

Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy & Procedure

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 At South Essex Homes we are committed to improving our services so that we meet our customers' needs. To do this, we need to know when you are not happy, or if you have a suggestion for ways to improve our services. Equally, if we have done something well please let us know.

If you have not contacted us before to tell us about the issue, please do this first. For example, if you haven't reported a repair to us, or need to tell us about a problem on your estate, please telephone our Freephone number 0800 833160 and allow us to try to put things right. However, if you have previously contacted us and are not happy with the outcome then you may wish to make a formal complaint. Further information is on our website at www.southessexhomes.co.uk

- 1.2 We will keep you informed about the progress of your complaint during our investigations, and aim to give you a full response within 10 working days. Our guarantee is to respect confidentiality at all times.

- 1.3 To download a printable fact sheet about comments, compliments and complaints, please visit our website - www.southessexhomes.co.uk.

- 1.4 You can provide your feedback on the service we provide by returning a feedback form or in any of the following ways:

- Freephone: 0800 833 160
- Email: complaints@seh.southend.gov.uk
- Letter: Write to the Corporate Services Officer at FREEPOST SOUTH ESSEX HOMES
- Contact us on Facebook or Twitter

2 General Policy Statement

2.1 Comments and Compliments

A comment is a suggestion about how South Essex Homes can improve its services. However, if you feel you want to make a positive comment about an individual, team or service, South Essex Homes will treat this as a compliment. We welcome all compliments, as these help us to identify where we are performing well and share this good practice with other departments within South Essex Homes.

- 2.2 We will acknowledge receipt of your comments and compliments, and let you know what action we will be taking. We will also pass your comment or compliment to the relevant Group Manager, and publish the best suggestions in our Insight magazine.
- 2.3 **Making a Complaint**
- 2.4 South Essex Homes is committed to providing its customers with a high standard of service at all times. However, we accept that there may be occasions when you are not satisfied with the service which you have received and as a result you may wish to make a complaint.
- 2.5 We try to make it easy for our customers to make a complaint and accept complaints in most formats and from a variety of sources, including email, our online feedback form on our website, letter, telephone, text or message via Facebook or Twitter.
- 2.6 All complaints will be registered and logged by our Corporate Services Team. This team will decide which service area your complaint relates to and will ask the relevant Service Manager to investigate and provide you with a reply. The Corporate Services Team will log all complaints on our Complaints Database and also save a copy of the complaint and our response on to Civica (the application that we use to save documents electronically). This team will monitor all complaints and ensure that a reply is sent out to you within the agreed timescale.
- 2.7 Details of the number of complaints we receive and compliance with our performance indicators are reported on our website as part of our year end performance information. Wherever possible we will learn from the complaints we receive and in each case, we will identify where a lesson or amendment to a service has been identified to improve how we do things. We will record these lessons learned and report them to our Management Team.
- 2.8 All complaints will be dealt with promptly and in a professional manner by appropriate member/members of staff. Confidentiality will be preserved as far as is possible.
- 2.9 Complaints relating to nuisance or harassment by neighbours will be dealt with separately, under the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy. A copy of the policy can be obtained by visiting our website
- 2.10 South Essex Homes defines a complaint as:
‘An expression of dissatisfaction, where South Essex Homes has failed to do what we have agreed to do.’
For example, if you feel a service standard, policy or procedure has not been met, or a contractor fails to keep an appointment time, please inform the Customer Contact Centre on 0800 833 160.

3 Our Mission Statement & Aims

3.1 South Essex Homes Mission is **Working Smarter Together**

3.2 Our aims reflect the fundamental goals we must achieve in close collaboration with the Council. These are;

Working Smarter Together in Partnership with Southend Borough Council we will:

- Provide excellent services
- Ensure our sustainability

3.3 Effective handling of complaints will ensure the company is able to learn from complaints to improve the service to our customers in accordance with expectations.

4 Responsibility

4.1 The Corporate Services Group Manager is ultimately responsible for compliance with the Policy on a day to day basis. The Corporate Services Team will be responsible for responding to complaints in line with this Policy.

5 Review and Monitoring

5.1 As part of the monthly performance monitoring the Operational Management Team will receive updates on Complaint stages and performance against complaints responded to in target time. The Board will receive information on complaints performance annually.

5.2 We ensure that we benchmark against our peers to learn from other organisations within the housing sector on how they provide their service.

5.3 South Essex Homes ensures that it monitors the complaints about our contractors. Each contractor will be expected to have a Complaints Policy comparable to the Policy of South Essex Homes. In particular complaints about the service provided by our larger contractors will be reviewed and discussed with individual contractors at client management meetings and reported to the Board on an exception basis.

6 Procedure

6.1 South Essex Homes has three stages for dealing with complaints. At every stage of your complaint, we will ask you how you feel that we have failed to

meet your expectations and what you think we should do to resolve your complaint.

Stage 3 is the final external stage of complaint that is reached if you remain dissatisfied with what we have done after Stage 2 is complete.

- **Stage 1**

If you are making a complaint about a person or a service area for the first time, the Corporate Services Officer will be responsible for making sure it is investigated and will send you an acknowledgement letter within 2 working days. Whenever possible we will do our best to provide a full response to your complaint at this point.

Your complaint will be passed to the Manager or Team Leader responsible for the area of service you are unhappy about, who will send you a full response within 10 working days. This letter will also include details of who to contact if you are still unhappy. If your complaint is more complex, perhaps requiring us to get information from other teams or departments or undertake more in depth investigation it may not be possible to provide a full reply to your complaint within 10 days. In this case, we will send you a holding reply stating why we are unable to provide a full response, what action we are taking and the date that we will reply in full

- **Stage 2**

If, despite efforts to resolve the issue at Stage 1, you are still unhappy with the way it was dealt with, or the service is still poor, please contact the Corporate Services Officer (the telephone number will be provided on response letter from Stage 1). Your complaint will then be passed on to a Group Manager or Director.

The Director or Group Manager will respond to you within 10 working days. The response will include an explanation of why they reached their conclusion and will also give you details of the Ombudsman if you are not satisfied.

- **Stage 3**

If you have been through the South Essex Homes complaints process and are still not satisfied with our response or feel the issue has not been resolved, there are further options you can take;

1. You can contact the Housing Ombudsman directly. However, you must wait for eight weeks from the date of the decision on your Stage 2 complaint - this will be the date on the letter confirming the Group Manager/Director's decision.

You can contact the Housing Ombudsman at:

- Housing Ombudsman Service 81 Aldwych, London, WC2B 4HN
- Telephone: 0300 111 3000
- Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

- Website: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk
- Fax: 020 7831 1942

2. Instead of going directly to the Housing Ombudsman, residents can go to a 'designated person' and ask their assistance in resolving their complaint and/or referring their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman. A 'designated person' can be:

- A Member of Parliament
- A local Councillor from the district you live in - for us, Southend-on-Sea Borough Council
- A designated Tenant Panel - however there is currently no designated Tenant Panel in Southend

The 'designated person' will try to resolve the complaint locally but if they are unable to, and the complainant wishes them to, they can refer it to the Housing Ombudsman.

6.2 Compensation

If you feel that there has been a failure in our service delivery and you want to claim compensation then the complaints process may not be the most appropriate route. You should refer to our compensation and ex-gratia payments policy which can be found on our website.

6.3 Vexatious Complainants

We are committed to dealing with complaints fairly and impartially and to providing a high quality service to those who make them. However, a very small minority of customers make complaints that are vexatious, in that they persist unreasonably with their complaints, or make complaints in order to inconvenience South Essex Homes rather than genuinely to resolve a grievance. This may involve making serial complaints about different matters, or continuing to raise the same or similar matters over and over again. The frequency of contact with the organisation can hinder the consideration of their complaints and the ability of officers to provide a quality service to customers as a whole. Please see our Vexatious Complaints guidance for more details.

6.4 For more information about this document please contact us

- **Write to us at:**
South Essex Homes,
Civic Centre,
Victoria Avenue,
Southend-on-Sea,
Essex, SS2 6FY
- **Phone:** 0800 833 160
- **Email:** sehcustomerservices@seh.southend.gov.uk
- **Visit:** www.southessexhomes.co.uk

