

# Customer Care Policy & Procedure

Compliments, Comments and Complaints



**Tuntum is passionate about providing high quality services that make a real difference to the lives of our tenants so we actively welcome customer feedback. After all, your views and comments enable us to learn from our performance and to take positive action to continually improve all of our services and maximise customer satisfaction.**

We also recognise that there may be occasions when our services fall short of your aspirations and our high standards and that you may need to complain about an aspect of the service.

To enable us to more effectively listen to your views and feedback, we have introduced this clear, concise and easily accessible policy for dealing with enquiries, comments, complaints or compliments.

A truly people-focused organisation, we will provide training for all of our staff, so that they are able to effectively handle and communicate any enquiries, comments, complaints and compliments.

## **The aims of this policy**

- All comments on service standards will be acknowledged, considered and where appropriate, acted upon with feedback always being provided to the person making the comment.
- All complaints will be dealt with within the timescales set out in this policy and to the satisfaction of both the customer and the Trust.
- Any matters regarding customer dissatisfaction will be put right as quickly and as simply as possible. We will also improve services to ensure that these issues do not arise again.
- To quickly implement any improvements to our policies and procedures arising from a comment or a complaint.

# Customer Care Policy & Procedure

## Compliments, Comments and Complaints



### Comments, Compliments and Complaints

If you wish to comment on any of our services or have an enquiry, any of the following steps may be taken:

- Contact our Customer Service Team on by:
  - **calling:** 0115 9166 066
  - **email:** [admin@tuntum.co.uk](mailto:admin@tuntum.co.uk)
  - **write to:** The Customer Service Team, Tuntum Housing Association, 90 Beech Avenue, New Basford, Nottingham, NG7 7LW.
- Contact the service concerned directly, either in person or by telephone.
- Complete an Enquiries, Comments, Complaints & Compliments form obtainable from any of our Area Offices, or via our online complaints form.

We welcome all comments and enquiries and will deal with them all seriously. In line with this policy, they will be acknowledged, directed to the appropriate area of service and where appropriate, a full response given.

All compliments will be treated in the same way with the appropriate people being made aware of the appreciation expressed.

All enquiries, comments and compliments will be recorded and monitored with the information being fed back into policy and service reviews to ensure continuous service improvement.

### What is a complaint?

A complaint is when a customer expresses any of the following:

- Dissatisfaction with actions taken by Tuntum (i.e. we have done something badly or incorrectly).
- Dissatisfaction with a lack of action by Tuntum (i.e. we have failed to do something we should have done).
- Dissatisfaction with the way staff/contractors have dealt with someone or provided a service (i.e. treated someone unfairly or discourteously).

# Customer Care Policy & Procedure

## Compliments, Comments and Complaints



A complaint for the purpose of this policy is not any of the following:

- A request for service (reporting a repair).
- A request for information or explanation of a decision.
- Request or explanation of policy or practice.
- Matters of which there is an alternative route of appeal (i.e. someone objecting to an offer of housing being made).

We aim to resolve all complaints effectively within set targets and to customer satisfaction.

The following principles will be followed when dealing with complaints:

- They will all be dealt with promptly, courteously, systematically and fairly.
- Where appropriate, they will be treated confidentially. If information is to be discussed with staff or external bodies, the customer will be asked for their permission before any information is disclosed.
- There will be clear communication of the final outcome or of a complaint's progress if a longer timescale of investigation is required.
- They will be used to improve and develop procedures and services.

### Complaints Procedure

You will find forms in explaining this policy clearly and with space to record the specific complaint will be available at all of our offices and on our website. Forms in other languages will also be available upon request.

Our complaints procedure provides clear stages for the progression of a complaint within our organisation. The stages are set out below.

#### Stage 1 (Officer stage)

A customer complaint can be expressed via:

- Letter
- Telephone call
- In person
- Complaints form
- Email
- Online
- Councillor enquiry
- MP enquiry

# Customer Care Policy & Procedure



## Compliments, Comments and Complaints

All complaints will be logged on the database and an acknowledgement will be sent out within 3 working days of receipt of the complaint.

At Stage 1, the most appropriate officer will take responsibility for responding to a complaint as quickly as possible. However if after investigation, it is likely that a response to the complaint will take more than 10 working days, the customer will be informed and a position logged on the database accordingly.

The Customer Response Co-ordinator will follow up any Stage 1 complaint with the officer handling the complaint where a response or the position has not been logged at the end of the 10 day period.

### Stage 2 (Head of Service Stage)

If a customer is not satisfied with the response received at Stage 1, they can then request that the Head of Service investigates the complaint. Upon receipt of this Stage 2 complaint, an acknowledgement will be sent out to the customer within 3 working days.

Where there is new information, the officer who considered the complaint and the Head of Service will look at it again to see if it is necessary to do something differently. They will investigate the complaint, the action taken to date, the outcome of Stage 1 and the outcome sought by the customer. The Head of Service will make recommendations for resolving the complaint and write to the customer within 10 working days of receipt of the Stage 2 complaint with the proposed recommendations as part of the full response.

If a customer is still unhappy with the response at this stage, they may notify Tuntum that they plan to appeal.

If a complaint has not been resolved in the appropriate timescale at any stage in the process, the customer will be informed of the delay, the reasons for this, the person dealing with the complaint and when the complaint will be responded to.

### Stage 3 (Director stage)

If a customer remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the Stage 2 investigation and response, and they can give reasons to show that the responses at Stage 1 and 2 were unsatisfactory - they can request that their complaint is heard by the relevant Director. The Director will have 20 working days to review the complaint and respond to the customer in writing with the results of their findings.

At this stage, such requests will be dealt with and co-ordinated through the Customer Service Manager.

# Customer Care Policy & Procedure



## Compliments, Comments and Complaints

Once this stage has been completed a final response letter should be written in clear plain language. Where reference is made to previous correspondence then there will be a copy attached. It will be made clear that this is the final internal response and the letter will include a note that if the customer remains dissatisfied with the final response they may refer the matter to the Independent Complaints Panel.

## Independent Complaints Panel (ICP)

The Localism Act 2011 brought in an additional step before a complaint may be sent to the Housing Ombudsman. This is scrutiny of the complaint by a 'designated person' which could be a local MP, the local authority or an independent complaints panel made up of fellow tenants. Since April 2013 Tuntum has operated such a panel in partnership with two other local housing associations, Derwent Living and Gedling Homes.

If a tenant's complaint remains unresolved after Stage 3 then they are invited to submit the complaint to the ICP. This request should be made in writing or by e-mail to Tuntum's Head of Housing. She will then process the complaint and advise the complainant of the procedure to follow.

Only if a complaint remains unresolved after the ICP has met, or 8 weeks have passed since the end of Stage 3, can a complaint be forwarded to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

## The Housing Ombudsman

Our Director of Operations will make the relevant files and records available to the Housing Ombudsman's Investigating Officer on request and we will co-operate fully with the investigation.



## How we record, monitor and report on our service

We use information from enquiries, comments, complaints and compliments to develop policy and service reviews to ensure continuous service improvement. The number of complaints received and our performance in resolving complaints will be reported to all relevant bodies and published annually in our tenant newsletter.

All enquiries, comments, complaints and compliments dealt with under this policy will be recorded and made available to the Board. Statistics on complaint resolution will be reported to the Board on a regular basis.

A complaints register will also be kept and will be updated at each stage of the procedure with information about the relevant issues, timescales and person dealing with the complaint.

When complaints have been resolved and closed, a sample of the customers will receive a survey to check whether the outcome met their needs and to ensure our procedure worked effectively. This will be carried out at quarterly intervals.

# Customer Care Policy & Procedure

## Compliments, Comments and Complaints



### Remedial action we will take

All Managers will consider the appropriate remedy in a particular case. This will often not be financial. Such remedies will be recorded on the complaints database detailing the reason for the remedy and the financial value. For example if an appointment was cancelled. The first remedy here would be to rearrange the appointment within a time that is suitable for the customer, even if this is completed out of the normal hours of service. However if this is not a satisfactory remedy for the customer, then it will be at the discretion of the Head of Service to consider if a payment should be made to compensate for loss of earnings or inconvenience suffered.

Where a complaint is justified and upheld the reply will include an apology. Where there is also evidence of a financial loss resulting directly from the subject of the complaint, consideration will be given to appropriate recompense.

Compensation is discretionary but payments will be considered for the following circumstances at the discretion of the relevant Head of Service:

- Major disturbance or loss of services such as heating or unusable rooms.
- Inconvenience of having poor work remedied.
- Damage to possessions.
- Cost of lighting or power used by operatives where this is excessive.
- Cost of travel arrangements and childcare where the customer has been inconvenienced as a result of a complaint upheld.

### Who has responsibility for this policy?

Our Director of Operations is responsible for the implementation of this policy. Payments for compensation and other non-financial remedies are the responsibility of the relevant Head of Service. However, the levels of compensation and ex gratia payments (payment made without Tuntum recognising any liability or legal obligation) will be reviewed by the Customer Service Manager to maintain a level of equity and fairness.

### How we consult you

We will consult annually with our staff and the forums within our tenant consultation structure regarding the effectiveness and satisfaction levels of this policy.

### Persistent and unwarranted complaints

# Customer Care Policy & Procedure



## **Compliments, Comments and Complaints**

Vexatious complaints have the potential to consume resources and cause stress for our staff whilst achieving no benefits for customers and service users. Complaints that are thought to be vexatious will be initially investigated to determine that this is the case. The

Head of Service in consultation with our Customer Service Manager will make the decision. Vexatious complaints will not be pursued after the aforementioned investigation.

The receipt and rejection of a vexatious complaint, (including the reason(s) for the rejection) should however be recorded and managed by the Head of Service concerned and our Customer Service Manager.

Legal advice will be sought where appropriate and the Human Resources Manager will be informed where a vexatious complaint involves a member of staff.

## **Misconduct of Tuntum Employees**

Where a complaint alleges potential employee misconduct our disciplinary policy may have to be involved. In these cases, the customer will be interviewed by an Investigating Officer and appropriate action will be taken. This will be managed by the Human Resources Manager.

## **Timescales for complaints procedure**

### **Stage 1 (Officer stage)**

1. Acknowledgement letter to be sent to the customer within 3 working days of receipt of the complaint.
2. A letter advising of the outcome of the investigation and actions to be taken to be sent within 2 weeks (10 working days) of receipt of the complaint.  
NOTE: If the investigation requires more time, an interim response will be sent within the 10 working days of receipt of the complaint advising on progress and estimating when the formal reply will be sent.
3. Customers may request reconsideration of their complaint and for the complaint to be considered for Stage 2 of our procedure within 7 days from the date that they receive the written reply.

### **Stage 2 (Head of Service stage)**

# Customer Care Policy & Procedure



## Compliments, Comments and Complaints

1. Acknowledgement letter sent to the customer within 3 working days of receipt of notification that they are unhappy with the result of Stage 1.
2. Letter to customer or interim response (as in Stage 1 above) sent within 2 weeks (10 working days) of receipt of the complaint.
3. Customers may submit an appeal to the relevant Director 14 days from the date they receive the written response at Stage 2.

## Stage 3 (Director stage)

1. Acknowledgement letter sent to the customer within 3 working days of receipt of request to appeal.
2. Director to offer a full response within 20 working days from the date of receipt of the request to appeal.

It is good practice to try to resolve the complaint immediately or have an overall time frame of no more than 8 weeks for all stages of the complaint.

SCW July 2013