



Summary Report
Customer Feedback
Complaint Handling Process
March – June 2021

What is customer scrutiny?

Customer scrutiny is a check that processes in place to deliver services to customers, meet with agreed commitments. In-turn, this holds Great Places responsible for the performance and standard of services, and therefore offers reassurance.

We're a group of customers who are keen to help make a difference to the service experience of customers. We do this by exploring, examining and testing what matters most to customers about services. We share findings of our investigations including customer views with Great Places to show customers' perspective of services. Our goal is to highlight areas that work well and make suggestions, using information collected of ways services can be improved.

Our most recent review looked at Customer Feedback, specifically the complaints handling process, our findings were shared with Great Places Board in August 2022. We can report our suggestions for improvement were accepted. We chose to investigate complaint handling because of its importance to customers. It is a means for customers to voice feedback of experiences to hold Great Places to account.

We wanted to review service from a customer point of view, so we set off to find out about;

- customers' knowledge of the service,
- how easy customers find raising a complaint,
- customers' expectations when complaining and their experience

We collected information to help us understand;

- how service operates throughout the complaint handling process,

- to learn about customers' experiences, and
- to identify how feedback can support service

We wanted to identify areas that work well and any where improvement maybe required.

Service Background

A revised Customer Feedback Policy was published in May 2021 that includes the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman Service, (HOS) Complaint Handling Code. The code gives guidance to landlords to help reach fair and timely complaint resolution with customers and learn where services could be improved. The policy is will be reviewed shortly to apply learning from our scrutiny review, feedback from an internal audit that tested the complaints handing process and check policy aligns with updates to HOS's code - landlords are expected to be compliant with these updates by October 2022.

How we carried out the review

We started our review researching how the service functions looking at the processes and procedures in place to handle complaints and we looked at performance information and other factors, which may have impacted service delivery in the last 12 months.

We also collected comments from customers to hear about their experiences of service then met with the Customer Feedback team to hear what it's like to delivering a complaint handling service.

When we'd finished our investigations, we looked at the information collected during review to see what works well and what may require change to improve services for customers.

Our suggestions asked to;

- ensure customers can easily access service and feel confident when raising complaints
- provide an effective complaint handling service, which customers feel is easy to use
- continually engage with customers to understand service from their perspective
- be open and accountable - communicate meaningfully with customers

More detail of each suggestion can be found in table one at the end of the report

Our key findings

- The Customer Feedback policy includes the key elements of the Housing Ombudsman Service, Complaint Handling Code and can be found on the customer website
- Customers have choice of different ways to raise a complaint, which includes the option of completing an online form via the website. Shortly following a period of testing customers will be able to log a complaint via the new customer portal
- Performance of complaints is reported to Great Places Board and relevant teams, which shows how many complaints have been logged, which are broken down by theme and service area. The number of complaints closed, an average resolution time, which was 10.8 days for stage 1 complaints at year end. Reports show learning from complaints, compensation offered, and compliments customers made about service received from Great Places, which provides understanding and highlights areas for improvement.

2021 / 22 Year End Complaints	434 logged / 406 resolved 36% = outcome service failure Ave resolution = 10.8 days 63% repairs - 19% neighbourhoods	19 HOS logged 8 HOS determinations <i>(at time of reporting)</i>
Data for each team member 2021-22	Responded to 395 ST1 complaints Average response time 10.4 days	58 complaints escalated to ST2 87.5% of complaints resolved @ST1

- Detail of complaint performance is published in the Customers' Annual Report that's posted on the website with the Housing Ombudsman Service code self-assessment, performance updates also feature in customer newsletters, published 6 monthly.
- Compliments are used as a source of feedback and shared as examples of good practice and form part of the reporting feedback, which helps support Great Places service delivery

Compliments	280 logged	73 repairs	72 neighbourhoods	45 contractors
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When we met with the customer feedback team, we heard that;

- over the past 12-month period whilst embedding the new policy and team structure, the service has seen a substantial rise in the numbers of complaints logged,
- a 175% increase from 147 to 434 complaints logged in 2021/22, which is a trend seen across the housing and other sectors

What customers said;

We sent 108 surveys to customers who'd raised a complaint since January 2022 and received responses from 26% of the surveys; we also spoke by phone to 8 of these customers to gather further detail of the customers' experience. We recognise this sample doesn't necessarily reflect opinion of all experiences, although the comments did show themes, which we've summarised;

- I wasn't confident who to complain to and I hadn't always found it easy
- It took too long to acknowledge complaint / I had to follow-up
- Complaint's officer had looked at records and understood the issues being raised
- Listen and talk through complaint with customer, to understand root cause of issue
- I wasn't contacted to discuss the detail of my complaint
- Promises weren't always kept so I didn't feel informed

Overall Summary

Insight feels we've carried out a fair and balanced review of a promising service. We wish to note from evidence reviewed that we feel responsibility for delivery of an effective complaint handling is greater than a single team. It sits with the business to establish a positive culture that;

- outwardly welcomes complaints, accepts when promises aren't kept and apologies for service failure,
- see's and considers customers' position and values feedback as a chance to put things right and learn

We felt this would support the service to resolve disputes fairly and quickly to maintain good relationships.

Table One – suggestions for improvement based on our review findings:

1. Review service-related information with customers testing it can be easily understood and revise ways information is promoted to check accessibility - we suggest a flow chart that highlights the key stages.
2. Inform wider customer base of complaint themes, outcomes, improvements and learnings, using case studies and a 'you said, we did' format so customers can see how their voice has been acted on.
3. Together with customers revise the online reporting form to check it guides customers to express their concern, expectations and resolution when logging a complaint. Ensure complaints raised using this method are logged and customers receives an acknowledgement.
4. Complaints to be discussed with customers – talk through to understand root cause of complaint, agree action to be taken, which can act as a measure of complaint handling, include the importance of engaging with customers to agree action, as part of training.
5. Include in training the importance that decisions to resolve complaints must be taken in agreement with customers, to give clarity and transparency avoiding any unnecessary confusion.
6. Highlight in training what's expected when investigating a stage 2 review, including the importance of speaking with customers prior to sending final resolution letter, to ensure the customer has chance to discuss with the investigator.
7. Recruit customer group to help to monitor complaint process and test that response letters use plain English and language that's relatable and outlines the issues of the complaint.
8. Explore a simplified survey to collect satisfaction of complaint handing process, which differentiates between the 2 complaint stages to allow greater accuracy when analysing feedback. Offer low scoring customers chance to speak further with a customer group member.
9. Response letters to confirm dates when work agreed as offer of resolution will happen and a contact

Insight would like to thank the Customer Feedback team to support this review to be carried out and to any customer who took time to provide feedback to inform the review findings.

We are always keen to hear from customers so keep your eyes peeled for our next review and if you're interested to find out more visit Great Places website <https://www.greatplaces.org.uk/customers/get-involved/insight-customer-scrutiny-group/> or email at customerscrutiny@greatplaces.org.uk