



COMPLAINTS & COMPLIMENTS POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

Habinteg is committed to providing excellent homes and services. We want to hear from any tenant, applicant or member of the public who is dissatisfied with the way a service has been delivered, with a decision that has been made or with a policy or procedure. Complaints are an important business tool. They are an opportunity to learn about what people expect from us.

We also welcome your compliments about the service you have received from an individual, team or the organisation as a whole. Your compliments show us that we are providing the service that you expect and want. Compliments should be recorded to enable us to review the level of service we provide to our customers.

Customer care is important to Habinteg and we show we care by:

- listening to our customers
- learning from our mistakes
- continually trying to improve our services

We report a summary of our complaints to our National Tenants Forum and include information in our annual report to tenants on our performance. In addition the policy is reviewed at least once every three years and we will consult with the National Tenants forum regarding any proposed changes.

2. DEFINITION & SCOPE

What is a complaint?

A working definition is “any expression of dissatisfaction that needs a response” this may be in relation to an action we have taken, or lack of action, or about the standard of service. Generally complaints will fall into one of the three categories below:

1. We have not followed a published policy or procedure
2. We have failed to deliver or meet an expected standard of service
3. Our staff or contractors have been unhelpful or acted in an inappropriate manner

There is a fourth element to our definition of a complaint and that relates to:

4. An appeal against a decision made when carrying out a policy.

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If the complaint involves an allegation about a member of staff or of discrimination by the Association it may be investigated differently, depending on the nature of the allegation.

What is not a complaint?

To our customers any form of dissatisfaction is a complaint and we would treat it as such, however for internal monitoring the following would not be recorded under the complaints procedure (but will be included in other monitoring).

- **Anti social behaviour and neighbour nuisance**

Customers will contact us regarding complaints about their neighbours and anti social behaviour, these issues are dealt with through the ASB procedures. However if the customer has completed a complaints form we will still issue an acknowledgement and an explanation as to how the issue is to be dealt with.

- **Policy**

Where a complaint relates to a policy or procedure (eg rent setting) then we need to communicate to the complainant how Habinteg reviews and consults on policy and procedural matters. This may be an excellent opportunity to encourage the customer to get involved via tenant representatives. The customer should be left feeling that their views have been listened to and will be taken into account in the future. We need to record this feedback separately to ensure comments are taken into account at the next policy review date and reported to the National Tenants Forum.

Complaints from tenants about the general application of the Association's policies or procedures may be better dealt with by residents associations or tenant's forums. Habinteg encourages the involvement of tenants and offers opportunities for them to make the views known. However, these forums are not intended for the purpose of resolving individual complaints.

Who can complain?

Any tenant, applicant, customer receiving a service from Habinteg, or member of the public may complain either personally or via a Local Authority Councillor, Board Member or Member of Parliament. In addition an external individual or organisation can make a complaint / appeal a decision made on behalf of a service user.

The association will do its best to investigate and take action on anonymous complaints. However, there will be practical difficulties in doing so as full information is not available and clarification cannot be obtained from the complainant.

How to complain

Complaints may be received in person, over telephone, by letter, on a complaints & compliments form, fax, email or via text. In other words, Habinteg will accept a complaint via any medium which allows the customer to express their dissatisfaction.

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If the individual is in receipt of support services and is not happy with Habinteg services they also have the right to complain to the Supporting People Team at the local authority. In addition the individual may have an advocate who can make the complaint on the complainants behalf and also be involved at any stage of the complaint. However the local authority would have expected Habinteg to have already received the complaint and tried to resolve the issue.

Summary

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by a tenant, applicant, customer receiving a service from Habinteg or member of the public where an initial response from us has not proved satisfactory to them. The complaint can be made by any medium to allow the customer to express their dissatisfaction.

3. MAIN PRINCIPLES

Habinteg’s complaints handling system adopts the Housing Corporation’s good practice guidance on complaints handling and the British Standard for complaint management (BS8600) which, in essence, requires:

- adequate resources to deal with complaints received;
- staff training to make sure those who deal with customers understand the procedures and operate them properly;
- delegation and responsibility to enable staff to deal quickly and efficiently with routine complaints;
- escalation procedures to ensure that in the event of a serious complaint, senior staff are alerted and the problem is dealt with by whoever has the appropriate expertise;
- external review mechanisms where internal procedures are deadlocked;
- follow-up action to ensure that the association learns from any mistakes, and improves products, services and the complaint system where necessary.

The association’s complaints system is accessible, simple, speedy, fair, confidential, effective and informative.

The accompanying Complaints Procedure aims to ensure that complaints are handled consistently and fairly. It makes the process accessible to our diverse customers and takes into account the different needs of people wishing to make a complaint. We aim to complete all stages of the complaints process within eight weeks. We will offer complainants the opportunity to discuss their complaint in person, at the start of the process and at later stages. Staff involved in investigating complaints will contact the customer to clarify the complaint, clarify the outcome sought, check whether or not he or she needs support of any kind, explain the investigation procedure and discuss what the customer wants.

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Complainants will be offered mediation or arbitration as an alternative resolution process.

Complainants will be offered the opportunity to complain in person to a panel at the final stage of the procedure.

Staff must be informed immediately if a complaint is about them and given the opportunity to tell their side of the story and be kept informed of progress and the result.

Complaints will be dealt with impartially, objectively and professionally. Confidentiality will be maintained and no complainant or their family will be treated adversely because they have made a complaint.

The Association will apologise if we have made a mistake and we will attempt to rectify the mistake by putting the customer in the position they would have been in if the mistake had not been made. If we change a policy or procedure as a result of a complaint we will inform the complainant.

Habinteg will offer financial compensation if appropriate, for example, if a specific financial loss has been incurred, property has been devalued, a tenant has had to live in poor conditions for longer than reasonable, the complainant has spent an unreasonable or significant amount of time pursuing the matter or exceptional worry, distress or inconvenience have been caused by events.

All staff will be trained in complaints handling.

We will monitor satisfaction at each stage of the complaints process by asking complainants to complete a short questionnaire about the outcome and our handling of the complaint.

The Association will monitor the effectiveness of the complaints system by collecting management information which tells us how well we are performing and if we are using complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve. Management information can be used to discover patterns and trends among groups of customers and who accesses the complaints system and who does not. Complainants will be monitored by gender, age, ethnicity and disability to ensure that the system is widely accessible and to identify groups who do not complain in case this suggests they may be having difficulty using the procedure.

4. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

A report will be presented to each quarterly meeting of the Operations Senior Management Team and will include information on:

- the number of complaints at each stage and the outcome (fully upheld, partially upheld, not upheld);
- the amount of and reasons for compensation offered (if any);

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- performance in meeting response targets;
- complaints data by key service areas;
- complaints data by gender, age, ethnicity and disability;
- customer satisfaction with complaint handling, both generally and by ethnicity and disability;
- complaints investigated by the IHO.

A summary report will be presented to the National Tenants Forum bi-annually. All information will be confidential and therefore anonymised.

5. RELATED PROCEDURES AND OTHER DOCUMENTS

- Complaints Procedure “How to Make a Complaint” and complaints form
- Compensation Policy

6. RESPONSIBILITIES

All staff are responsible for listening to complaints and attempting to resolve them as quickly as possible.

The **initial complaint** can often be resolved at front line staff without formal stage 1 action. We need to capture this information to enable Habinteg to consider trends, good practice in dealing with initial complaints and identify any training & development needs. All staff will need to provide Area Managers with quarterly details of initial complaints. Area Managers will provide Regional Operations Managers and Head of Operations PA with this information in a timely manner to be included in quarterly reports to Operations Senior Management.

Stage One

Regional Operations Managers are responsible for dealing with complaints at stage one. They must ensure that monitoring information is recorded on the complaints database and ensure that staff receive guidance on the handling of complaints.

Where the complaint / appeal is against a decision we have taken when carrying out a policy, it must be reviewed by someone not involved in the original decision.

Stage Two

The Head of Operations is responsible for handling complaints at stage two, for servicing the complaints panel, for preparing management information reports and for ensuring that staff are trained in complaints handling.

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Stage Three

A complaints panel will be convened and will consist of one board member and two tenant representatives from the National Tenants Forum. The representative board member is responsible for chairing complaints panel hearings and for notifying the complainant of the panel's decision. Both the complainant and their advocate can attend the complaints panel.

Note:

There is a time limit for escalation of complaints between stages of two calendar months.

7. REQUIREMENTS OF THE POLICY

- All complaints must be acknowledged within two working days of receipt.
- All stage one and two complaints must be investigated and responded to within 10 working days.
- At stage three complaints must be heard by a complaints panel within 20 working days of receipt and the decision notified to the complainant within 5 working days of the panel hearing.

8. COMMUNICATION

The complaints procedure will be publicised in newsletters, in the Association's offices and on both the Association's website and the Habinteg Tenants' website in a range of languages and formats as appropriate.

9. INDEPENDENT HOUSING OMBUDSMAN

In accordance with the Housing Act 1996, Section 51 and Schedule 2, Habinteg is a member of the IHO scheme. Normally the IHO investigates a complaint after an association's internal complaints procedure is exhausted. However, the IHO does have the discretion to take on a complaint if there is reason to believe the association is causing unnecessary delay in handling it.

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Disability and Race Impact Assessment

Appendix

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Functions being assessed	Could the functions have a different impact on different racial groups	Response to potential adverse impacts on different racial groups	Could the functions have different impact on disabled people	Response to potential adverse impacts
Complaints	YES Why:		YES Why:	
	Unaware how to make a complaint	At tenancy sign up make adequate time provision to explain procedures. It may be necessary to have an interpreter present.	Unaware how to make a complaint and the nature of disability may make it difficult to make a complaint	At tenancy sign up make adequate time provision to explain procedures. It is essential that at tenancy sign up and at regular intervals the clients communication needs are updated.
	Unable to effectively communicate nature of the complaint.	Where necessary use language line or an interpreter. Ensure adequate time is allowed for discussion to make sure that cultural differences are understood.	Nature of disability may mean a person with a visual impairment can not read housing related documents.	Facilitate unmet needs by offering document in Braille or on tape.
	Unable to read literature. Unable to understand spoken word.	Ensure use of language line where appropriate. Where necessary seek to have key documents produced in languages other than English.	Nature of disability may mean a person with a hearing impairment can not hear the spoken word when discussing housing related tenancy matters	Facilitate unmet needs by provision of appropriate written material, use of sign language interpreter, if necessary. Use of Text Talk.

