

# COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURE





## COMPLAINTS POLICY STATEMENT

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to set out our complaints policy and procedure and to encourage staff to take a positive and proactive approach to handling complaints with the aim of finding an agreeable resolution.

### OUR DEFINITION OF A COMPLAINT

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with one or more of Hanover's services, which has been reported, but not resolved.

### POLICY

Hanover is committed to ensuring views about our services are valued. We aim to welcome, understand and resolve individual complaints in a timely manner; applying a consistent approach that allows for monitoring and escalation of complaints as necessary. We welcome complaints from residents, service users and advocates.

Via the central monitoring service we will share collective lessons for the improvement of our service provision across Hanover, developing best practices for staff to learn from.

### EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

We are committed to respecting diversity in all aspects of our work and we will not tolerate any form of discrimination.

### COMMITMENT AND REVIEW

The Group Board will support the professionalism of staff at all levels in making this policy truly effective. The effectiveness of this general statement of intent & other specific policies & procedures in use, will be regularly reviewed & revised as & when necessary.

Approved by the Board of Hanover Housing Association (the Group Board) on 29 September 2009.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bruce Moore".

Signed: .....

Dated: 29 September 2009

**Bruce Moore, Group Chief Executive**

## **COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

Hanover's ambition is to offer our residents the highest quality of service. To achieve that aim we need to listen, respond to and learn from residents' and service users' feedback. That includes addressing all complaints positively and professionally.

We welcome complaints from anyone who receives a service from Hanover or anyone affected by our activities including residents, service users and advocates. It is our opportunity to resolve service issues that people feel unhappy about. Complaints are a source of valuable information on which to improve our services to residents. This procedure sets out:

1. Why Hanover has a complaints procedure
2. How Hanover aims to address complaints
3. How to make a complaint about a Hanover service
4. The stages of Hanover's complaints process
5. How Hanover appoints a member of staff to act as complaint handler
6. How Hanover will address staff implicated in complaints
7. Details of further advice or assistance

If you require this document in an alternative format such as large print or audio version or in a different language please contact the Complaints team.

### **Why Hanover has a complaints procedure**

At Hanover, we are very aware that procedures can become bureaucratic and get in the way of common sense. We do not want to make the process of making a complaint and getting it resolved an administrative burden. But it is important to have a procedure in place so that:

- There are clear expectations on how the complaint will be handled
- We are able to capture and co-ordinate responses to complaints from across Hanover in a central location
- We improve our internal reporting of complaints, ensuring we are identifying lessons that can improve all our services
- There are clear stages for escalating a complaint if we are unable to resolve it satisfactorily at the initial stage
- There is a record of every complaint and how it has been handled, so any independent review can comment on the appropriateness and effectiveness of Hanover's response

### **How Hanover aims to address complaints**

We expect the highest standards of behaviour from all our staff and contractors, in keeping with our values. When we receive a complaint, the complainant can expect that:

- We will RESPECT their views
- We will LISTEN to their concerns
- We will provide HONEST answers
- We will be COMMITTED to understanding and responding to the complaint
- We will take ACTION and always look to find a mutually agreeable resolution as soon as possible

In some cases Hanover may agree to pay compensation as part of the resolution of a complaint. This would normally only be paid in circumstances such as a failure to provide a service or loss of service due to Hanover's actions.

We will treat all personal information in a sensitive and confidential way, complying with the Data Protection Act at all times. We will also ask for feedback at the end of process on how we handled the complaint.

In return, we ask anyone making a complaint to:

- Provide us with details of the complaint and how they want us to contact them
- Take time to talk to us when we contact them so that we can understand the complaint in detail and the outcome expected
- Allow us reasonable time (as agreed) to investigate if required and provide a proper response
- Make the complaint within 12 months of the incident occurring
- Treat our staff with respect

### How to make a complaint to Hanover

If someone has a complaint about any services provided by Hanover we want to hear from them.

We would ask that complainants always speak to their local manager first to see if they can resolve the issue without taking more formal action. This may be the rstate manager, retirement housing manager or extra care housing manager. However, if they are unable to get a satisfactory resolution they can ask any member of staff to log the complaint or contact the Complaints team.

The Complaints team can be contacted by:

- ✓ Phoning 01249 707000 and asking to speak to the Complaints team.
- ✓ Emailing: [complaints@hanover.org.uk](mailto:complaints@hanover.org.uk).
- ✓ Visiting our website: [www.hanover.org.uk](http://www.hanover.org.uk).
- ✓ Writing a letter and sending it to the Complaints team, Hanover, Gateway House, Cornbrash Park, Bumpers Way, CHIPPENHAM, Wiltshire, SN14 6RA.

The Complaints team is an administrative resource that identifies the appropriate member of staff to handle the complaint and then monitors the responses centrally, maintaining appropriate files. The Complaints team do not handle or address complaints directly.

### **Hanover's complaints process**

There are three stages to Hanover's complaints process.

#### Stage 1

When a complaint is received by the Complaints team we will acknowledge it in writing within 5 working days.

The Hanover staff member who handles the complaint will be asked to investigate the complaint and will, of course, aim to agree a resolution as quickly as possible. It is expected that this will be done within 15 working days. However, when this is not possible the complainant will be contacted by the complaint handler and a response time will be agreed with them.

A formal written response by the person handling the complaint will be provided to the complainant and recorded by the Complaints team for reference.

If the complainant remains unhappy and feels we have not responded to all points they can request the complaint be escalated. The complaint handler identified for the next stage will be responsible for contacting the complainant to ask for details of why they feel their complaint is not resolved. The complaint handler will then review and consider whether the complaint merits escalation.

#### Stage 2

When we receive a request to escalate the complaint to stage 2, the complaint handler identified for stage 2 will contact the complainant to ask for details of why they feel their complaint is not resolved.

Normally this will be a more senior manager who will review the actions taken to date, consider how well the complaint was initially handled, identify and investigate any issues not previously addressed.

Our aim is to have responded within 15 working days although we will agree a reasonable time period with the complainant in relation to the specific complaint or issues raised.

If the complainant remains unhappy and feels we have not responded to all points they can request the complaint be escalated. The complaint handler identified for the next stage will be responsible for contacting the complainant to ask for details of

why they feel their complaint is not resolved. The complaint handler will then review and consider whether the complaint merits escalation.

### Stage 3

When we receive a request to escalate the complaint to stage 3, the complaint handler identified for stage 3 will contact the complainant to ask for details of why they feel their complaint is not resolved.

We will inform the complainant who has been appointed as the complaint handler. All stage 3 complaints are referred to a member of Hanover's Strategic Management team who may choose to delegate the investigation to an appropriate member of staff. This may be a head of service level from a different team or geographical area. The role of the complaint handler at stage 3 is to carry out a full investigation of the complaint, how it has been addressed to date, and resolve the complaint if possible. If this is not possible and the resident wishes, a Complaint Panel meeting will be organised within 15 days of the review having been completed and the complaint handler will provide the Panel with a report which summarises the complaint and all actions taken to date in an aim to resolve it.

The Complaint Panel will consist of:

- A Hanover Board member
- A resident Board member or member of Hanover's Residents' Council

The role of the Complaint Panel is to:

- Review how well Hanover handled the complaint at stages 1 and 2 and whether the complaints process has been followed.
- Consider the complaint handler's report
- Consider the complainants response to the complaint handler's report,
- Come to a conclusion about the overall effectiveness of Hanover's response and identify any further proposed actions to be taken by Hanover to resolve the complaint

A Complaint Panel meeting should take place within 15 working days of the review having been completed by the stage 3 handler. The Complaint Panel meeting will be held in a location convenient to the complainant and on a date when they can attend. If the complainant does not wish to attend there is no obligation to do so. The complainant can bring along a companion if they wish and they will be provided with a copy of any reports 10 working days prior to the meeting.

Following the Complaint Panel meeting, the panel will provide the complainant with a written letter and report setting out the findings and recommendations of the Complaint Panel within 10 working days.

If the complainant is still unhappy with Hanover's response following stage 3, they can decide to take the complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service who will review Hanover's handling of the complaint and make a decision about whether Hanover has done something wrong or not.

### **Vexatious, serial or unacceptable complaints**

Hanover recognises that a small minority of complaints may be vexatious (aggravated), serial or unacceptable – this may include people who make frequent complaints which are not legitimate, people who persistently make the same complaint, people who request a complaint be escalated when Hanover has responded to all points, or people who are seeking an unreasonable or unrealistic outcome.

Where a complaint has been identified as vexatious (aggravated), serial or unacceptable, the case will be referred to a member of the Strategic Management team who will decide whether Hanover agrees or refuses to progress the complaint. In these circumstances the complainant may be advised that the correspondence is at an end, reasons for this decision and that further letters received may not be responded to unless they contain new relevant information.

Where the complainant is a resident they will still have the right to contact the Housing Ombudsman if they so wish.

### **How will the Complaints team identify a complaint handler**

At each stage of the complaints process it is the role of the Complaints team to work with managers to assign handlers for all complaints. This will be done by assessing the nature of the complaint and identifying the appropriate manager to deal with the complaint.

Throughout the process of escalation, we will aim to ensure a more senior manager act as a complaint handler at every progressive stage. So for example:

- Stage 1 is likely to be handled by a housing manager or technical manager or equivalent in other areas of service
- Stage 2 is likely to be handled by a Head of Service unless they decide a more appropriate staff member should deal with this stage such as a lead retirement housing manager.
- Stage 3 is likely to be handled by a member of Hanover's Strategic Management team unless they choose to delegate the investigation to a more appropriate staff member.

## What happens if a complaint is made about a member of staff?

Where 3 or more complaints are received about a member of staff the Complaints team will contact Human Resources to inform them so that they can contact the staff member's line manager and agree what action may be needed.

Any member of staff implicated in a complaint will be informed by the complaint handler that a complaint has been made unless the complainant has asked for the complaint to be reviewed confidentially. The member of staff will also be kept informed of ongoing progress with the complaint and the final outcome. Please note that when a complainant wants to keep their complaint handled confidentially, the handler will have to make it clear that it is difficult to do a full investigation or take actions if we cannot disclose the complaint with those staff implicated.

Hanover will not involve complainants in matters relating to employment contracts. If as a result of complaints there is a need to take disciplinary action against a member of staff Hanover will address this confidentially with that member of staff.

## Help or further assistance

If you would like help or further assistance in making a complaint any member of our staff will be pleased to help. Hanover also accepts complaints from others acting on behalf of a resident or other service user so long as they have their permission to do so. Useful contacts for agencies which may help you make a complaint can be found on Hanover's Complaints help sheet.

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### Complaints Policy and Procedure

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### Version Control

Version No	Purpose/Change	Author	Date
392.1	original	Sarah Jack	October 2009
392.2	Substituted procedure leaflet for formal procedure	Sarah Jack	November 2009
392.3	Reviewed and updated	Margi Shand	April 2011