



## Customer Service Charter

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Review Plan: e.g. annually	Three-yearly
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Owner:	Highstone Housing Association
Document Controller:	Supported Housing Director

### Amendments:

<b>Changes made</b>	<b>sections</b>	<b>date</b>	<b>by</b>	<b>Date approved by board</b>
Various to simplify the policy and support easy read leaflets.	All	31/8/2017	L. Bell	22 <sup>nd</sup> November 2017
Various to reflect changes to GDPR and Tenancy Policy changes	2.4, 2.7, 5	18/01/2019	L.Bell	7 <sup>th</sup> February 2019
Various reflecting improvements to the complaints handling procedure	All	1/10/2019	L. Bell	17 <sup>th</sup> October 2019

## 1. Introduction

Highstone Housing Association (HHA) is committed to providing a consistently high standard of customer care to all our tenants. Our core values will help us to achieve this:

- To make a positive difference
- Work in partnership
- Be innovative and responsive

## 2. Our Service Standards

### *2.1. Tenants can contact HHA directly*

Our aim is to make it as easy as possible for our tenants to contact us:

- Our office will be open between the core hours of 9am to 5pm Monday to Thursday and 9am to 4pm Friday (except on public holidays)
- We will provide a 24-hour telephone service for emergency repairs outside our core hours
- Tenants can contact us by telephone, email or letter:
  - By telephone, we will:
    - Always give our name
    - Explain how and when queries will be dealt with
    - Respond to telephone messages within 2 working days
  - By letter or email, we will:
    - Respond to letters within 3 working days and emails within two working days
    - Reply using plain English

### *2.2. How HHA will communicate with Tenants:*

- Housing Officer Visits
  - Individual tenant homes will be inspected every six months
  - We will plan to visit all our schemes every couple of weeks
  - And, we will always show photographic identification
- Information to help our Tenants
  - Each tenant will be provided with a detailed tenants handbook, including an Easy Read version
  - We will publish our housing association policies and procedures through our website [www.highstoneha.co.uk](http://www.highstoneha.co.uk)
  - Any changes to our services or our standards will be published openly and communicated to each of our tenants
- Information to help us improve
  - We will conduct a tenant satisfaction survey at least once every three years
  - Seek tenant feedback following a repair

### *2.3. Ordering a Repair*

- We have clear categories and response times for all repairs:
  - Emergency repairs – attention immediately
  - Urgent repairs – attention within 24 hours
  - General repairs – attention within 28 days
- All contractors will:
  - Be approved by Highstone Housing Association and carry photographic identification
  - Clean up any mess resulting from the repair
- We will follow up all repairs to check they have been completed satisfactorily

### *2.4. Rent*

- We will provide all tenants with a rent statement upon request (please refer to the Tenancy Policy for further information). A rent statement will be provided when the tenancy ends
- Tenants with rent arrears will be given an opportunity to make an agreement to clear the arrears before serving a notice of repossession

### *2.5. Letting Our Properties*

- Properties will be prepared to a lettable standard, including all necessary safety checks
- The property will be clean and tidy before a new tenant moves in
- We will explain the conditions of the tenancy agreement before asking the tenant to sign
- New tenants will be visited within 7 working days of moving in

### *2.6. Anti-social Behaviour*

- We will take all reports of anti-social behaviour seriously and investigate each complaint promptly and impartially
- And, apply an inclusive approach working with all residents, the local community, Police and the Local Authority

### *2.7. Confidentiality*

- We will treat all information provided to us in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and documented in our Privacy Information policy
- In line with GDPR we will comply with Subject Access Requests within one month of a request being made by the tenant.

### 3. Compliments and Complaints

We will always aim to put our tenants and partners at the heart of everything we do. We will always strive to provide an excellent service. We welcome all feedback and endeavour to use it to help us continuously improve.

#### 3.1. Compliments

It's good for our staff to know when they have done a good job. This helps us to build on these areas for the benefit of all tenants in the future.

#### 3.2. Complaints

We will strive to get things right first time, but we accept that occasionally things will go wrong

Highstone Housing Association views complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future, as well as a chance to put things right for the person who has made the complaint.

Our complaints policy is designed:

- To provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint
- To publicise the existence of our complaints procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint
- To make sure everyone at HHA knows what to do if a complaint is received
- To make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way
- To make sure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired
- To gather information which helps us to improve what we do

Definition of a Complaint:

- A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of HHA.

A complaint can be received:

- verbally, by phone, by email or in writing.

Confidentiality

- All complaint information will be handled sensitively, telling only those who need to know and following any relevant data protection requirements.

### 4. How Tenants can help us achieve our Service Standards

- Be polite and non-aggressive to our staff
- Report any concerns to our staff as quickly as possible
- Tell us how we can improve our service

- Pay their rent regularly and on time
- Take reasonable care of the property
- Promptly report items requiring repair
- Behave in a reasonable manner towards neighbours, visitors and others

## 5. How we will achieve fairness and Consistency

- We will have a clearly documented procedure for handling customer complaints
- We will train all our staff in complaints handling and general customer care skills
- All complaints and compliments made will be recorded and monitored to ensure consistency. Additionally, the data will be used to identify trends, training opportunities and process improvements
- The board will be informed quarterly of all complaints and compliments received

## 6. Vexatious or Repetitive complaints

All complaints will be dealt with in accordance with this policy. However, unreasonable or abusive complaint behaviour does happen from time to time. Difficulties in handling such situations can place strain on time and resources and can be stressful for staff who have to deal with these complex and challenging issues.

At appendix A we set out how we will respond to these situations.

## 7. Contact details

### Telephone:

- Your Housing Officer – 07464 971884
- Customer Services (Tenant Enquiries)– 01484 609189
- To Report A Repair – 01484 609189
- Out of Hours Emergency Repair Number – 0330 0584090

Please be aware that we may record and monitor phone calls for training purposes and to make sure we are providing the best possible service.

**E-Mail:** [enquiries@highstoneha.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@highstoneha.co.uk)

### Write to Us:

Highstone Housing Association Broadstone Farm Browns Edge Road Ingbirchworth Sheffield, S36 7GR	Independent Review Body:  Housing Ombudsman Service 81 Aldwych London, WC2B 4HN
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## APPENDIX A

### Vexatious Complaints, Unreasonable and Abusive Behaviour Policy

This policy deals with service complaints which Highstone Housing Association considers vexatious or repetitive, and behaviour which we deem as unreasonable. It has been developed considering the Information Commissioner's (ICO) guidance under the Freedom of information Act 2000. And best practice as adopted by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

#### 1. Vexatious or repetitive complaints

Complaints which can be deemed 'vexatious' or 'repetitive' can be costly to handle; or responding to them may be a disproportionate use of our staff's time. Deciding whether a complaint is vexatious requires us to take into account the context and history of the complaint. We will consider whether the complaint is likely to cause unjustified distress, disruption or irritation. In particular, we will consider the following issues:

- Could the complaint fairly be seen as obsessive?
- Is the complaint harassing or causing distress to staff?
- Does the complaint appear to be designed to cause disruption or annoyance?
- Does the complaint lack any serious purpose or value?

The concern we will address is whether a complaint is vexatious in terms of the effect of the request on us and not whether the applicant is personally vexatious.

By its ordinary meaning, the term 'vexatious' refers to activity that "is likely to cause distress or irritation, literally to vex a person to whom it is directed".

For a complaint to be vexatious, we will consider whether there is a proper or justified cause for it. We will not only examine the complaint itself, but also its context and history. That context may include other complaints made by the applicant to HHA (whether complied with or refused), the number and subject matter of the complaints, as well as the history of other dealings between the complainant and HHA. The effect a complaint will have may be determined as much, or indeed more, by that context as by the complaint itself.

We will take into consideration the following factors (which are not an exhaustive list) when determining whether a complaint is vexatious:

- where the complaint requests information which has already been provided
- where the nature and extent of the complainant's correspondence with us suggests an obsessive approach to disclosure
- where the tone adopted in correspondence by the complainant is confrontational and/or haranguing and demonstrates that the purpose is to argue and not really to obtain information

- where the correspondence could reasonably be expected to have a negative effect on the health and well-being of our staff
- where the complaint, viewed as a whole, appears to be intended simply to re-open issues which have been disputed several times before, and is, in effect, the pursuit of a complaint by alternative means
- where responding to the complaint would likely entail substantial and disproportionate financial and administrative burdens for us
- where it is not a one-off complaint, but a case of the same complaints having been made repeatedly, or where on repetition, the particulars of the complaints have been varied making it difficult to know exactly what the complainant is seeking and making it less likely that the request can be satisfied

No single one of the above factors would lead to a finding, by itself, that a complaint was vexatious. However, based on the strength of the various factors, taken together with the history and context of a complaint, a complaint may be deemed vexatious by HHA.

We recognise that all complaints from a single source should not be deemed vexatious just because some may have been so previously. This is particularly the case if, on the face of it, the complaint seems to be specific, stand alone and straight forward. However, it is entirely appropriate and necessary, when considering whether a complaint is vexatious, to view that complaint in context - if, say, the complaint is part of a wider grievance against HHA and is, for example, inextricably linked to an individual's quest to hold HHA to account for perceived shortcomings.

Complaints can sometimes become a vehicle for individuals to try to reopen previous issues. Although we recognise that people are not always satisfied with the responses they receive, the raising of complaints is not a panacea for problems that have not been resolved through other channels. Continued complaints after the underlying complaint has been addressed, go beyond the reasonable pursuit of resolution.

## 2. Unreasonable Behaviour

HHA understands that people may act out of character in times of distress or due to frustration. We do not view behaviour as unreasonable just because a complainant is forceful or determined. HHA will make reasonable allowances for complainants' behaviour. However, sometimes the situation between a complainant and HHA staff can escalate and the behaviour of the complainant becomes unacceptable, for example becoming abusive, aggressive or threatening. Such abusive, aggressive, threatening or vexatious complaints are in the minority but we sometimes find ourselves in the position where we need to restrict or bring to an end communication and access to our premises or staff. Our staff have the right to undertake their work free from abuse, threats and harassment, or vexatious and repetitive complaints. We expect our staff to be treated with courtesy and respect. HHA has a duty to protect the welfare and safety of staff and considers that violence,

threats or abuse towards staff is unacceptable. Staff are also expected to treat complainants with courtesy, respect and fairness.

Complainants who harass, or have been abusive, aggressive or threatening on one or more occasions towards our staff - or their families or associates - directly or indirectly, will be considered unreasonable.

Any threats or acts of violence will cause direct contact with the complainant to be discontinued. Violence includes behaviour or language (written, oral, or in tone or otherwise) that may cause staff to feel afraid, threatened or abused. Examples of unacceptable behaviour includes but not exclusively, threats, verbal abuse, derogatory remarks, rudeness, racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, disablist or other harassment based on personal characteristic or obscene remarks, repeatedly demanding disciplinary action be taken against staff, and where complainants are known to have recorded meetings or telephone conversations without consent.

We also consider that inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated allegations can amount to abusive behaviour.

Furthermore, HHA staff will end phone calls if the caller is considered aggressive, abusive or threatening. The complainant will first be told that we consider their language offensive or their behaviour unacceptable and will be asked to stop using such language or behaviour.

If staff consider behaviour to be unreasonable, they are advised in the first instance to refer it to their manager who may seek advice and guidance before determining future contact with the complainant, be that by telephone, in person, or electronically.

Where complaints are deemed vexatious, the complainant will be notified in writing that no further correspondence will be entered into on the matter in question. HHA will initially keep one form of contact open so that there is not a 'blanket ban' on contact for any individual. Where unreasonable or abusive behaviour is determined, the complainant will be notified in writing that no further contact will be undertaken, and this will apply to all HHA contacts. A copy of this policy will be included and, if and where appropriate, a no-contact period specified. If further contact is necessary, the complainant will be informed that it will be made through a Director or their nominated officer/s. A decision to restrict contact will be reconsidered if the complainant subsequently demonstrates more reasonable behaviour.

If you disagree with a decision made by HHA to regard your behaviour as unreasonable, you can challenge it as detailed in this policy.

All incidents of harassment or aggression will be documented and referred to HHA directors. In appropriate circumstances these matters may be referred to the police and HHA may consider taking appropriate legal action against the complainant, if necessary, without prior warning.