



PEAKS & PLAINS
Housing Trust

The Trust

Complaints Policy

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1. SCOPE

1.1. This Policy outlines how Peaks and Plains (the Trust) will manage complaints and compliments, ensuring that customers are dealt with fairly and consistently.

1.2. Policy statement

1.3. *“Peaks and Plains welcomes feedback on the services that we provide. The Trust recognizes that providing an excellent service to customers is vital. We promise to put things right when they have gone wrong and use feedback to improve our service to all our customers”*

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1. The Trust aims to provide an excellent service to all our customers. However, we acknowledge that sometimes things can go wrong and therefore customers may wish to make a complaint. This policy outlines what we will do to put things right.

2.2. The Trust welcomes all feedback in any format, from anyone who receives a service from the Trust or is affected by a decision or action taken by us, including former tenants and non-customers. Additionally, we welcome complaints and feedback from anyone who represents our customers. We will keep customers making a complaint informed of progress throughout.

2.3. This policy is to ensure that customers wishing to give feedback to us or make a complaint about a service they have received (including concern about the safety of their home) are able to do so easily. The Trust offer various ways for Customers to report Complaints and we will deal with issues quickly and fairly. When we do something wrong, we put it right, apologize, and improve services to avoid repeat mistakes.

2.4. We have a dedicated team who are responsible for coordinating all complaints and all of our Investigating Officers and Managers are trained in how to investigate and respond to complaints.

3. COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

3.1. Compliments

3.1.1. We receive compliments from our customers for a job well done, or in recognition of a process that works well and exceeds expectations. This will be recorded to help us identify where our customers are happy with our service and enable us to share good practice within the Trust

3.2. Complaints:

3.2.1. Sometimes things go wrong. It could be that we have failed to meet service standards, not delivered against one of our policies or have not treated someone fairly. When this happens, our complaints process is used.

3.2.2. Examples of a complaint include:

- Repeated chasing of the same service request (more than two occasions.)
- Service standards not met (i.e. we took longer to do something than we promised)
- Not calling you back or keeping to an appointment when we said we would
- Not delivering on a paid for service charge

3.2.3. The Trust uses the Housing Ombudsman's definition of a complaint which is; *"an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organization, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents."*

4. EXCLUSIONS

4.1. The Trust will accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so:

- The complaint has fully exhausted the complaints process and all aspects have been investigated and addressed with all outstanding actions complete within the agreed timescales
- The complaint is over 6 months old (unless the complaint relates to safeguarding or health and safety)
- There is already legal action being taken relating to the complaint which may compromise legal proceedings such as a disrepair claim.
- We deem the complainant to be displaying unacceptable behaviour (see section 15.)

4.2. A detailed explanation will be provided to the customer setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman. If the Ombudsman does not agree that the exclusion has been fairly applied, the Ombudsman may instruct the Trust to take on the complaint.

5. HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT

5.1 The Trust has a two stage complaints process. We have made it easy for our customers and representatives of the customer to tell us when they are unhappy with our service, including:

- Online form via our website: [Complaints \(peaksplains.org\)](https://www.peaksplains.org/complaints)
- Telephone [0800 012 1311](tel:08000121311)
- Social media and live Chat (we will never ask for personal details if a complaint has been made via a public post and will request for details privately.)
- Email: complaints@peaksplains.org
- In person at: Ropewalks, Newton Street, Macclesfield SK11 6QJ (please call the customer services line to book an appointment)
- Through a Trust member of staff

6. COMPLAINTS PROCESS

6.1. 'Quick fix'

- 6.1.1. Regarding any issues that can be dealt with quickly, with no requirement to formally investigate, the Trust will aim to offer a 'quick fix resolution' with agreement from the customer. We will respond within two working days with a resolution. A record will be made of the issue and we will use this feedback to improve our services.
- 6.1.2. However, depending on the nature of the complaint, an immediate response may not be possible or appropriate. If we need to investigate, the complaint will be logged as a formal complaint and dealt with under the "Investigation" stage of our process.

6.2. Investigation (Stage 1)

- 6.2.1. When a complaint is received, we will record it and acknowledge in writing within 5 working days of receipt. The letter will detail who is responsible for investigating the case and the investigating Manager will contact the customer within 3 working days of the acknowledgement letter being sent. Where a customer makes a complaint about the safety of their home, (e.g., mould and damp), we will always ask to visit the customer's home to see the problem first-hand. Additional concerns will be considered within the case if related issues arise during the investigation period.
- 6.2.2. We aim to investigate and respond in writing within 10 working days. However, in exceptional circumstances, depending on the nature of the complaint, it may take longer. In these cases, we will write to the customer to explain why and advise of a new response date. If an extension date cannot be agreed with the customer, provision of the Ombudsman's details will be provided.

6.3. Review (stage 2)

- 6.3.1. If the customer is not satisfied with the response, they may request that the complaint be reviewed. The request to review the case must be received within 20 working days of the stage 1 response letter. In order for an assessment of the case to be escalated, the customer is required to clearly state what part/s of the Stage 1 response is being challenged and why as the Trust will not review as a repetition of the investigation stage. The request to review will be examined by the Senior Manager of the relevant department.
- 6.3.2. The customer will receive a written response to advise if the complaint is to be escalated or not.
- 6.3.3. The customer will be given the opportunity to further discuss their dissatisfaction about the Stage 1 response and will be invited to meet with the Customer Experience Manager and the Senior Manager responding to the complaint. The customer may bring a representative to the meeting which may be a friend or relative, for support.

- 6.3.4. We are committed to providing a final decision in writing within 20 working days of accepting a complaint for review. However, in exceptional circumstances, the Trust may require extended time depending on the nature of the complaint. If this is the case, we will contact the complainant to agree a revised timeline. If an extension date cannot be agreed with the customer, provision of the Ombudsman's details will be provided.
- 6.3.5. Throughout each stage of the complaints process, The Trust will provide advice to the customer about each step of our procedure in addition to their right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service throughout their complaint.
- 6.3.6. If there are any outstanding actions at the time of response, the Complaints team will monitor and continue to provide regular updates to the customer in relation to progress.

7. EXTERNAL REVIEW

- 7.1. If the customer remains dissatisfied after the Trusts complaints process has been exhausted, they can elect to have an external review of their case matter.
- 7.2. The external review will allow the customer to present their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service and engage with their dispute support advisors for impartial advice at any stage of the complaints process. There are no time restrictions on how quickly this can be reported after the case has been closed with the Trust.

8. THIRD PARTY ENQUIRIES

- 8.1. Complaints received from local MP's, Elected Members, Board Members or independent third party advocates (including a Friend or Relative) will be handled in line with the Trusts complaints process.
- 8.2. In cases where a complaint is reported to the Trust via a Friend or Relative, we require written consent from the customer to confirm permission to discuss details of the complaint with Trust staff on their behalf.

9. COMMUNITY COMPLAINTS

- 9.1. The Trust recognizes that there will be times when customers will raise complaints that are affecting them as a community. We understand that community complaints can be more complex and require more resource and may need input from external partners. In this case, the Trust may exercise discretion and extend the published timescales for investigating and responding to a complaint.
- 9.2. When dealing with community complaints, the Trust acknowledges that they may be received in many different ways, including petitions, events, or from contact from one customer speaking on behalf of their communities. They will be responded to in accordance with the complaints procedure.

10. POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

- 10.1. Following an investigation, we will make one of the following decisions:
- Uphold (acknowledge any wrong doing) the complaint and put things right.
 - Uphold part of the complaint put right the element that has gone wrong.
 - Not uphold the complaint if we do not identify any wrong doing.

11. WHEN A COMPLAINT IS CLOSED

- 11.1 Examples of when a complaint would be closed:
- Investigation is complete and a response is sent.
 - When a resolution is agreed and the Trust have made a commitment to carry out the action.

12. CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT

- 12.1 We record customer feedback, identify trends and regularly review cases to understand:
- The number and type of complaints received, at each stage and if they were resolved within timescale.
 - The number of cases that are upheld and referred to the Ombudsman.
 - Customer satisfaction with the complaints process.
 - Exploring learning opportunities and make service improvements.
- 12.2 In order to continually improve our services, we will use learning outcomes from all upheld complaints.
- 12.3 Where learning from feedback and complaints results in a change to the way we do things, we publicise this through our publications, website and social media channels.

13. CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

- 13.1 Customer Satisfaction will be sought via digital or postal survey for all closed complaints and is conducted on the complaint process rather than the complaint outcome.

14. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

- 14.1 Complaints and compliments performance will be closely monitored and shared with respective areas and the Trusts Leadership team on a monthly basis. A quarterly summary review of complaints performance will be presented to Senior Leadership, resident led Challenge Group and the Trust's Board. A comprehensive annual report on Complaint performance will be presented to the Trust's Board.
- 14.2 A member of the Trust's Board will have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This role will be responsible for ensuring the governing body receives regular information on complaints that provides insight to the governing body on the Trust's complaint handling performance.

- 14.3 The Trust will also publish the performance information on their website including annual performance and learning.
- 14.4 Finally, we will self-assess on an annual basis against the HOS Code and publish our findings on our website www.peaksplains.org

15. UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR

- 15.1 The Trust is committed to investigating and responding to all complaints fairly, comprehensively, and in a timely manner.
- 15.2 However, there are a minority of cases where a person complains in a way that prevents the Trust's staff from investigating the complaint, including taking up a disproportionate level of resources; or behaves in a way that is unacceptable. We deem this to be "unacceptable behaviour".
- 15.3 In such cases, we will deal with the complaint on a proportionate basis which may vary from the standards described above. Our Unacceptable Behaviour Policy sets out the Trust's position fully.

16. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 16.1 We recognise and value the diversity of our communities. We aim to reduce barriers to ensure that everyone has equal access to our complaints service and are committed to treating everyone fairly, complying with all relevant legislation under the Equality Act 2010.
- 16.2 We will offer practical support for customers who may otherwise find it difficult to make a complaint.
- 16.3 The Trust will ensure that its Complaints Policy Statement is accessible to its diverse customers and will take into account the different needs of people wishing to make a complaint.
- 16.4 Analysis of feedback and complaint performance will ensure understanding of how customers with the 9 protected characteristics use the service, and how satisfied they are.

17. DATA PROTECTION

- 17.1 The Trust recognizes that confidentiality is important to customers and will ensure all performance reporting information is anonymized and is compliant with GDPR good practice.

18. RESPONSIBILITIES

- 18.1 This policy will be delivered by all departments within the Trust and be coordinated by the Customer Experience team. Staff involved in the process will be fully trained. All

complaints will be recorded by service area, cause and remedy. We will publish information about the complaints we receive every year on our website and our Annual Report. This will include the number, nature and outcomes of complaints and how we learned from the issues and applied learning to improve our services.

19. FUTURE REVIEWS

19.1 This policy will be reviewed every three years, or sooner in response to a change in regulation such as decisions from the Housing Ombudsman, audit recommendations or emerging best practice.

20. ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

- Unacceptable Behaviour Policy
- Compensation Policy
- Equality Diversity & Inclusion Policy

POLICY INFORMATION

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