

COMPLAINTS POLICY

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Hillcrest Housing Association (Hillcrest)'s commitment to putting customers first means providing high quality services to all our customers. If things go wrong, however, we want to know, so we can put them right straight away.

2. Principles

- 2.1 Hillcrest's complaints policy and procedures will:

- Be easily accessible and well publicised;
- Be simple to understand and use;
- Allow speedy handling, with established time limits for action, and keep customers informed of progress;
- Ensure a full and fair investigation;
- Respect all the points at issue, and provide an effective response and appropriate redress;
- Provide information to management so that services can be improved.

3. What is a Complaint?

- 3.1 If you think you have a complaint we want to hear about it. Definitions of what constitutes a complaint could be as follows:

- (a) We have not done something we said we would do;
- (b) We have taken too long to do something;
- (c) We have not told you what is happening;
- (d) We have not achieved the publicised standard;
- (e) A Hillcrest representative has been rude or unfair to you.

4. How to Complain

- 4.1 A complaint form has been designed to help you submit complaints. Complaints can also be submitted by letter, email, telephone or in person.
- 4.2 Complaints against contractors employed by Hillcrest will be treated as complaints against the department employing them.

4.3 Hillcrest will not normally be able to investigate matters more than 12 months old or deal with anonymous complaints. Some anonymous complaints may be investigated if serious issues are involved.

4.4 Informal Complaints

4.4.1 We know that when things go wrong you want things put right as soon as possible. In our experience most problems can be settled quickly by talking to the employee you have been dealing with. If you feel however, that they cannot help, or you are not happy with this response, you can also talk to their manager. Contact details are available by calling 01382 224083 or may be found on our website via contact details. The manager will investigate and evaluate what has gone wrong and what they intend to do to put it right. They will do all they can to resolve things for you.

4.4.2 If after this you are still not satisfied with the way your problem has been dealt with, you may want to consider making a formal complaint.

4.5 How to make a formal complaint

4.5.1 Any person making a complaint in person will be encouraged to use the Complaints Form. Help in completing the form will be offered. The complainant may submit the form immediately or take it away and send it in later.

4.5.2 There are three stages in the formal complaints process:

Stage One - Complete our online complaints form, or contact us using one of the alternative methods explained above. Hillcrest will investigate your complaint, and you will receive an acknowledgement within 5 working days from the date we received your complaint, and a full reply within 14 working days from the date we received your complaint. If we can not respond in this time we will tell you why.

Stage Two - If you are not satisfied with the answer from Stage One you can write to the relevant Director who will review your complaint and the responses you have received. Again you will receive a reply within 14 working days from the date we received your complaint. If we can not respond in this time we will tell you why.

Stage Three – if your complaint is upheld then you have no further right of appeal to the Association to consider the complaint again. If your complaint has not been upheld and you are dissatisfied with how your complaint has been investigated, you can complain to the Committee of Management Complaints Appeal Panel, who will investigate it on your behalf. An appeal hearing should take place within 28 working days of your request, or as soon as practicable.

5. If I am still not satisfied what can I do?

5.1 If at the end, you are still not satisfied that we have fully dealt with your complaint, then you can contact the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). They are an independent body who investigate complaints about the Scottish Public Services. They will normally only consider your complaint after you have given us the opportunity to resolve matters for you.

5.2 The SPSO's address is:

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
4 Melville Street
Edinburgh EH3 7NS
Tel: 0800 377 7330; Text: 0790 049 4372; Fax: 0800 377 7331;
Email: ask@spsso.org.uk

5.3 A leaflet about the Ombudsman is available from Hillcrest or from Advice Centres. Information can also be found on the Ombudsman's website at www.spsso.gov.uk

5.4 The Ombudsman will not be able to deal with complaints until you have gone through Hillcrest's own complaints procedure.

6. Equality

6.1 Hillcrest will not discriminate in the operation of any of its policies on the basis of age, gender, race, colour, religion, marital status, family circumstances, political or sexual orientation, medical condition or disability.

6.2 Hillcrest aims to promote equality and diversity and complies with current legal requirements relating to equality issues.

7. Will my complaint be treated as confidential?

7.1 We will, as far as possible, respect the confidentiality of your complaint. However, you will appreciate, that if a complaint involves another customer or an employee or contractor, it may be difficult for us to look into this without talking to other people.

7.2 If you wish us not to do so, we will respect this, however, it may not be possible for us to take any action to tackle this problem.

8. How do we record and monitor complaints?

- 8.1 All formal complaints made to Hillcrest are recorded and reported to Hillcrest's Committee of Management on a twice annual basis.
- 8.2 This information can help Hillcrest to make changes or improvements in its service delivery and working practices.

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Policy approved by	Audit & GP Sub-Committee
Date of next review	April 2010
Policy complies with	Performance Standard GS3.3 Complaints & Appeals

CUSTOMER COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY - TIMESCALES

Stage 1

1. An acknowledgement letter to be sent to the complainant within 5 working days of receipt of the complaint.
2. Letter to complainant advising the outcome of the investigation, action to be taken etc., to be sent within 14 working days of receipt of the complaint.

NOTE: If the investigation requires more time, an interim response will be sent within 14 working days advising on progress and estimating when the formal reply will be sent.

3. Timescale within which the complainant may request reconsideration of their complaint at Stage 2 - 14 working days from the date they receive the written reply.

Stage 2

1. An acknowledgement letter to be sent to the complainant within 5 working days of receipt of stage 2 complaint.
2. Letter to complainant or interim response (as in Stage 1 above) - within 14 working days of receipt of the complaint.
3. Timescale within which the complainant may submit an appeal to the Committee of Management - 28 working days from they date they receive the written reply.

Stage 3

1. Acknowledgement letter to complainant - within 5 working days of receipt of appeal letter.
2. Letter to complainant notifying the date of the Complaints Panel meeting - to be sent within 14 working days of receipt of the appeal letter.
3. Complaints Panel to meet within 28 working days of the date of receipt of the appeal letter.
4. Letter to complainant advising the outcome of the appeal to be sent within 5 working days of the Complaints Panel meeting.

