

Complaints Policy

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Responsible officer	Head of Operations (Triathlon Homes) (Responsibility for proposing final draft, implementation and review)
Author	Customer Relations Manager

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Triathlon Homes LLP are committed to providing a good quality service to all our customers. We welcome both positive and negative feedback to help us improve our services.
- 1.2 We know that from time-to-time things don't always go according to plan. When this happens we will;
 - apologise,
 - take action to put this right as quickly as possible,
 - use your feedback to change and improve the way we deliver our services.
- 1.3 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that there is a consistent and fair approach to responding to complaints which aims to resolve the issue at the earliest opportunity.
- 1.4 This policy has been developed in accordance with the Housing Ombudsman's (HOS) Complaint Handling Code, our statutory and legal duties and customer feedback.
- 1.5 Any reference to 'we', 'our' or 'us' refers to Triathlon Homes LLP. When we use 'you' and 'your' we mean customers.

2. What is a complaint?

- 2.1 We have adopted the Housing Ombudsman's definition of a complaint as "an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by Triathlon Homes, our own staff, or those acting on our behalf, affecting an individual resident or a group of residents."
- 2.2 There are some issues which we will not deal with as a complaint because there is an alternative process. These include:
 - Issues where legal proceedings have started. This is defined as when a Claim Form and Particulars of Claim have been filed at court. This will be passed to our solicitors at the point we become aware (either at the beginning or during the complaint).
 - Service charge enquiries. If you are contacting us about an increase or the amount that you are being charged for services, your case will be dealt with as an enquiry and responded to by an appropriate person within Triathlon Homes. In addition, disputes about variable service charges can be heard by the First-tier Tribunal (Property Chamber). A complaint about the standard or lack of service will be dealt with as a complaint.
 - Rent charge enquiries. Please refer to our Rent Setting Policy.
 - Personal injury or third-party liability claims. These claims will be dealt with by our insurers.

- We have a separate policy for how we manage complaints of Anti-Social Behaviour. However, a complaint about the standard or lack of service will be dealt with as a complaint.
- If you are unhappy with the way we have dealt with your subject access request, you will need to refer this to the Information Commissioners Office (ICO).

This list is not exhaustive.

2.3 Other issues that may not be dealt with as a complaint include:

- Matters that have already been considered fully under the Complaints Policy, and a response has been provided.
- Decisions which have been made in accordance with our statutory obligations, or in line with legislation or regulation, for example Succession or the Right to Rent. Issues relating to how we handled the matter will be dealt with as a complaint.
- Where the specific issue being raised has been made subject to contact restrictions under our Unacceptable Behaviour policy.

This list is not exhaustive.

2.4 If we decide not to accept a complaint, an explanation will be provided setting out the reason why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process. If you are unhappy with this decision, you have the right to take your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.

2.5 **Service request**

A service request is a request from a resident to us as their landlord, requiring action to be taken to put something right. A complaint will be raised when the resident raises dissatisfaction with the response to their service request.

3. **Making a complaint**

- 3.1 Anyone can make a complaint to us, however only complainants with which we have a landlord or tenant relationship (including leaseholders and applicants for housing) may be escalated to the Housing Ombudsman.
- 3.2 We will accept complaints from a representative of any of the above people, such as a relative or an advocate, who is authorised by the complainant to make a complaint on their behalf.
- 3.3 If we receive a complaint from a Residents or Tenants Association or a petition from a group of residents, then this would be dealt with in line with the process that we have set out. We will require a lead person to be nominated who is the main point of contact

and all our correspondence will be with them. If the complaint escalates to Stage 2 then we will allow one other petitioner/member to be involved in the complaint.

- 3.4 Complaints can be made in person, over the telephone, by email, by letter, or via our website. If you need any support or assistance in making a complaint then please let us know so that we can make any necessary adjustments in accordance with our Reasonable Adjustments Policy.
- 3.5 If you raise your complaint via social media, we will reply and ask you to message us directly with further details so that we can log your complaint. We will not comment beyond this to ensure that confidentiality and privacy is maintained.
- 3.6 Complaints should be made within a reasonable timeframe. We will not accept a complaint about a matter which occurred over 6 months ago, unless the complainant can show good cause as to why it was not raised sooner. If the problem is a recurring or ongoing issue, we will consider any older reports as background to the complaint.
- 3.7 If at any point you are unhappy with how we are dealing with your complaint, then please let us know. You are also able to contact the Housing Ombudsman Service at any point throughout your complaint for advice. Their details can be found on our website and the last page of this document.

4. Stage 1 complaint

- 4.1 Your complaint will be handled by a nominated person within the relevant service relating to your complaint. This individual will:
 - act independently and have an open mind,
 - take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest,
 - consider all relevant information and evidence carefully,
 - keep the complaint confidential as far as possible, with information only disclosed if necessary to properly investigate the matter.
- 4.2 The complaint handler will contact you, where possible, by telephone and within 5 working days of you reporting your concern to us. The complaint handler will acknowledge receipt of the complaint, confirm their understanding of your complaint, and find out what resolution you are seeking. You will be provided with a case reference number and the contact details of the person managing your case.
- 4.3 Our aim is to provide you with a response within 10 working days of the acknowledgement. If this is not possible, we will contact you and let you know why we are not able to do this and when we will provide the response. This will not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason. If we can not agree on an extended timeframe, you are entitled to contact the Housing Ombudsman to discuss.
- 4.4 On completion of your Stage 1 complaint, we will write to you (unless a different contact method has been requested in accordance with our Reasonable Adjustments Policy) to confirm the following:

- the complaint stage,
- the complaint definition,
- the decision on the complaint,
- the reasons for any decisions made,
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right,
- details of any outstanding actions and a plan to monitor these
- details of how to escalate the matter to Stage 2 if you are not satisfied with the conclusion of your Stage 1 complaint.

4.5 If there are further actions that we need to take as part of the remedy to your complaint, we will inform you of these within the formal response. The complaint investigation case will be closed but the proposed remedies will be monitored as part of a live action plan.

5. Escalating your complaint

5.1 If you are unhappy with the response provided you can either speak to us to discuss your concerns so that we can explore if there is anything further that can be done, or you can request for your complaint to be escalated to Stage 2. When requesting for your complaint to be escalated we will require you to set out the reasons why you are unhappy with our response and the outcome that you are seeking. We can provide help with this if it is required. The reason should fit into the following categories:

- the complaint was not fully investigated,
- we did not follow our own policies and procedures, or
- one of the agreed points was not addressed.

5.2 If you want to escalate your complaint you need to let us know within 20 working days of your Stage 1 complaint being closed or the date your action plan should be completed by. If you do not let us know within this timeframe then we will not normally re-open your complaint unless there are exceptional circumstances.

5.3 There may be occasions when it would not be appropriate to escalate the case to Stage 2, for example if the outcome being sought was not within our power or ability to deliver. In cases such as these we will write to you and explain why the complaint will not be escalated and what options are available to you, including your right to contact the Housing Ombudsman.

5.4 The reasons why we may not escalate a complaint to Stage 2 are the same reasons stated above in the policy as to why we may not accept a complaint.

6. Stage 2 complaint

6.1 Stage 2 complaints will be handled by a manager not previously involved in the Stage 1 complaint.

- 6.2 Within 5 working days of receipt of the Stage 2 escalation request, the case handler will acknowledge your request and set out their understanding of issues outstanding and the outcomes you are seeking. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the case handler will ask you for clarification.
- 6.3 We will aim to respond within 20 working days of the complaint being escalated. This will usually be by telephone unless a different contact method has been requested in line with our Reasonable Adjustments Policy.
- 6.4 If it is not possible to respond within 20 working days, we will contact you and let you know why we are not able to do this and when we will provide the response. This will not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason and your agreement. If we can not agree on an extended timeframe, you are entitled to contact the Housing Ombudsman to discuss this further.

7. What happens if you are still unhappy?

- 7.1 The outcome letter that is sent to you following the conclusion of Stage 2 will be the Groups final response to your complaint.
- 7.2 If you remain dissatisfied, you can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service directly. Their contact details are:

Housing Ombudsman Service
PO Box 152
Liverpool
L33 7WQ
Telephone: 0300 111 3000
Email: info@housingombudsman.org.uk

8. Continuous learning and improvement

- 8.1 We recognise the valuable feedback that a complaint can provide, and we have mechanisms in place to ensure that we capture this when we conclude a complaint.
- 8.2 We speak to customers to find out how we dealt with their complaint and pass their feedback across the business in order to improve the services we provide.
- 8.3 We record and monitor all complaints that we receive, and this information is reviewed by relevant Committees, Managers and Staff across the Group and is used to identify areas where we can improve our services.
- 8.4 Organisational learning and changes to policy and services resulting from complaints will be captured and shared with our Board, staff and residents.
- 8.5 Our performance in respect of complaint handling is constantly reviewed and this information is provided to the Management Team and our Board. Information concerning our performance is also available to our customers and this can be viewed in our Annual Report to Residents or on our website.

9. Equality and diversity

- 9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out as part of the development of this policy. We aspire to embed diversity and inclusion within all of our business activities to enable these principles to become part of our everyday processes.
- 9.2 We will make reasonable adjustments to our complaints process where necessary, ensuring that customers with a specific need are not at a disadvantage when accessing the service. Examples of the reasonable adjustments we may make include using a customer's communication preference for the duration of the complaint and providing information in alternative formats e.g. Braille, large print or on coloured paper. More information is available in our Reasonable Adjustments Policy.

10. Related documents

- Complaints Procedure
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Unacceptable Behaviour Policy
- Reasonable Adjustment Policy

Policy Controls sheet		
Author	Date	Main changes and why (i.e. change in legislation, change in internal processes)
Customer Services Policy Consultant	1 October 2022	Aligned policy to be consistent with Southern Housing Group's Policy and to reflect the latest changes to HOS Complaints Handling Code.
Customer Services Policy Manager	13 December 2021	Timescale for acknowledgment of new complaints changed to be within 3 working days.
Customer Services Policy Manager	May 2021	Update new template. Correct minor typing errors.
Customer Relations Manager	December 2020	Revised policy to take into account changes required to comply with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.
Head of Operations	June 2016	Officers seek to resolve complaints informally. If not successful then it becomes formal with an agreed action plan and input from Head of Operations. Action plans are monitored to completion. If the customer is still dissatisfied following an action plan, they can request an M.D review.
Policy and Research Manager and Head of Operations	December 2015	Stage 2 Panel removed and replaced with a review by TH Managing Director.
Policy and Project Officer	April 2013	Original policy.