



Complaints Policy and Procedure

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Introduction

Empower welcomes all feedback from our customers and their representatives and recognises that this feedback provides valuable information that we can use to improve the services we offer.

A key part of this feedback is customer complaints, which allow us to learn from experiences where things may have gone wrong and make amendments to our working practices to ensure that they don't happen again. We encourage feedback by providing different channels through which customers can easily make a complaint.

The Board and Senior Managers at Empower recognise that complaint handling is an important strategic role, providing vital insight on our performance and reputation.

Performance data on complaint handling will be considered by the Board alongside other key performance indicators to provide assurance, assess any risks, identify emerging trends and learning points to improve services to customers.

Empower has completed its self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, which promotes the progressive use of complaints and provides a useful framework to support effective handling and prevention of complaints.

The Board has visibility of the volume and type of complaints received and the impact of our complaint handling on customers. In addition, it also considers any improvements made as a result of learning from complaints.

What is a Complaint - Definition

Empower recognise that effective complaint handling is a customer focused process that enables customer voices to be listened to and understood.

We have used the Housing Ombudsman definition of a complaint which is "an 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".

What is not a complaint - Exclusions

There are a number of circumstances in which a matter will not be considered a complaint, and which we consider to be fair and reasonable in accordance with the Housing Ombudsman's Code. These are:

- A comment, or series of comments, where the customer is making a suggestion about

how we may improve or maintain our service

- A question, or series of questions, where a customer is requesting information about a service we provide
- A service request, where the customer is letting us know about a particular issue for the first time; for example reporting a repair or an incident of anti-social behaviour
- The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over six months ago
- Legal proceedings have been started
- Matters that have already been considered under the Complaints Policy.

When we decide not to accept a complaint, we will provide an explanation setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process.

Customers have the right to challenge this decision by bringing their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.

Making a Complaint

We will always attempt to resolve a complaint at the first point of contact and empower our staff to resolve any concerns there and then. At this stage we will confirm our understanding of the complaint and the outcomes being sought with the customer.

Empower also recognises that that every customer interaction represents an opportunity for to gain feedback and insight. We will record all complaints on the SDM database and run regular reports from the system to identify if there are any trends in customer dissatisfaction and any lessons we can learn.

When we receive your complaint, we aim to deal with it there and then if we can.

If we are unable to resolve the complaint at the first point of contact, we will investigate under the formal complaints process.

A formal complaint can occur when:

- A customer is unhappy about a service that they have received from Empower or the attempts that Empower has made to resolve the issue
- A customer requests that the service they have received be reviewed by a manager, or the customer has expressly asked for a complaint to enter the formal complaints process

- A member of staff has triggered the formal complaints process to reach a resolution with a customer.

A full record will be kept of the complaint, any review and the outcomes at each stage, including all correspondence with the customer, correspondence with other parties etc.

At the completion of each stage of the complaints process we will ensure that customers are communicated with and advised of the following information:

- the complaint stage
- the outcome of the complaint
- the reasons for any decisions made
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right
- details of any outstanding actions
- details of how to escalate the matter if dissatisfied.

The process has 2 stages and will be co-ordinated by our dedicated Complaints Officer:

Stage 1 - Investigation

We will make it easy for our customers to make a complaint in a way that is the most convenient for them, this could be in writing, over the telephone, via text or email or in person to a member of Empower staff. The complaint will be acknowledged within three working days. We'll investigate the complaint and then discuss with the customer what needs to be done to resolve the issue. We will provide a full written response within ten working days. If this is not possible, an explanation and a date when the stage one response will be received will be communicated. This should not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason.

Stage 2 – Review

If the complaint is not resolved to the customer's satisfaction, the customer can request a review of the complaint within 10 days of receipt of the outcome.

A senior manager will consider the initial findings of the complaint investigation and may choose to take further action. The review outcome will be completed within 10 working days of the request. If this is not possible, an explanation and a date when the stage two response will be received will be communicated. This should not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason.

Housing Ombudsman

If the customer remains unhappy or dissatisfied with the response to the complaint, they can appeal to the Housing Ombudsman.

Making a referral to the Ombudsman is free and further details can be found at: <http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/>

This can either be done by the customer directly or can be co-ordinated through the dedicated Complaints Officer. The referral must be made within eight weeks of the final decision.

Related policy, documents, legislation

Regulator of Social Housing - Consumer Standards - Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard

Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

Anti Social Behaviour Policy

Equality & Diversity Policy

Reporting Structure and Learning Points

- Quarterly performance reports will be presented to the Board on the volume, category and outcome of complaints
- The Empower Annual Report will share trends arising from complaint handling and any learning or changes made as a result of complaints.
- The Board will review any orders from the Ombudsman and findings of severe maladministration of the Ombudsman, or any referrals by it to regulatory bodies
- The Board will review annually the self-assessment to confirm that the Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code is being applied