

# Complaint Policy



<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	Assistant Chief Executive-Neighbourhoods
<b>Approved:</b>	May 2020
<b>Review Date:</b>	April 2023
<b>Regulatory Standard:</b>	Tenant Involvement & Empowerment
<b>Version</b>	2
<b>Scope:</b>	Group Wide

# Complaint Policy

## Statement of Intent:

Incommunities refers to Incommunities Housing Association and Sadeh Lok Housing Association – Reference to 'Incommunities /the landlord/our/we' in this policy shall be deemed to apply to Group subsidiaries as appropriate unless specified otherwise

## 1.0 Policy Statement:

1.1 This policy sets out Incommunities approach to dealing with complaints from our tenants and other customers.

We understand that good housing is an important element for stability and living well. Our aim is provide good quality services to all our customers, but we recognise that on occasions things can go wrong. When customers are dissatisfied we will receive complaints in a positive way. We will make the process accessible to everyone and easy to follow. We will respond to complaints in a timely manner and be fair and consistent in our decision making. We are committed to using customer feedback to make service improvements.

## 2.0 Definition of a complaint:

2.1 A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction from a customer, a group of customers or other stakeholders. We define customers as anyone who lives in one of our homes; this includes tenants, leaseholders and shared equity owners, and anyone who uses our services, even if they do not go on to become a tenant.

The table below clarifies what we will treat as a complaint and what we will treat as a request for service or feedback:

<b>Examples of what we will treat as a complaint, (these will be recorded and require a response)</b>	<b>Examples of what we will treat as feedback, (these will be recorded and used in a service review)</b>
Failure to provide a service or achieve the standards of service we have promised	Disagreement with a policy or procedure
Failure to fulfill our legal or contractual obligations	Disagreement with a service standard
Unfair treatment by staff	
Unacceptable delay or failure to respond to an enquiry or request	<b>Examples of what we will treat as a service request, (these will be recorded and actioned)</b>
Dissatisfaction with a decision or the way that it was made	An initial report of a repair
Dissatisfaction with the attitude of staff, contractors or agents	A report of anti social behaviour
Incommunities Group not applying policies and operating procedures fairly	A request for information

### **3.0 Limitations & Exceptions of the complaint procedure**

- 3.1.1 Where Incommunities have been unable to deliver a service due to circumstances beyond our control, Incommunities may use discretion to limit access through the complaint procedure.
- 3.1.2 If the complaint is not regarding social housing or a landlord/ tenant/leaseholder relationship, Incommunities may use their discretion to limit access through the complaint procedure; however the complaint may still be investigated and responded to by appropriate level of officer.
- 3.1.3 Incommunities may use their discretion to limit access through the complaint procedure where the behavior of a complainant is unacceptable and will apply the 'Managing Unacceptable Behaviour Guide'.
- 3.1.4 Complaints which have entered the legal process such as court action or disrepair claims where a solicitor has been instructed are excluded from the complaint procedure.

### **4.0 Aims & Objectives:**

Incommunities Group is a member of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme and we follow their dispute resolution principles of:

#### **4.1.1 Being Fair**

We aim to ensure that all complaints will be handled fairly being consistent in our approach, considering the facts of each case, the individuals' circumstances and listening openly without bias or prejudice regardless of background, appearance, age, beliefs or lifestyle.

- 4.1.2 We aim to provide customers, including the most vulnerable, with the support they need to access the complaints service and ensure that they have the confidence to report their concerns if our services fall below standards.

- 4.1.3 Activities involved in providing services to customers involve the collection and storage of significant amounts of personal data, including sensitive personal data. Incommunities is committed to ensuring that it stores and processes such data in accordance with data protection legislation.

#### **4.2 Putting things right**

Our focus will be to understand if something has gone wrong, be open and honest about responsibility, consider the outcome we can deliver to restore the complainants position. Where this cannot be done, Incommunities may use the Compensation Policy to offer redress; offering redress will also include offering an apology and rebuilding of the landlord tenant relationship.

### 4.3 Learning from outcomes

We are committed to making sure we let customers know we have been listening to their feedback and we will let individuals know what changes have been made to services or procedures as a result of their complaint. We will share learning from all complaints with our wider customer base and through tenant panels.

Where we have been unable to make suggested changes, we will give an explanation why.

## 5.0 Complaint Handling

Incommunities empowers staff to be open to receiving complaints by:

- 5.1.1 Ensuring all staff are trained and equipped to receive and record complaints.
- 5.1.2 Ensuring complaints from a group are handled appropriately.
- 5.1.3 Not placing a restriction on the methods that can be used to make a complaint. We will accept complaints by telephone, email, in person, in writing, using our complaint leaflet or on-line form on our website.
- 5.1.4 Complaints made via social media will be forwarded to the relevant service area for recording.
- 5.1.5 Accepting complaints from people acting on behalf of complainants with their permission including advice workers, councillors, MP's, friends, relatives and recognised tenant panels.

## 6.0 Complaint Timescales

- 6.1.1 We will only consider complaints which are presented within **6 months** of the matter arising unless there are exceptional circumstances. Where a complaint has already been considered, complaints may be re-opened within a 6 month period on presentation of new evidence or information.
- 6.1.2 Complaints will be acknowledged within 2 working days with information provided about who is dealing with the complaint, and their job title.
- 6.1.3 We will aim to respond within 10 working days with the decision and outcome. We will keep customers informed if there are any anticipated delays meaning we are unable to meet this timescale.
- 6.1.4 Complaints in relation to Health & Safety which cause a risk to life we will respond within 24 hours

- 6.1.5 We will let the complainant know the timescale for how long any offer of redress will remain open; usually a maximum of 6 months
- 6.1.6 Where we have been unable to contact the complainant we will send a letter setting out the timescale for contact before closing the complaint.

## 7.0 Complaint Stages

Incommunities Group operates a 2 stage internal complaints procedure. We will let customers know what stage their complaint is being considered and who is dealing with the matter. All complaints will be investigated by an officer with the best knowledge and skills to deal with the issues raised.

### 7.1.1 Stage 1

- 7.1.2 Stage 1 is a new complaint that has not been raised previously by the customer. This is where the most effort is made in order to ensure we understand the position at an early opportunity and what customers are seeking as an outcome. Our aim is to resolve complaints at first point of contact wherever possible.
- 7.1.3 A full or interim response will be relayed to the customer by their preferred method of contact. In most cases delivering the outcome and offering an apology will mean the complaint can be closed without sending a letter.
- 7.1.4 A letter will be sent when it's the customers preferred method of contact **or** where we need to set out in writing our decision. Written communication may include digital communication such as an email or text.
- 7.1.5 We will let customers know what they can do if they remain dissatisfied with the decision or outcome.

### 7.2 Stage 2

- 7.2.1 If the complainant remains dissatisfied Incommunities will need to know the reasons why, what remains unresolved and what they are hoping for as an outcome.
- 7.2.2 We will aim to remove barriers for escalating the complaint to the next stage but may limit access if we have delivered the expected outcome and there is nothing further to be considered.
- 7.2.3 We will appoint an officer with no previous involvement to consider where any issues remain outstanding for the complainant and to review the decisions made at stage 1.
- 7.2.4 A letter will be sent out setting out Incommunities final decision and what are the next steps for the complainant.

## 8.0 Housing Ombudsman

- 8.1 A complaint can be made to the HOS 8 weeks after the Association has closed the case. info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk tel: 0300 111 3000 PO Box 152, Liverpool L33 7WQ
- 8.1 The complainant may get approval to proceed immediately to the Ombudsman from a Designated Person which is a local Councillor or any MP or a recognised local tenant panel

## 9.0 Performance Reporting:

- 9.1.1 We will monitor the progress of individual service complaints and service failures as an ongoing operational process at management team meetings.
- 9.1.2 Learning from complaints and service failure will form part of scrutiny reporting to our Community Trust Panel (CTP) and other involved groups.
- 9.1.3 Performance reports will be provided to the CTP on a quarterly basis. These reports will include performance information and any other reports the Boards feel may improve service delivery.
- 9.1.4 We will inform customers how we are achieving against our measures through our website and annually in the @ Home magazine.
- 9.1.5 Incommunities will share performance information about complaints with recognised Tenant Panels where they exist.
- 9.1.5 We will monitor how compensation is awarded as an outcome of complaints to ensure consistency in application.

## 10 Best Practice and Review

- 10.1 This policy has been developed with regard to examples of best practice and guidance. There will be an automatic review of this policy whenever there is a change of statutory or regulatory provisions or when other Best Practice information becomes available that will impact on the policy. In any event there will be a substantive review of this policy every three years.

<b>Scope:</b>	This policy applies to the Group
<b>Effective Date:</b>	May 2020
<b>Review Date:</b>	May 2023
<b>Signed Off:</b>	Group Board
<b>Policy Owned by:</b>	Assistant Chief Executive (Neighbourhoods)

**Related Documents**

Compensation Policy

Complaints & Compliment Leaflet

Customer Pledges

Sadeh Lok Service Standards

Complaint Management Officer Matrix

Complaints Procedure

Complaints Handling Flow

Managing Unacceptable Behaviour Procedure