

Complaints Policy

1 Purpose

This policy is designed to effectively manage complaints about Hastoe's services with a focus on learning lessons and improving services.

At Hastoe we aim to deliver excellent services to residents, but we recognise that sometimes things go wrong and when this happens we want to put things right and stop it happening again. We value feedback from residents and will use this to improve our services.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies, procedures and guidance:

- Complaints procedure
- Active H Complaints Handling guide
- Compensation policy
- Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code

2 Scope

A complaint 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.

When managing a complaint our focus is on resolving the issue as quickly as possible and ensuring the process of making a complaint is simple for the resident. The investigation must be thorough and include an effective review process where the resident remains dissatisfied.

A resident, or someone acting on their behalf, does not need to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such.

Some areas of resident dissatisfaction fall outside the scope of this policy, these include:

- A first request for service, such as a repair.
- Challenges to service charge or rent setting. Although complaints about the quality of estate services are managed under this policy.
- Neighbour disputes or antisocial behaviour, unless the complaint is in relation to how Hastoe has managed this issue.
- In situations where legal proceedings have started and an application has been made to the court.
- Situations where a claim is being dealt with by Hastoe's insurers.
- Complaints about data breaches.
- Matters that have already been investigated as part of a formal complaint.

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Separate policies and/or procedures exist for these areas.

Where a complaint is made about an issue that arose more than 6 months prior to the complaint being made, Hastoe will not ordinarily investigate these as a complaint, but we will consider this information as part of the background of the complaint.

Where it is decided that we will not accept a complaint, a detailed explanation will be provided to the complainant and the right to take the decision to the Ombudsman.

3 Detail

A complaint can be made to Hastoe by:

- Telephone
- Face to face
- Text Message
- The Hastoe website or MyHastoe portal
- In writing by letter, email or by completing a complaints form
- A third party such as an MP, Councillor, advocate, friend or family member. Although the complainant will have to give permission in most circumstances.

If a resident raises a complaint via social media, we will not deal with the complaint via social media, but we will advise how they can raise a formal complaint using another channel.

Service Failures

A service failure is a request from a resident requiring action from Hastoe to put something right, such as a missed appointment. Service failures will be recorded, monitored and reviewed.

Service failures should be resolved 'there and then', and in no longer than 48 working hours. If this isn't possible and further enquiries are required to resolve this issue, or, if the resident requests it, the issue must be logged as a formal complaint.

If the resident is dissatisfied with the response to the service failure then a formal complaint should be raised.

This policy has a 2 stage process in dealing with complaints;

- Formal stage 1
- Formal stage 2

When a complaint is received, the resident will be asked specifically what the complaint is about and what they would like Hastoe to do to resolve the issue. This approach will ensure that all parties are clear on the content of the complaint, particularly where there is more than

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one issue, or the issue is complex, and so that expectations of what Hastoe are able to do to resolve the issue can be effectively communicated from the outset.

When investigating a formal complaint the emphasis will be on personal contact with the resident via telephone or face to face, unless the resident requests a different form of contact.

Reasonable Adjustments

Reasonable adjustments will be made to accommodate a complainant's needs in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. This may include changes to the complaints policy, procedure or process.

When investigating a complaint, the complaint handler will consider whether reasonable adjustments should have been made to policies, procedures or processes relevant to the complaint to accommodate the needs of the complainant.

Formal Stage One Complaints

All complaints received will be investigated at Stage One in circumstances where dealing with the issue as a service failure has not resolved the issue for the resident or they have requested to make a formal complaint.

The complaint will be investigated by a member of staff from the department responsible for the service being complained about, who hasn't been involved in dealing with the issue previously, has received training in complaint handling and has the authority to effectively resolve the issues raised.

The complaint will be acknowledged within two working days, setting out the detail of the complaint and the outcomes the resident is seeking. The acknowledgement will also advise who the complaint handler will be, giving details of Hastoe's complaints policy and timescales for response.

The complaint handler will make personal contact with the complainant within two working days of receiving the complaint to ensure that the details of the complaint are clear and what it is the complainant would like as an outcome. This contact should be via telephone where possible.

Where residents raise additional complaints during the investigation, these should be incorporated into the stage one response if they are relevant and the stage one response hasn't already been sent. Where the stage one response has already been sent, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the complaint should be logged as a new complaint.

A full written response must be made within 10 working days of the complaint being logged. If there are exceptional circumstances, this timescale can be extended to a further 10 working days and the resident must be provided with an explanation as to why this is and the timescales for when the response will be received.

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If an extension beyond 20 working days is required to enable a full response, this should be agreed with the resident. Where this extension cannot be agreed, the resident must be provided with the Ombudsman's contact details so they can challenge the timescales.

A complaint response must be sent to the resident when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions are completed. Any outstanding actions must be tracked and regular updates provided to the resident.

Written responses must address all points raised in the complaint. The response should be empathetic and reflect conversations already held with the resident. Although the response must give a full account of the investigation and outcome, complaint handlers should ensure that responses are not impersonal. The complaint handler will be responsible for following up on all actions agreed to resolve the complaint.

The complaint handler must record any lessons learned and service improvements required following the complaint.

Formal Stage Two Complaints

Where the complainant remains unhappy they must notify us within 21 days of the date of the response to the stage one complaint, advising what it is they remain unhappy with and what they would like as an outcome of their complaint.

Complaints will only be escalated to stage two once the stage one process is completed and at the request of the resident.

We will acknowledge the request to review the outcome of the stage one complaint within two working days, setting out our understanding of the issues outstanding and the outcomes that the resident is seeking.

We will arrange for a Director to review the way in which the complaint was handled at stage one and review the areas of the complaint that the complainant remains dissatisfied with. This will normally be the Director responsible for the service complained about, but may be an alternative Director.

A Manager responsible for the services complained about will assist by undertaking the investigation.

The complainant will be contacted by the Manager or Director involved with the complaint, ordinarily by telephone or virtual meeting method such as Teams to discuss the complaint and to understand why the complainant remains dissatisfied and what they would like as an outcome. If the complainant does not want to discuss the complaint a paper based review will be conducted.

We will conduct the review and provide a formal written response from the Director of the outcome within 20 working days of the complaint being escalated. If there are exceptional circumstances, this timescale can be extended to a further 10 working days and the resident must be provided with an explanation as to why this is and the timescales for when the response will be received.

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If an extension beyond 30 working days is required to enable a full response, this should be agreed with the resident. Where this extension cannot be agreed, the resident must be provided with the Ombudsman's contact details so they can challenge the timescales.

Complaints about the Executive Team

In circumstances where complaints are made about members of the Executive team, the Chief Executive will investigate and respond to the complaint at stage one of the process and a Board member if the complaint is escalated to stage two.

Where the complaint is about the Chief Executive, the Chair of the Board will investigate and respond to the complaint at stage one. If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint at stage one, then the complainant will have the right to have their case escalated to Housing Ombudsman.

Resident Satisfaction

Satisfaction with our complaints service will be measured as part of an annual perception survey of residents. The results of this will be reported to the Executive team and the Board.

Service Improvements

All complaint handlers at both complaint stages will record lessons learned and service improvements required as a result of complaints. Even when complaints are not upheld, there may still be an opportunity to improve services or communications.

These service improvements will be recorded and tracked. Individual managers will be given responsibility to implement the improvements to services required.

Persistent and Vexatious Complainants

From time to time a small minority of complainants may behave in a way that makes it difficult to effectively investigate their complaint and become overly time consuming to manage.

Staff dealing with a complainant displaying behaviours that could be considered as persistent and vexatious should refer to the Acceptable Behaviour policy. Decisions to restrict contact in these instances will be made by a senior member of staff.

Reporting and Review

Complaints will be reviewed regularly by managers delivering services to residents and lessons learned shared with teams as appropriate.

Complaints and their outcomes will be reported to the Executive team and the Board on a quarterly basis.

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The self-assessment against the Ombudman's Complaint Handling Code will be undertaken on an annual basis and reported to the Executive team and the Board.

The following performance indicators will be used to measure the success of this policy:

- Average time to acknowledge a complaint
- Average time to respond to a complaint
- Number of complaints upheld or not upheld
- Themes of complaints
- Services improved as a result of complaints made.
- Results of satisfaction surveys.
- Performance against the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

Complaints performance and service improvements will be reported to residents as part of the customer annual report.

Residents will be involved in the scrutiny of complaints performance.

4 Responsibilities

All managers responsible for delivering services to residents have a responsibility in ensuring that complaints are effectively managed and services are improved as a result of complainant feedback.

The overarching responsibility to ensure that this policy is effectively implemented sits with the Housing Director.

5 Review

The performance indicators will be reviewed on an annual basis and this policy will be reviewed from time to time to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of Hastoe and is in line with current legislation and regulation.