complaint at each stage in order to ensure impartiality in the investigation.

5.0 Compensation

- 5.1 In some circumstances compensation may be payable when a complaint is upheld. Three Rivers compensation policy sets out in detail the situations in which compensation is payable.

6.0 Suggestions

- 6.1 Customers may have suggestions to make to Three Rivers about how a service area can be improved. The Customer Involvement Strategy sets out a whole range of ways in which comments of this nature can be gathered through consultation processes. However some of the most pertinent ideas may arise on an ad-hoc basis as customers are actually experiencing a particular service process.
- 6.2 In order to ensure that ideas of this nature are captured all suggestions relating to service delivery made by customers should be logged and passed on to the relevant service area.

- 6.3 A customer survey will be carried out after completion of the process to collate information from customers on how they perceived the process. The outcome of the complaint will not be taken into consideration.

7.0 Service Improvement

- 7.1 A primary function of handling complaints or suggestions is to consider whether the issue provides scope for service improvement. This could be immediate amendments to policy or practice, or identifying an issue to feed into the annual service improvement planning process. The individual dealing with the issue is responsible for progressing any necessary amendments or passing them to the responsible service manager for implementation.
- 7.2 A lead officer will monitor and manage the complaints database on a weekly basis. This will ensure staff are adhering to timescales and the correct level of service is being offered by the organisation.

8.0 Compliments

- 8.1 Positive feedback from customers is also beneficial to Three Rivers. It provides documentary evidence of the value that customers attach to specific service areas and boosts staff morale to know that compliments are being officially recognised and recorded.
- 8.2 Compliments will be recorded on the central database and analysed on a weekly basis by the Customer Service Team Leader in conjunction with the recording and reporting of complaints.

9.0 Recording, Analysing and Monitoring

- 9.1 All complaints and compliments are to be recorded on the database by the 1st tier staff member that takes the complaint.
- 9.2 The database will be monitored by the Customer Services Team Leader on a weekly basis to ensure that all issues which require a response to customers have been completed.
- 9.3 On a monthly basis the Customer Services Team Leader will analyse all of the issues recorded on the database. This analysis will be reported to management via the month end performance reports.

- 9.4 The Customer Services Team Leader will identify any underlying trends in the issues reported which necessitates a review of a process or service area.
- 9.5 A summary of complaints and compliments received and any resulting service improvement action taken will be reported quarterly to all customers through The Bridge.
- 9.6 Customer Satisfaction with the complaints process will be monitored through the biennial major customer satisfaction survey and through a rolling survey of those customers who have made a complaint.

10.0 Summary

- 10.1 In order to ensure we continue to provide the best possible complaints handling service for our customers, this policy will be subject to ongoing evaluation and annual review.
- 10.2 Staff involved in complaints handling will be consulted for their views and suggestions on how the policy may be improved.
- 10.3 Three Rivers complaints and compensation policy provides a framework to maximise the capture of customer feedback and ensure that it is used to enhance service standards and inform the service improvement process.

