



Customer Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy

Contacting us

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You can also contact us using our online reporting forms. Please note our website is speech enabled and you can adjust the size of the text and translate it to other languages.

Getting our information in other formats

If you would like any part of this document explained, translated or provided in another format such as large print, audio or Braille, please contact our Customer Services Team on 0800 408 2000.

Bengali

যদি আপনি এই ডকুমেন্ট অন্য ভাষায় বা ফরমেটে চান অথবা যদি আপনার একজন ইন্টারপ্রেটারের প্রয়োজন হয়, তাহলে দয়া করে আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করুন।

Chinese

本文件可以翻译为另一语文版本，或制作成另一格式，如有此需要，或需要传译员的协助，请与我们联系。

Gujarati

જો તમને આ દસ્તાવેજ બીજી ભાષા અથવા રચનામાં જોઈતો હોય, અથવા જો તમને ઈન્ટરપ્રિટરની સેવાઓ જોઈતી હોય તો, કૃપા કરી અમારી સંપર્ક સાધો.

Polish

Aby uzyskać ten dokument w innym języku lub formacie, albo jeżeli potrzebujesz usług tłumacza, skontaktuj się z nami.

Urdu

یہ دستاویز اگر آپ کو کسی دیگر زبان یا دیگر شکل میں درکار ہو، یا اگر آپ کو ترجمان کی خدمات چاہئیں تو برائے مہربانی ہم سے رابطہ کیجئے۔

[Translation reads: If you would like this document in another language or format or require the services of a translator, please contact us.]

STATUS (Draft / Approved / Updated / Archived)	REFERENCE
APPROVED	Gloscitys76/GCH/ALMO Project/Policies & Procedures/06 Current GCH Policies & Procedures/Access, Customer Care and User Focus/Compliments, Comments & Complaints/GCH Customer Compliments, Comments & Complaints Policy & Procedures - Controlled.doc
<p>Important Notice: Printed paper copies of this procedure are uncontrolled. The current version of this procedure is available on the Intranet</p>	

Documentation Master Sheet
Amendments to this Document are Detailed Below

Version Number	Date Amended	Comments	Date Approved	Author	Approved By
1	21/12/2005	First Draft		GIH	
2	23/01/2006	Second Draft		GIH	
3	08/02/2006	Third Draft		GIH	
4	06/03/2006	Fourth Draft		GIH	
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6	10/05/2006	Final version	09/05/2006	AG	Board
7	04/10/2006	Addition to Monitoring Section	04/10/2006	GIH	GIH
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9	22/11/2007	Standard response letter added as appendix		PDM	
10	31/03/2008	Updated the Ombudsman details		KD	
11	24/09/2008	Updated to reflect Ombudsman and Disrepair referrals		LDP	
12	19/02/2009	Remove stage 4 – referral to GCC	22/04/2009	LDP	Services & Operations Committee
13	14/01/2010	Stage 3 revised to include a Board member appeals panel and several other minor amendments	23/06/2010 29/06/2010	DT/PDM	Services & Operations Committee Customer Forum

Summary of most recent changes:

Stage 3 revised to include a Board member appeals panel and several other minor amendments.

There now separate response letters for each step of the complaint process, each giving only the next step to avoid premature Ombudsman complaints.

Contents	Page
GLOUCESTER CITY HOMES COMPLIMENT, COMMENT AND COMPLAINTS POLICY	4
1. PURPOSE OF THIS POLICY	4
2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION	4
3. WHY DO WE NEED A COMPANY WIDE POLICY?	5
4. WHAT ROLE DO STAFF PLAY?	5
a) Everyone	5
b) Managers	6
c) Performance Manager	6
d) Executive Management Team and the Board	7
e) City Council, Tenants Forum and Leasehold Forum	7
5. HOW CAN CUSTOMERS COMPLIMENT, COMMENT OR COMPLAIN?	7
a) Access to our service	7
b) Help from an advocate, translator or independent agency	8
6. WHO IS A CUSTOMER?	8
7. WHAT IS A COMPLIMENT?	8
8. WHAT IS A COMMENT?	9
9. WHAT IS A COMPLAINT?	9
10. WHAT ARE OUR SERVICE STANDARDS?	10
a) Compliments:	10
b) Comments:	10
c) Complaints:	11
11. PERSISTENT OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS	13
12. SPECIAL SITUATIONS	13
13. PUBLICISING THE POLICY	14
14. COMPENSATION	15
15. CONFIDENTIALITY	15
16. MONITORING & EVALUATION	16

GLOUCESTER CITY HOMES COMPLIMENT, COMMENT AND COMPLAINTS POLICY

1. Purpose of this policy

Gloucester City Homes believes in continually improving to achieve and maintain high quality service & customer care; and value for money.

The purpose of this policy and procedure is to make it easy for customers to:

- compliment our service;
- comment on our service; and
- complain about our service

and easy for members of staff to:

- be commended for their customer care;
- consider where comments could improve the service; and
- put matters right where something has gone wrong.

We want to learn all we can from customers so that we can continually consider whether our policies, procedures and practice can be improved to provide customers with services, which meet their needs and expectations.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

2. Background information

Gloucester City Homes recognises the importance of complaints, comments and compliments. In 2008/9 over 96% of complaints were answered within our service standard for responding to complaints of within 5 working days (this standard is half the timescale of the industry standard of 10 working days). We also learn from complaints and other feedback as part of continuous improvement; this is reported regularly to both Customer Forum and Board.

As part of our Management Agreement with Gloucester City Council we support the Council's policies in this area and provide evidence on how we listen and respond to compliments, comments and complaints.

As a local authority, the City Council are required to maintain a system for dealing with complaints, and keep records of all those dealings as

- i. Evidence for its Cabinet and Scrutiny Panels so that they can examine how services are performing; and
- ii. Evidence to regulators of good customer care, continual learning and improvement, strong corporate governance and good organisational health

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

3. Why do we need a company wide policy?

When we deal with any compliment, comment or complaint we need to be sure everyone is treated fairly and equally. We must be confident that we are consistent in the way we respond to customers, no matter where or how they choose to contact us. From the customers point of view a company wide system ensures that everyone who wants to compliment us, comment on us or complain about us, knows how to and that it is clear how we will listen and respond no matter which service point they choose to contact.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

4. What role do staff play?

a) Everyone

We each represent Gloucester City Homes and through our Management Agreement - Gloucester City Council, so we all need to understand the need for an efficient and effective, customer friendly compliments, comments and complaints system and how it must work in practice. By following this new system we should all be positive and confident when dealing with compliments, comments or complaints we receive and consequently provide a better service to our customers.

All compliments, comments and complaints must be recorded on our FOCUS IT system, and regular reports will be produced which analyse the level and type of compliment, comment and complaint and what action has been taken as a result of receiving it.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

b) Managers

Training will be provided at all levels of the organisation but key to the success of the system is the role of each Manager.

If you are a Manager, you are responsible for ensuring all your staff are familiar with the system and where:

- Compliments are received, the appropriate staff are commended and lessons are learnt on how services can be improved more generally;
- Comments are received, that we consider how such suggestions could result in services being improved;
- Complaints are received that we put matters right, offer an apology (and compensation if appropriate) and through learning from the experience, continually improve our services.

We need to continually learn from our customers in order to help us meet or exceed our stated service standards and achieve or surpass our annual performance targets.

[Service Standards and Performance Targets are included in each of our Policy and Procedure Documents and are reviewed annually to ensure that we achieve top quartile performance.]

The compliments, comments and complaints system will allow you to ensure each contact is responded to appropriately.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

c) Performance Manager

The Performance Manager will regularly analyse and provide reports on compliments, comments and complaints to the relevant managers to report to Gloucester City Homes' Executive Management Team and Board, the City Council and our Customer Forum, Leaseholder Forum and other resident groups.

The Performance Manager will also ensure that summary information on compliments, comments and complaints, the lessons learnt and the actions taken to improve our services is widely published on our website and in staff and customer newsletters.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

d) Executive Management Team and the Board

The Executive Management Team and the Board consider and approve (in consultation with the City Council and the Customer Forum) changes to policies, standards, targets and procedures where major changes require formal approval.

However smaller changes, which will quickly improve services, will be implemented and where appropriate, retrospectively referred to the City Council and Customer Forum for scrutiny and if necessary any amendment.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

e) City Council, Tenants Forum and Leasehold Forum

From time to time more fundamental changes to policies and procedures may prove necessary to improve services. The City Council, Customer Forum and Leasehold Forum will give consideration to these changes and decide whether to support or amend.

The aim here is to ensure that where small changes can be made to improve services that this is done without delay and where larger more fundamental changes are necessary that this is considered as quickly as possible through Gloucester City Homes and Gloucester City Council's joint arrangements.

This will enable our customers to help shape future housing and related services and help us improve the quality of life for our customers.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

5. How can customers compliment, comment or complain?

a) Access to our service

We want to make it as easy as possible for customers and we understand that they may need to do this in a variety of different ways.

We will therefore take compliments, comments or complaints made in person, over the phone, by text, in writing, by e-mail, by website feedback and by other customer feedback (customer satisfaction forms, focus groups, customer events, resident groups etc), in English, Braille or another community language.

Compliments, Comments or Complaints can be made either by the customer or by someone acting on their behalf such as a relative, friend, Councillor, member of parliament or member of staff from another agency, statutory or voluntary.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

b) Help from an advocate, translator or independent agency

The member of staff first receiving the compliment, comment or complaint should consider putting the customer in touch with an independent agency that can help them, if they have special needs or if the matter cannot be resolved immediately by the Company. No one should be excluded from the system because of difficulties they may have in representing themselves.

Staff should also check whether we have all the necessary diversity information so that it is possible for us to analyse compliments, comments and complaints by age, ethnicity, disability, nationality, sexual orientation and / or religious belief to ensure that we are not inadvertently treating any group less favourably, and are able to tailor our response and services to the particular needs of the customer.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

6. Who is a customer?

Our definition of a customer is:

- Anyone in receipt of our services e.g. tenant, leaseholder, lifeline user etc; and / or
- Anyone affected by our services e.g. owner-occupier, councillor, partner etc.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

7. What is a compliment?

Our definition of a compliment is:

An expression of satisfaction, respect or admiration by one or more customers about Gloucester City Homes' or a member of staff's, or a partner's:

- action, or
- standard of a service; or
- the policy we are applying

An example of this would be "your repairs service is excellent" or "here is a box of chocolates for your warden for looking after my mother so well"

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

8. What is a comment?

Our definition of a comment is:

A neutral expression by one or more customers about Gloucester City Homes' or a member of staff's, or a partner's:

- action, or
- lack of action, or
- standard of a service; or
- the policy we are applying

An example of this would be “could you consider expanding your gardening service to cover young single mothers”.

This acts as a catch all for comments received which are not clearly either a compliment or a complaint.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

9. What is a complaint?

Our definition of a complaint is:

An expression of dissatisfaction by one or more customers about Gloucester City Homes or a member of staff's, or a partner's:

- action, or
- lack of action, or
- standard of a service; or
- the policy we are applying

This includes referrals from the Ombudsman or the receipt of an Early Notification Letter or Letter of Claim in Disrepair cases

We do not treat the following as complaints:

- Initial requests for service
- Initial reports of faults and defects, unless they concern work that we or our partners have already carried out
- Requests for information or an explanation of Council policy

The aim is not to exclude matters by this definition, but to deal effectively and appropriately with real expressions of dissatisfaction that require a proper explanation and response from us.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

10. What are our service standards?

a) Compliments:

- Thank the customer for their compliment within 24 hours
- Consider whether the complimented service or behaviour can be used to help improve other services generally or specifically within 48 hours
- Consult staff and customer groups on possible options for change within 20 working days.
- Refer new policy, procedure, standard etc. to relevant decision making body e.g. Line Manager, Executive Management Team, Customer Forum, Leaseholder Forum, Board, The Council, within 20 working days.
- Implement new policy, procedure, standard etc. within 20 working days of approval or other date agreed with customers and the decision making body.
- Informing the customer and the customer groups within one day of a decision being made to amend current policies etc and within one day of the amendment being implemented, thanking them for helping to improve our service.
- Publicise the change in policy etc via a variety of formats eg handbook, booklet, website, newsletter etc within 20 working days.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

b) Comments:

- Thank the customer for their comments within 24 hours
- Consider whether the comments on service or behaviour can be used to help improve other services generally or specifically within 48 hours
- Consult staff and customer groups on possible options for change within 20 working days.
- Refer new policy, procedure, standard etc. to relevant decision making body e.g. Line Manager, Executive Management Team, Customer Forum, Leaseholder Forum, Board, The Council, within 20 working days.

- Implement new policy, procedure, standard etc. with 20 days of approval or other date agreed with customers and decision making body.
- Informing the customer and the customer groups within one day of a decision being made to amend current policies etc and within one day of the amendment being implemented, thanking them for helping to improve our service.
- Publicise the change in policy etc via a variety of formats e.g. handbook, booklet, website, newsletter etc. within 20 working days.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

c) Complaints:

Informal Stage

- Tell a member of our staff who will try and sort it out on the spot

FORMAL STAGE

STEP 1

You can tell us that you want to make a complaint by:

- Telephoning
- Text
- In writing
- By e-mail
- Through the GCH website
-

RESPONDING TO YOU

We will:

- Register your complaint and pass it to a manager in the right area so they can investigate and get back to you.
- Acknowledge your complaint within 1 working day with a reference number and contact details of the team who will deal with the complaint
- Send you a full response within 5 working days
- Ask you for an extension of no more than 10 working days if your complaint is more difficult
- Advise you how to take it further if you're still not happy

STEP 2

What happens if you're still not happy?

We will:

- Acknowledge that you want a complaint review within 1 working day
- Ask a senior manager or Director who will carry out an independent review of your case.
- We will write to you again, with our response, within 5 working days.

STEP 3

The final appeal stage

If you are still not happy you can contact us as above and appeal.

We will:

- Set up an appeals panel made up of Board members including at least one tenant Board member.
- The appeals panel will meet with you to discuss your complaint to be held at a time convenient for you and within 28 working days of receiving your complaint.
- We will write to you within 5 working days of the appeals panel meeting to tell you of their decision
- Advise you how to take it further if you're still not happy through the ombudsman

If you are still are not happy with how we have dealt with your complaint you can contact Local Government Ombudsman below who will investigate your complaint and how we have handled it.

The Ombudsman will carry out a full confidential investigation asking us to provide information to help him make a decision. At the end of the investigation, he will write to us and to you, to set out his decision and explain how he arrived at it. He will then recommend how the problem should be solved.

The contact detail is:

Local Government Ombudsman
The Oakes no 2 Westwood Way,
Westwood Business Park
Coventry
CV4 8JB
Telephone: 0247682 0000.
Fax 024 7682 0001

If your complaint is about supporting people

Please contact
Gloucestershire County Council,
Supporting People team,
Community & Adult Care Directorate,
Bearland Wing
Shire Hall,
Gloucester
GL1 2TR
Tel 01452 426548.

11. Persistent or vexatious complaints

Persistent or vexatious complaints may be made very occasionally, where the customer will not accept the matter is concluded despite having their complaint investigated or may repetitively make substantially similar complaints. If a member of staff feels that a complaint has become 'vexatious' they can ask the Chief Executive to decide whether to write to the customer to explain that the procedure has been exhausted and no further action will be taken.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

12. Special Situations

Complaints received for Disrepair cases or Ombudsman referrals should be reported to the relevant Director who will appoint an appropriate officer to respond. This officer should be identified to the Customer Services manager.

Complaints about Managers should be reported to the relevant Director.

Complaints about Directors should be reported directly to the Chief Executive.

Complaints about the Chief Executive or Board Members should be reported to the Chair of the Board.

Complaints about the Chair of the Board should be reported to the Director of Resources & Company Secretary who is obliged to notify the Chair of the Audit Committee of the complaint

Complaints about the conduct of a Councillor Board member, but in their role as a Councillor should be referred to the Council's Client Manager who may refer the matter to the Head of Legal Services, to the Council's Standards Committee, or direct to the Standards Board for England.

Complaints of financial impropriety should be reported to the Director of Resources & Company Secretary, but if the complaint concerns the Director of Resources & Company Secretary, then to the Chair of the Audit Committee.

Allegations of criminal behaviour require special care. Staff must ensure that they deal with any allegations in a way, which would not later hamper an investigation by the Police. The safest course is to report such information to the Chief Executive, who will take legal advice, which may include consulting the Police before taking any action in response to the allegation.

The Board should be alerted, at the earliest opportunity, about complaints involving any kind of alleged unlawful action by the Council or anyone else, which affects the organisation.

A complaint may lead to disciplinary proceedings against a member of staff. Any such disciplinary action would be taken according to the company's disciplinary procedure.

Any disciplinary behaviour should be treated separately to the complaint. It is not normally acceptable to delay providing a remedy for the customer until after disciplinary proceedings have been completed. In exceptional circumstances, advice should be taken from the Human Resources Manager.

Some complaints may be complex because they relate to the actions of the company and some other body, for example an organisation with which the company has a 'partnership' arrangement. In such cases the complaint must be dealt with under the procedure set out in the relevant document e.g. Contract, Service Level Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding. Where appropriate, there should be a joint investigation of complaints and a protocol setting out guidance on any complaint.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

13. Publicising the Policy

The Policy will be:

- Adopted Company wide;
- Promoted via a poster and / or leaflet in all public places such as the company's offices, sheltered housing schemes and other public venues with the permission of the organisation's concerned e.g. libraries and day centres;
- Available in at least the five most commonly used community languages and also produced in Braille, large type, on audio tape and CD-Rom
- Available at Partnership organisations such as the Citizens' Advice Bureaux (CAB), charities, amenity groups, law centres or solicitors, who will be encouraged to promote awareness of the company's procedure;
- Available as an on-line complaint form on the company's website.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

14. Compensation

Where appropriate the remedy under the complaints system should fit the harm or injustice caused to the complainant. Section 92 of the Local Government Act 2000 gives councils a general power to pay compensation or take other remedial action. Whilst money is not the only, or necessarily the best remedy in every case, complainants should be asked to say what they think would be a reasonable and fair outcome. See our [Compensation Policy](#).

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

15. Confidentiality

In the majority of cases the identity of the person, making a complaint or on whose behalf the complaint is being made, would normally be made known to those who need to consider the complaint. This will be the officer dealing with the complaint, the line manager, and in cases of escalation, the senior investigating manager. This information would not be revealed to any other person or made public by the company unless there is good reason and is duly recorded e.g. information required to be released under the Freedom of Information Act. The Complaints Officer (Customer Services Manager) must be kept informed throughout the process.

Care will be taken to maintain confidentiality where particular circumstances demand (e.g. information about third parties see our [Access to Information Policy](#)).

It may not be possible to preserve confidentiality in some circumstances, for example, where relevant legislation applies or allegations are made which involve the conduct of third parties. The complainants must be advised about this should the situation arise.

Should a member of staff be the subject of a formal complaint then their line manager may inform them. The decision to inform them will be based on advice from the company's Human Resources Manager and will depend on the nature of the case and the stage the complaint has reached.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

16. Monitoring & Evaluation

The effectiveness of the compliments, comments and complaints system will be monitored in five main ways by:

1. Daily monitoring and chasing by our Customer Services Manager to ensure responses are within target times
2. Regular internal audits by our Performance Manager to ensure that they have been resolved to the customers satisfaction
3. Undertaking a regular on-going customer satisfaction survey;
4. Monthly analysis and reporting of compliments, comments & complaints to our Executive Management Team and Board; and
5. Conducting a regular review of the lessons learnt and subsequent action taken.

These research methods will obtain useful information on the range of compliments, comments and complaints and the background of customers in terms of their gender, ethnicity, age and disability.

The types of questions, which will be addressed in the customer survey will include:

- Were staff helpful?
- Were staff polite?
- Did we acknowledge receipt of the compliment / comment / complaint with 1 working day?
- Did we give a full reply with 5 working days or if another target time was agreed within that target time?
- Did we answer the compliment, comment or complaint?
- Did we collect enough information to enable a fair conclusion to be drawn?
- At the end of each stage, were you told what to do if not satisfied?
- If something went wrong, was action taken to try to put things right?
- Were there any wider lessons and, if there were, were you told what actions would be taken?
- Have you seen any evidence that such actions have been implemented?
- Overall are you satisfied with the way we handled your compliment / comment / complaint and if not, why not?

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)