



<b>Policy Owner</b>	<b>Director of Housing &amp; Insight</b>
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## Complaints Policy

**Purpose:** This policy sets out Flagship's commitment to dealing with complaints.

**Aim:** Flagship aims to give an outstanding service to our customers. However, we acknowledge that occasionally things may go wrong and customers may wish to make a complaint. We want to know if this happens or when customers are unhappy with the service they have received so we can put things right and continually improve.

### 1. What a complaint means to Flagship:

- 1.1 At Flagship, we value feedback of any kind to help us improve and help us strive towards achieving our purpose and delivering outstanding customer service.
- 1.2 We take complaints seriously and will ensure we listen to what matters to our customers. We want to understand the causes of dissatisfaction within our service to enable us to learn.
- 1.3 We welcome complaints and feedback from anyone who receives a service from Flagship or is affected by the work we do including; customers, leaseholders, owner occupiers, former customers, applicants, neighbours and other stakeholders.

NB: Flagship will ask customers to provide authority to deal with a third party on their behalf, if required, in order to protect their personal data.

## 2. Definition of a complaint

- 2.1 At Flagship, we understand sometimes things go wrong and customers may be dissatisfied with the service they have received.
- 2.2 In the first instance, we would like the opportunity to put things right and we will deal with an expression of dissatisfaction that has first come to our attention as a failure. Our aim is for our frontline staff to resolve these issues as quickly as possible at the point of contact.
- 2.3 If we haven't managed to do this, Flagship will manage the issue as a formal complaint which is defined as ***"A dissatisfaction about the decisions, actions or failures of our services after we have had the opportunity to put things right"***.

## 3. What is not considered a complaint

- 3.1 The following are not considered to be formal complaints:
  - 3.1.1 A service failing where Flagship have not had the opportunity to put things right.
  - 3.1.2 A general enquiry or service request.
  - 3.1.3 Disputes regarding service charge calculations (apart from complaints about the handling of service charges).
  - 3.1.4 Communications which relate to Anti-Social Behaviour (apart from complaints about the handling of an ASB case).
  - 3.1.5 Complaints about services where Flagship have no control over such services e.g. where the Local Authority allocates one of our properties to a customer etc.
  - 3.1.6 Claims for damages (where these can be dealt with as an insurance claim).
  - 3.1.7 Where the complaint has already exhausted our internal complaints procedure (signposting will be provided to external bodies where appropriate).
  - 3.1.8 Complaints where an appeal, court or tribunal are dealing with the issue.
  - 3.1.9 Complaints that have already been before a court or tribunal.

3.1.10 Complaints that are being pursued in an unreasonable manner. This can include where customers use threatening, abusive or intimidating behaviours or whereby their complaint is unreasonably persistent, repetitive or vexatious complaints, or where the complaint has been dealt with already in accordance with the relevant complaints procedure and a final determination given.

## **4. Handing Formal Complaints**

### **4.1 Stage 1 Complaints (Investigation and Resolution) - Internal**

We will always acknowledge complaints when they reach us and our Learning and Resolution Team will assign a Resolution Officer who will make contact and work to agree an outcome that is suitable as quickly as possible, clearly communicating timescales and next contact dates.

Whilst the Learning and Resolution team will deal with the majority of stage 1 complaints, we reserve the right to direct complaints to a more appropriate member of staff in extenuating circumstances.

Once we have taken the relevant action in line with the agreed resolution, we will send a full and final response and close the complaint.

### **4.2 Stage 2 Complaints (Review) - Internal**

If a customer has reason to believe that their complaint has not been handled in-line with the complaints policy, are unhappy with the proposed resolution or if they have a complaint about the conduct of the complaint handler, they can ask for it to be reviewed within 20 working days of when they receive their outcome letter.

If the customer is unhappy with the proposed resolution then Flagship will escalate the case to be reviewed by an appropriate senior manager who will review the investigation and outcome of stage 1 (including any new information provided by the customer when requesting their review) and will make a final decision. That decision and any actions to be taken by Flagship will be communicated to the customer in writing.

If the request for a review focuses on compliance with the process/conduct of staff member dealing with the complaint at stage 1 then this will be reviewed by the Customer Insight Manager and any outcome will also be communicated in writing.

### **4.3 Stage 3 Complaints (Designated Person) – External**

If the complaint is unresolved at the end of stage 2 we will signpost the complainant to a designated person - an MP, or local councillor to whom they may give consent to liaise with us on their behalf They may contact Flagship in accordance with the

Localism Act to come to a resolution. By entering this process the complainant is giving consent for the designated person to act on their behalf and liaise with Flagship regarding the complaint. If an MP contacts us and the complaint has not exhausted stages 1 and 2 of this policy, we will respond at the appropriate stage.

#### **4.4 Stage 4 Complaints (Housing Ombudsman Service) – External**

If the designated person cannot resolve the complaint, we/they can refer the customer to the **Housing Ombudsman Service**. Alternatively, if the customer chooses not to contact the designated person, they can wait eight weeks from the date they receive our final response letter (at the end of stage 2) and then contact the Housing Ombudsman Service directly themselves.

Flagship Group is a member of the Housing Ombudsman Service Scheme. The address and contact details for the Housing Ombudsman Service are:

Housing Ombudsman Service  
PO Box 152  
Liverpool  
L337WQ  
Tel: 0300 111 3000  
E-mail: [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)

### **5. Policy Objectives**

- 5.1 We will ensure that customers can make a complaint in a number of ways either by telephone, email, letter, live chat or face to face.
- 5.2 We will acknowledge all complaints and ensure we regularly communicate next steps and timescales.
- 5.3 We will ensure that formal complaints are handled by a dedicated Resolution Officer or appropriate staff member who will manage the complaint through to completion/escalation.
- 5.4 We will ensure our Learning and Resolution Team is effectively trained to handle complaints from beginning to end acting in a fair, impartial and sympathetic manner.
- 5.5 We will work with customers to find a mutually agreed resolution, understanding the reason for the complaint, the desired outcome and any timescales. An appropriate response will clearly be communicated to the complainant.

5.6 Flagship will contact customers once their complaint has been closed to understand whether they were happy with how the complaint was handled and to understand if the customer was happy with the outcome. This information will help us improve our complaints handling service.

5.7 We will capture accurate data to ensure lessons are learned to improve services, this information will be reported periodically to senior management and the Customer Operations Group.

## **6. Contractors**

6.1 To ensure that complaints are dealt with in a consistent and effective manner we expect our contractors to have a complaints process which is appropriate and consistent with our approach to complaints. We will monitor complaints received by our contractors and where complaints are not handled by Flagship we will use our discretion to take over the handling of complaints ourselves where we feel it is more appropriate to do so.

## **7. Redress**

7.1 Flagship understand that at times it may be necessary to make either an obligatory payment of compensation or a discretionary payment or goodwill gesture and will endeavour to award fair and reasonable settlements if deemed necessary.

7.2 Flagship will ensure fair and reasonable consideration is taken over unnecessary costs such as out of pocket expenses, damage or loss directly caused by failures in service - these payments shall be made directly to the customer. If Flagship deem that goodwill gestures are appropriate, this may be offset against any debt a customer may owe us including a debt on their rent account.

7.3 This section of the policy does not apply to personal injury claims, decants or temporary moves, formal disrepair claims, service charge refunds or new properties during the defects period.

7.4 Where a customer starts legal action against Flagship, this policy and related procedures will no longer apply and these cases will be dealt with on an individual basis.

7.5 Where a person does not receive a service from Flagship but is affected by our actions, or lack of actions, these claims will be assessed on an individual basis.

7.6 For claims to be considered, details must be received by Flagship within 30 days of the event that caused the loss or damage. Failure to make a compensation request in this timescale will result in Flagship not being able to consider the claim further without evidence of extenuating circumstances. This does not affect legal claims which are governed by the appropriate Limitation Act.

7.7 When reviewing claims for compensation, we will take into account the effects of the actions of the claimant, i.e. if they have failed to allow us or our contractors to undertake remedial works deemed necessary which ultimately causes further problems/damage to the property.

## **8. Equality and Diversity**

Flagship is committed to ensuring that everyone is dealt with fairly and we have Equality and Diversity policies which confirm this approach. This policy will be applied in a manner consistent with this policy.

## **9. Confidentiality and Information Sharing**

We will only share information as outlined in our Data Protection Policy, however, details of complaints will need to be shared internally (and with our contractors where appropriate) in order for complaints to be properly investigated.

## **10. Review**

This policy will be reviewed every three years by the Director of Housing and Insight and approved by the Customer Operations Group and the Flagship Operations Board. We will review this policy sooner if legislation or regulations change.