

## Complaints Policy

### Policy statement

In line with our values, we aim to provide the best service possible for our customers, but we recognise that we will not always get things right first time. The aim of this policy is to find a successful resolution to problems at the first opportunity and for us to continually improve our service. This policy is for customers living in our homes, accessing our services and those affected by our services.

### Definition

Our definition of a complaint is:

*“Where a customer is unhappy with West Kent’s action or response”*

The policy does not cover, and we may refuse any complaint:

- about any action or inaction by us required by law
- about decisions made through alternative processes, for example anti-social behaviour, tenancy disputes, insurance claims or legal action
- about the actions of another resident or tenant
- about the action of an individual or organisation that we have no control over
- if the complaint is communicated in an abusive or threatening manner
- received more than three months after the event, or 20 working days after the previous stage concluded (except in exceptional circumstances).

### Our approach

We aim to resolve complaints at the first opportunity and learn from the experience to improve our services.

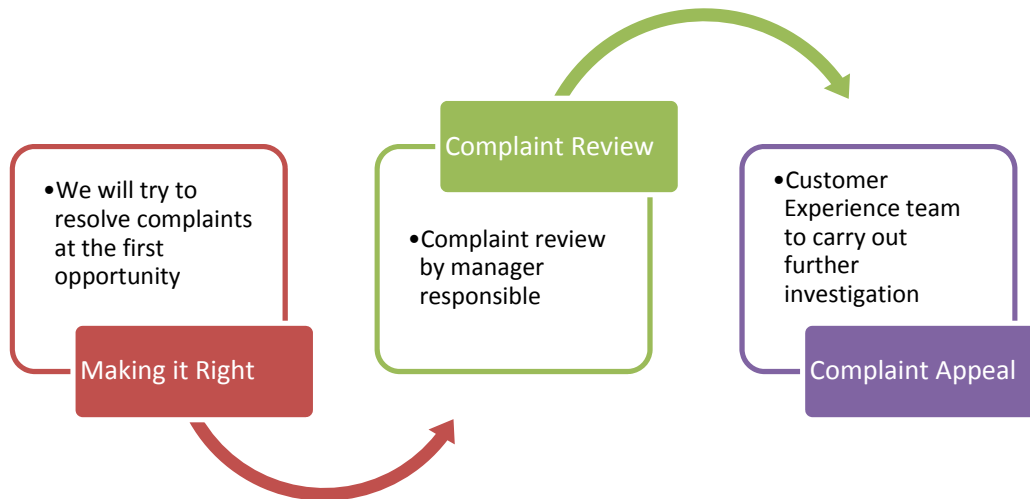
We will:

- make it easy and accessible for you to make a complaint
- signpost you to the right organisation if the complaint isn’t about West Kent
- fully investigate each complaint in a fair and consistent way
- keep you informed using your preferred method of communication
- apologise when we’ve made a mistake
- seek a successful resolution with you at the first opportunity
- keep records of complaints and investigations, ensuring any learning is captured to improve our services
- monitor and publish information about our complaints.

## Making a complaint

You can complain to any member of staff, in the way that best suits you. We will seek your permission to discuss a complaint if it is raised by a third party.

We aim to resolve all complaints as soon as they are received. If we're unable to agree an outcome, you can ask to escalate your complaint. Our process is set out below



## Making it Right

The staff member taking the complaint will work to understand it and try to resolve the matter immediately. Where they cannot, they will pass the complaint to the most appropriate person to try to resolve the issue. The responsible person will then contact you and investigate the complaint. They will respond to the complaint within **ten working days** using your preferred method of contact. The staff member may extend this timescale if they require extra time to investigate, but only after agreeing this with you.

## Complaint Review

You can ask for your *Making it Right* complaint to be reviewed if you are unhappy with our response. You have **20 working days** after the response to your *Making it Right* is issued in which to do this.

If you request a *Complaint Review*, we will acknowledge it within **two working days**. The appropriate manager will fully investigate and respond within **ten working days**. If more time is needed they will agree this with you.

## Complaint Appeal

If you remain unhappy with our response to your *Complaint Review*, you can appeal within **20 working days**. The Customer Experience team will handle all *Complaint Appeals* and will consider the most appropriate method of resolution with you.

As with the *Complaint Review* stage, we will acknowledge all requests within **two working days** and give you a written response within **ten working days**. Any timescale extension required must be agreed by you.

## Halting Complaints

We can halt the complaints process at any stage if we consider our responses to have been appropriate. We must fully explain to you the reasons for this decision.

## Designated Person and Housing Ombudsman Service

Once our process is completed or we have halted the process you can refer your complaint to a Designated Person or the Housing Ombudsman Service. The Designated Person can try to resolve the complaint or refer it to the Housing Ombudsman Service. Designated people include MPs, local councillors or a Housing Ombudsman Service recognised tenant panel.

You can go directly to the Housing Ombudsman Service, but you will have to wait eight weeks from the end of our complaints process before the Housing Ombudsman Service will consider the complaint.

## Complaints about third party contracts

We provide services on behalf of organisations such as Sevenoaks District Housing Register and commissioned youth and support services. Complaints about these services may follow the contracting organisation's own policy.

Some third-party contractors provide services on behalf of West Kent. When a complaint is about one of these contractors, they will handle the *Making it Right* (in line with our procedure), record and provide details to us.

## Persistent complainers

We expect customers to behave reasonably. We will not accept complaints where your behaviour is unreasonable or where there's persistent contact about complaints we've already responded to.

In these cases, we will tell you how we will deal with your complaint and may ask you to enter into an agreement about how you contact us in the future.

## Reporting and improving

We look at all learning from complaints, reporting both internally and externally to monitor trends and ensure opportunities for improvement are implemented. We train all staff on our approach to complaints as part of our core induction and learning package.

## Policy review

We will review this policy in 2021 or sooner as the need arises.