

Complaints policy

Policy Statement

This policy is for customers living in our homes, accessing our services and those affected by our services. We aim to resolve complaints at the first opportunity and learn from the experience to improve services.

We will:

- Focus on resolution and problem solving with our customers at the first opportunity
- Capture the learning to improve services
- Keep customers informed and discuss solutions with them
- Apologise when we've made a mistake and make amends as quickly as possible. This might include compensation
- Make it easy and accessible for our customers to make a complaint
- Signpost customers to the right organisation if the complaint isn't about West Kent
- Keep record of complaints
- Monitor and publish information about our complaints.

Definition

Our definition of a complaint is:

"Where a customer is unhappy with West Kent's action or response"

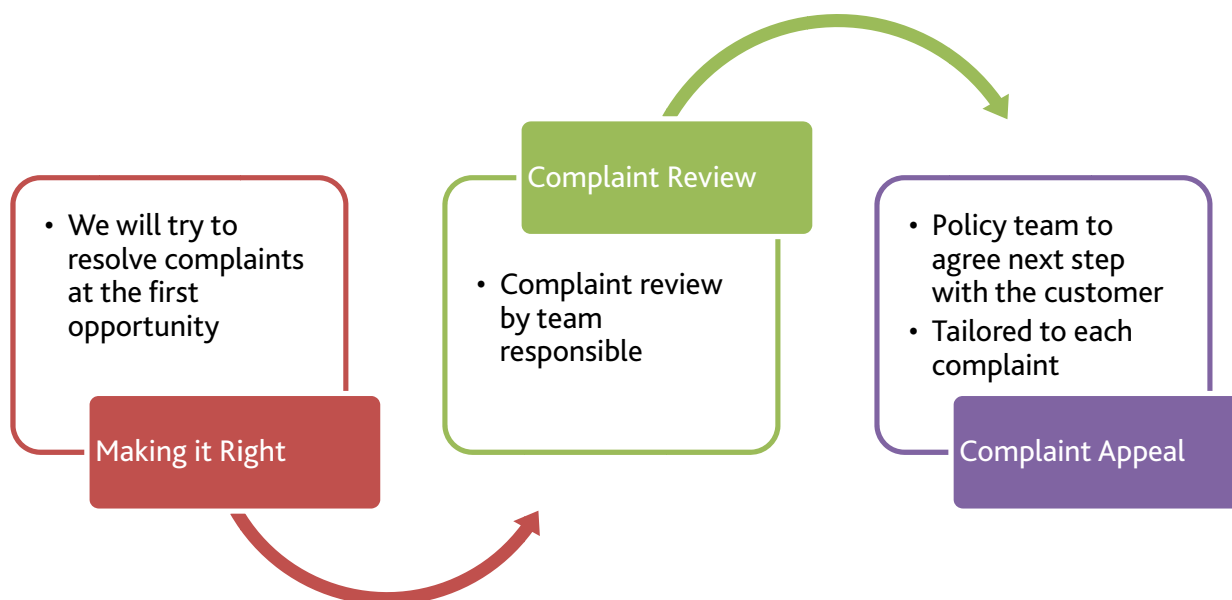
Making a complaint

Complaints can be made to any member of staff. Complaints can be made however best suits the customer. We will seek permission to discuss a complaint if raised by a third party.

Our approach

We adopt a 'right person, right answer, first time' approach. If we're unable to resolve the issue, customers can ask for a complaint review or appeal. The diagram sets out our process.

We will contact customers to discuss their complaint and establish what outcome they want. We will respond to the customer using their preferred method of contact.



Making it Right

We will pass the complaint to the most appropriate person to try to resolve the issue. We will record the details of the outcome.

Complaint Review

Customers can ask for their complaint to be reviewed if they're unhappy with our response.

We can halt the complaints process at this stage if we consider our responses appropriate. We will explain the reasons for this decision.

Complaint Appeal

If a customer remains unhappy with our response they can appeal. The Policy and Service Improvement Team will try to resolve the complaint, but where they are unable to they will consider the most appropriate course of action for the appeal with the customer. The options available are:

- Referring the complaint for a second review. If the customer remains unhappy after this we will consider one of the options below.
- Arranging a complaint panel where the complaint will be heard by members of our board. We will provide details of this process to customers.
- Halting our complaints process if we consider our earlier responses have been appropriate. We will explain the reasons for this decision.

Designated Person and Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS)

Customers can refer their complaint to a designated person or the HOS once our process is complete. The designated person can try to resolve the complaint or refer it to the HOS. Designated persons include MPs, local councillors or a [HOS recognised tenant panel](#).

Customers can go directly to the HOS, but they will have to wait eight weeks from the end of our complaints process before the HOS will consider the complaint.

Complaints about services West Kent are contracted to provide

We provide services on behalf of organisations such as Sevenoaks District Housing Register and commissioned youth and support services. Complaint escalation will be agreed with the contracting organisation.

Timescales

We aim to agree a resolution within ten working days at each step of our process. Where we need longer to investigate we will keep the customer informed and agree timescales.

Where a customer has asked for a complaint review or appeal we will acknowledge this within two working days. If we arrange a complaints panel we will agree a date within ten working days and respond within five working days of the panel being held.

Customers have 20 working days to ask for the complaint to be reviewed.

Exceptions

We may refuse to accept a complaint if it is:

- a repeat complaint which has already gone through the complaints process
- subject to legal action or an insurance claim
- about another resident or tenant. We may deal with these cases through our anti-social behaviour process
- communicated in an abusive or threatening manner
- received more than three months after the event, or 20 working days after the previous stage concluded

Persistent Complainers

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

In these cases we will tell the customer how we will deal with their complaint and may ask them to enter into an agreement about how they contact us in the future.

Learning

We train all staff on complaints handling as part of our core learning package and induction.

Learning from complaints

We will monitor and analyse complaints and report performance and learning outcomes.

Policy review

We will review this policy in 2019 or sooner as the need arises.