



## **Southway - A guide to how we deal with complaints. November 2020.**

**This document explains to our customers how we approach and resolve complaints.**

### **1. Our Values**

The way we do things is determined by our values.

We are **Caring, Committed** and we will be **Successful Together**

We care about our tenants and the communities that they live in and are committed to providing excellent services.

We know that we can only be successful together by listening to you and respecting your views. We also know that sometimes things go wrong and this might lead to you making a complaint. This document explains what we do when that happens, how we will try to put things right and how we learn lessons from complaints.

Our staff follow these guidelines dealing with complaints.

- Listen and Show Empathy
- Take Ownership
- Focus on Resolution

### **2. What is a complaint?**

A complaint is *an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by Southway, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.*

There are times when you might tell us that you are dissatisfied or unhappy with the way that we are doing things, but you might not call it a complaint. Don't worry we will still approach these problems in the same way.

### **3. The Housing Ombudsman**

The Housing Ombudsman is a regulator who makes sure that Housing Associations are dealing with complaints properly. They will also review and adjudicate on complaints that have been through the Southway complaints process. They can also mediate between Housing Associations and Tenants to try and help resolve problems

You can find out more about the Ombudsman by visiting their [website](#)

Southway is a member of the Housing Ombudsman Service and adheres to the Ombudsman's code of practice when dealing with complaints.

The code of practice is available to view [here](#) and is also stored as a Separate document on our website. Southway will also provide a hard copy for tenants who require it.

### **4. I want to complain. How do I go about it?**

Obviously we hope that you will not need to complain but if you do there are a range of ways you can let us know that you are unhappy with our services; telephone, letter, website, social media and in person.

We know that some people might not feel comfortable complaining in person. So if you would rather ask someone to deal with the matter for you we will accept complaints from friends, relatives, support workers, local Councillors or anyone else you would like to represent you. We will always check that you have given your consent for someone to contact us on your behalf to make sure that we protect your privacy and comply with Data Protection Legislation.

Southway complies with the Equality Act 2010. We carry out Equality Impact Assessments to make sure that everybody has equal access to our services, and will consider all reasonable adjustments to make this happen. Please contact us to discuss how we can help.

### **5. What happens next**

We will try and deal with the issue as quickly as possible. We have a dedicated complaints team within our Customer Hub whose job it is to try and resolve problems with as little fuss as possible. They are trained to listen, be helpful and deal with lots of different situations. The vast majority of our complaints are dealt with by this team.

### **6. I'm still not happy. What now?**

In line with the Ombudsman's Code of Practice Southway has a two-stage formal complaints process.

## Stage 1

Your complaint will be assigned to an officer who will be responsible for dealing with it and keeping you up to date with what is happening.

The officer will be proactive and try to resolve the issue with you rather than making you wait for an 'official decision.'

We will consider whether it would be helpful to involve the Ombudsman to intervene to find a solution (you can also contact them for advice and support at this stage)

You will receive a full written response within 10 working days, written in plain English that sets out our decision on the complaint and what steps we intend to take next.

If for some reason we cannot provide a response within 10 working days we will explain why and give you a date that you will receive it by.

We will advise you what to do if you are still not satisfied. If you want your complaint to be reviewed through Stage 2 of our process, you will need to contact us and explain why you are still dissatisfied

## Stage 2

Your complaint will be assigned to a senior manager who will be responsible for dealing with it and keeping you up to date with what is happening.

They will be proactive and try to resolve the issue with you rather than making you wait for an 'official decision'

We will consider whether it would be helpful to involve the Ombudsman to intervene to find a solution (you can also contact them for advice and support at this stage)

You will receive a full written response within 20 working days, written in plain English that sets out our decision on the complaint and what steps we intend to take next.

If for some reason we cannot provide a response within 20 working days we will explain why and give you a date that you will receive it by.

## **7. Complaint Outcomes**

When you make a complaint there are three possible outcomes.

- Not Upheld. This means that we believe that the service provided has been of a standard that can be reasonably expected, or is in line with our policy;
- Part Upheld. This means the outcome of the investigation has found partly in your favour. We will take the necessary action to resolve the situation

- Upheld. This means the outcome of the investigation has found completely in your favour. We will take the necessary action to resolve the situation.

If a complaint is upheld at any stage of the process, Southway will:

- Say sorry for the things we got wrong
- Apologise to you for the inconvenience caused
- Take some practical action to put things right
- Ensure that the same situation does not happen again
- Offer compensation in some circumstances. You can find more detail about this in our [compensation policy](#)

## **8. I'm still not satisfied. What do I do now?**

A very small minority of complaints are not resolved by our internal process and therefore need to be reviewed externally. There are two ways to do this.

- (a) Contact the Housing Ombudsman-The Ombudsman will only investigate complaints eight weeks after they have been through an organisation's internal complaints process. In Southway's case this means 8 weeks after the date of the Stage 2 review decision letter.
- (b) Ask a 'Designated Person' to review the complaint. A Designated Person is a Councillor or MP who you can contact once you have been through our internal complaints procedure. They can contact us to suggest possible solutions, or ask if the Ombudsman can consider your case more quickly.

## **9. Learning from our mistakes**

We see complaints as an opportunity to learn, do things differently, and improve our services. We will discuss complaints with individuals and teams, so that we can do better next time.

Every year we will report to our Tenants how many complaints we received, how many were reported to the Ombudsman, but more importantly the service improvements we have made as a result. We will publish the information on our website, and in our Tenant newsletter, Southway Stories.

Our Complaints Policy alongside most of our other Customer policies is the responsibility of our People and Places Committee. This Committee has delegated authority from the Board and is mainly made up of Tenants and Local Councillors. They will receive an annual report on complaint handling performance.

## **10. Involving Customers**

We recognise that the best way to make our services customer friendly is to involve customers in designing and reviewing them. This extends to our approach to complaints.

We have a Complaints Service Improvement Group who will, with your consent, review your complaints, tell us where they think we have gone wrong and suggest how to put it right.

## **11. Compliments**

We are happy to say that we receive far more compliments than complaints from our tenants. Praise and compliments let us know what we are doing well and where we are providing a good service. All praise and compliments received will be passed on to the staff concerned.

## **12. Exceptions**

There are a few complaints that we have to deal with differently for commercial, legal, or other reasons. A guide to when we need to do this can be found below.

## **13. Review**

We will review this guide at least every two years to make sure that it is up to date and relevant.



## **Southway - Complaints Exceptions**

### **Complaints Exceptions**

There are some service areas and issues that sit outside of this complaints policy and therefore will be dealt with in a different way.

The following are some examples of how we might deal with things differently, or outside our main complaints policy.

### **ASB Complaints**

Complaints from a customer about anti-social behaviour from another tenant or resident will be dealt with under the terms of the Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) policy.

Any complaint received about the outcome of an ASB case will be dealt with through an ASB case review. This will be carried out by an officer, or manager with no prior involvement in the case.

The investigating officer will have different options available to them including reopening an investigation or taking other action. The reasons for their decision will be communicated and advice provided on how to seek review via a designated person, or the Ombudsman.

Complaints about the way a case has been handled, or the behaviour of a staff member will be dealt with through the normal complaints policy.

### **Commercial or Legal Complaints**

We may receive complaints that relate to matters of legislation over which Southway has no control (such as Right to Buy), or commercial services offered by Southway outside of its core landlord activities.

We will not ignore these complaints and we will ensure that you are advised on the most suitable way to deal with the issue.

If legal proceedings have commenced between a complainant and Southway it may not be appropriate for us to consider a related complaint (for example an insurance claim). We will advise you if that is the case.

### **Complaints about Financial Advice**

We offer a free debt advice service to our tenants. If complaints about this service cannot be resolved in line with this Policy, complainants will be advised of the

opportunity to seek redress through the Financial Ombudsman Service, enclosing a copy of the Financial Ombudsman Services standard explanatory leaflet and the contact details of the Financial Ombudsman Service.

### **Complaints to the Regulator of Social Housing Standards**

We adhere to the consumer standards as set out by the housing regulator. The standards cover a range of issues around quality of accommodation and tenancy management.

Whilst the Regulator does not monitor compliance, tenants have the right to report alleged breaches for the regulator to investigate. Further details can be found by visiting <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/regulator-of-social-housing/about/complaints-procedure>

### **Complaints about other organisations**

We work with a number of different organisations to provide services to our tenants. Should you have a complaint about their service we will investigate this. If for any reason is not appropriate to deal with the problem through our standard complaints process we will advise you of the best course of action

If we receive a complaint about people of organisations over which we have no control, we will signpost the complainant to the appropriate contact or, if appropriate, may act on their behalf.

### **Anonymous Complaints**

Southway will investigate and respond to all complaints even if the source is unknown. We will hold the outcome on file, but for obvious reasons will not be able to provide a written response to the complainant.

### **Unreasonable Complaints**

We will not normally accept complaints that relate to incidents that occurred over 6 months ago.

You have the right to contact the Ombudsman should you wish to challenge an instance where we are not prepared to consider a complaint.

Occasionally complaints are received from people who are unwilling to accept the outcome of an investigation, even after the complaints procedure has been exhausted. There are also some customers who persistently make complaints that are without foundation or that are simply beyond our capability to resolve.

All complaints will be considered carefully. If, however, the subject has already been dealt with effectively or the complaint is deemed unreasonable, the matter will be

discussed with the appropriate manager and Director and dealt with outside the normal complaints procedure.