

February 2017

## *Complaints About Landlord Services*

Landlord services are the housing services that we provide to you because you are a Council tenant(s) or leaseholder(s).

These services include:

- Estate/neighbourhood management
- Day-to-day repairs, planned maintenance and improvements
- Rent and service charges
- Resident involvement

Complaints about landlord services are treated slightly differently from complaints about other Council services, including other Housing Services like homelessness and general housing advice.

This factsheet:

- Tells you how to complain if you are unhappy with the landlord services we provide
- Explains the Council's process for dealing with complaints about landlord services
- Explains how groups of Designated Persons (or Panels) and the Housing Ombudsman may be able to help you if you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint.

### *We welcome your complaints*

We always aim to provide the best possible landlord services to you. However, we know that from time-to-time things do go wrong. When this happens we would like to know - your feedback helps us to improve our services.

### **1. Tell us when something goes wrong**

If you are unhappy because:

- you feel you were treated badly by a member of our staff
- the service you received is not up to standard
- we haven't done something we promised
- we haven't taken all of your circumstances into account when making a decision
- we haven't followed our policies or procedures correctly

... please tell us as soon as possible.

The easiest and quickest way for you to let us know there is a problem is to talk to your Housing Officer or their manager.

We will work with you to try to:

- understand the problem
- come to an agreement with you about what can reasonably be done to make things right or at least explain why we can't do things differently



- Keep a record of problems and look at what we can do to prevent the same problems happening over and over again.

We aim to resolve most complaints informally within 5 working days.

## 2. Making a formal complaint

If you have discussed the issues but couldn't agree a way forward through the informal complaints process please call the Council's Customer Contact Centre to make a formal complaint.

How to complain:

- In writing (by letter or email)
- By phone
- Online
- In person at the Civic Offices

It is helpful if you can provide as much detail as possible about your experience and an outline of an outcome you think would be reasonable and appropriate.

### What happens next?

- We will ask an officer not previously involved with your complaint to look into the issues you raised.
- They will talk to everyone involved, review any documents relating to your case and check we have followed our policies and procedures correctly.  
*Things are not always straight forward - wherever possible the Investigating Officer will work with everyone involved to try to agree a way forward that is reasonable and fair.*
- They will write a formal response outlining their findings and recommendations. We send you the letter confirming the outcome of your complaint and details of any actions needed.

We aim to complete this stage within 20 working days. We will keep you informed of any delays.

## 3. Asking us to review your complaint

If we cannot reach an agreement and you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation you can ask for a review - you must do this in writing within 14 working days of receiving your letter.

Your letter should say why you feel we haven't dealt with your complaint fairly.

### What happens next?

- We will ask a more senior officer to take a fresh look at your complaint and make sure it was investigated thoroughly.
- They will contact you to discuss your complaint and talk to everyone else involved. They will work with everyone involved to try to agree a way forward that is reasonable and fair.
- They will write a report outlining the findings of their investigation and their recommendations. We will send you a copy of the report with a letter from the Head of Service confirming the outcome of your complaint and details of any actions agreed.

We aim to complete this stage within 30 working days and will keep you informed of any delays.

**This is the end of the Council's internal complaint procedure**



**PLEASE NOTE:** *You can use the complaints process if you believe we haven't applied the Council's policies correctly, but not to change the policy. If you think a policy is unfair please talk to your ward councillor.*

## 4. Taking your complaint further

If you have exhausted the Council's complaints process and are still dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint you can either:

- ask a DESIGNATED PERSON (or PANEL) to carry out an independent review of your complaint or
- wait 8 weeks then refer your complaint to the HOUSING OMBUDSMAN

### *Designated Person/Panel*

#### Who is a Designated Person (DP)?

They could be any MP, a local Councillor or a recognised Tenant Panel made up of Social Housing Tenants (*for more details see our Tenant DP Panel Factsheet*)

#### What is their role?

If they agree to take your case the DP will:

- provide a fresh, independent review of your complaint.
- check that we have followed our policies and procedures correctly and whether we have been fair and reasonable.
- check that we managed the complaints process effectively
- say if they think either party is right or wrong about the facts of the complaint
- use their local knowledge and relationships to try to find a fresh solution that is fair and reasonable for everyone

Or they may refer your complaint directly to the Housing Ombudsman.

#### What if a DP can't take my case?

The DP you approach may not be able to help you because of other commitments, a conflict of interest or other reasons. In this case they will usually suggest another DP.

#### What if the DP refuses to take my case?

The DP **MUST** give you their refusal in writing. Once you have their written refusal you can refer your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman without having to wait 8 weeks

#### How can I find a DP?

The Council's Customer Relations Team will give you information

#### Could I join a Tenant Panel?

The Council will provide support to enable tenants to set up or join a DP Panel - if you are interested in setting up a panel with other tenants please contact the Tenant Participation Team.

## *Useful Contacts*

Customer Contact Centre	0118 937 3787	housing.complaints@reading.gov.uk Customer Relations Team, Civic Offices, Bridge Street, Reading RG1 2LU
Tenant Participation Unit	0118 937 2730	tenant.participation@reading.gov.uk
Housing Ombudsman		www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk
Citizens Advice Bureau	03444 111 306	rcab.org.uk

This information can be provided in alternative formats (Braille, audio, large print) or languages on request

# Complaints About Landlord Services: Summary

## 1. TELL US WHEN SOMETHING GOES WRONG

If you are unhappy about the standard of service we provide or the way you were treated by a member of our staff tell your Neighbourhood Officer or their manager as soon as possible.

We aim to work with you to try to agree a way forward and sort things out within 5 working days.

No further action

YES

Are you satisfied with the outcome?

NO

No further action

YES

Are you satisfied with the outcome?

NO

2. If we can't agree a solution or if your complaint is more serious or complicated you can **MAKE A FORMAL COMPLAINT**. The person investigating your complaint will talk to everyone involved to try and agree a way forward that is reasonable and fair.

We aim to complete this stage within 20 working days.

3. If we haven't been able to agree a way forward you can **ASK FOR A REVIEW** - we will ask a more senior member of staff to look into your complaint again. They will work with everyone involved to try to agree a way forward that is reasonable and fair.

We aim to complete this stage within 30 working days.

This is the end of the Council's Complaints Procedure

## 4. If you are still dissatisfied with the outcome you can choose to:

### REFER YOUR COMPLAINT TO A DESIGNATED PERSON

They may:

- Agree to take your case and try to mediate a local solution or refer your complaint directly to the Housing Ombudsman
- Refuse to take your case - they **MUST** give their refusal in writing so you can refer your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman without waiting 8 weeks.

### WAIT 8 WEEKS THEN REFER DIRECTLY TO THE HOUSING OMBUDSMAN

They will look at the way we investigated your complaint to make sure we have:

- Acted legally
- Followed our policies and procedures correctly
- Acted fairly and reasonably

They may try to mediate a solution.