



Gravesend Churches Housing Association

Comments, Compliments & Complaints Policy

Status:	Approved
Approval Route:	Board
Responsible Officer:	Felicity Dunmall, Housing Manager
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Signed off by:	Name: Nicola Bowen  Signature: _____ Date: 7.1.21

1. Introduction

GCHA prides itself on the quality of service that it offers to residents and those seeking housing but we recognise that things can go wrong, and we do not always get it right first time. GCHA acknowledges the important role that tenant feedback plays in delivering excellent services:

- your compliments let us know when we are getting it right
- your comments tell us what you think
- your complaints help us to know where we need to improve

2. Definition of a Complaint

- A complaint is defined as any expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.
- The complaints procedure allows us to establish the validity of the complaint, to address the matter and to take appropriate remedial action. GCHA will accept a complaint either in person, writing, by phone, via the website or a method that suits the individual's needs. Where we have permission from the resident(s) we will accept complaints from a third party, friend, family, or advocate.
- We will not accept a complaint where there is an alternative appropriate process in place, such as reporting ASB, services outside of our control or where there is another appeal route available. If this applies, we will explain clearly and quickly what other options are available to you.
- If at any stage, we have not heard back from the complainant within the specified timescale we will consider the matter resolved and will close the complaint.
- The initial process of dealing with a complaint is to work with the resident outside of the complaint's procedure so that any minor issues can be resolved. For example, this may mean completing an outstanding repair or re-booking a missed appointment.

3. Our Approach

We aim to resolve complaints at the first opportunity and learn from the experience to improve our services.

We will:

- make it easy and accessible for you to make a complaint
- signpost you to the right organisation if the complaint is not about GCHA
- fully investigate each complaint in a fair and consistent way
- keep you informed using your preferred method of communication
- apologise when we have made a mistake
- seek a successful resolution with you at the first opportunity
- keep records of complaints and investigations, ensuring any learning is captured to improve our services
- monitor and publish information about our complaints

If we are unable to agree an outcome, you can ask to escalate your complaint. Our process is as follows.

4. Complaint Process

First Stage

- Your complaint will be dealt with by the member of staff that took it unless the complaint is about them in which case it will be dealt with by their line manager. If your complaint is about the CEO you should proceed directly to stage 3.
- We will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 1 working day and give you a comprehensive answer within 10 working days.
- If we are not able to meet this deadline because we need further information, we will write or email you and advise you of a date when you can expect a full response.

- We will always respond using your preferred method of communication and if your complaint is upheld, we may offer you compensation in line with our compensation policy.
- If you are not happy with the response you receive you can take the matter further to the second stage of our procedure within 28 days of the response. If we do not hear anything further, we will consider the matter closed.

Second Stage

- If you are still unhappy with the response to the complaint, the matter will be referred to the GCHA senior management team (SMT). If the complaint is about a member of the SMT, the complaint will be dealt with by the CEO.
- We will contact you within 10 working days of the date of your appeal and let you know the date you can expect a response from the SMT.
- The SMT will consider your complaint and any evidence put forward by you to support your case and will respond to you within 3 working days of the appeal meeting.

Third Stage

- The complaint will be referred to the Board of Directors who will appoint a panel. We will contact you within 10 working days of the date of your appeal and let you know the date you can expect a response from the board.
- The board will consider your complaint and any evidence put forward by you to support your case and formally record their decision which is binding on behalf of the association.

Fourth Stage

If the appeal is not upheld by the board, the resident will be advised that they can refer the matter to the Independent Housing Ombudsman Service:

0300 111 3000

9.15am - 5.15pm, Mon to Fri

Housing Ombudsman Service

PO Box 152

Liverpool L33 7WQ

info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

For stakeholders and other organisations or individuals who are not representing a resident, the decision of the board is final.

5. Vexatious Complainants

- We define a vexatious complainer as someone who, because of the nature, or frequency of their contact with us, hinders our ability to deal effectively with their, or other customers', complaints.
- Some examples of the type of behaviour that fall under vexatious are:
 - Refusing to specify the grounds of a complaint, despite offers of help.
 - Not co-operating with the complaint's investigation process.
 - Refusing to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaint's procedure.
 - Insisting on the complaint being handled in ways which are incompatible with our procedure or with good practice.
 - Making unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues and seeking to have them replaced.
 - Changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
 - Denying or changing statements made at an earlier stage.
 - Introducing irrelevant new information at a later stage.

- Raising many detailed but unimportant questions and insisting they are all answered.
 - Submitting falsified documents.
 - Pursuing parallel complaints on the same issue with various organisations.
 - Making excessive demands on the time and resources of staff with lengthy phone calls, emails to numerous staff or detailed letters every few days and expecting immediate responses.
 - Submitting repeat complaints with minor additions/variations and insisting they are 'new' complaints.
 - Refusing to accept the decision or repeatedly arguing points with no new evidence.
 - Making a complaint has no serious purpose or value. It may have little merit and investigating would be out of proportion to the seriousness of the issues complained about.
- We reserve the right to refuse to deal with vexatious complaints or deal with them differently. For example, we may advise you to approach the Housing Ombudsman Service without a review (if the request is an impossible one). This decision must be agreed by the CEO.

6. Promoting Feedback Arrangements

- GCHA will promote feedback arrangements in two ways:
 - inclusion of the feedback arrangements in the start of tenancy pack
 - GCHA web site – the comments, complaints and compliments policy and procedure will be available online including a link to the Housing Ombudsman website
 - Information will also be included in resident newsletters in the form of “You said, we did”
- In addition to this, the comments, complaints and compliments policy and procedure will be added to items for discussion at tenant focus groups so that the views of our residents can be taken into consideration when reviewing this policy.

7. Making a Comment or Compliment

- Our residents’ views are important to us and help to shape the services we deliver and lets us know if we are getting things right.
- If you have any comment or compliment regarding GCHA then we are always happy to receive these.
- You can make a comment or compliment either in person, writing, by phone, via the website or a method that suits the individual.

8. Reporting

- Any comments, complaints (including appeals) and compliments will be considered monthly by the management team and reported to the board at the next meeting including information regarding areas of dissatisfaction.
- Staff performance will be subject to external audit to improve service delivery.