Policy

Complaints and Feedback Policy

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Version	Date Issued	Originator/Modified by	Reason(s) for Change
1	05-2023	Head of Business Improvement	Full review
2	09-2023	Head of Business Improvement	Change to acknowledgement process
3	07-2024	Head of Business Improvement	Amendment to escalation process
4	11-2024	Head of Business Improvement	Clarification of existing practice on when 10/20 working day response time starts
5	03-2025	Head of Business Improvement	Housing Ombudsman's details not enclosed with complaint acknowledgements or Stage 1 responses
6	05-2025	Head of Business Improvement	Changes to complaint definition so it mirrors wording in the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code; further detail on the definition of a service request; further detail on how we publicise this policy
7	04-2026	Head of Business Improvement	Changes in line with Ombudsman recommendations
8	10-2026	Head of Business Improvement	Scope amended to reference BWHS, in line with Ombudsman request

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1. POLICY AIM

We are committed to providing the best service we can to our customers. We want to be told if there has been a problem with a service we have provided or when a customer is very happy with something we have done. Complaints, compliments and comments are valuable feedback. It gives us a chance to learn and most importantly a chance to improve services.

To ensure we listen and improve we have a two-stage Complaints process. We want to empower our staff to resolve customer dissatisfaction as early in the process as possible and wherever possible without the need for a formal investigation.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all our employees including those on temporary or fixed contracts.

This policy applies to all BVT, BTL, and BWHS customers. However, any mentions of the Ombudsman in this policy apply only to customers under the Ombudsman's jurisdiction. In practice, this means:

- BVT and BWHS Tenants
- BVT Leaseholders, including shared owners
- A housing applicant who is on Bournville Homes
- Anyone who used to be in one of the above groups, provided they were our customer (or on Bournville Homes) when the matter complained of arose.

This policy does not apply to internal complaints about services or other employees.

This policy does not apply to personal injury claims which will be dealt with by the Finance Team and insurers.

3. RELATED DOCUMENTATION

This document should be viewed alongside:

- Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Data Protection Policy and Data Sharing Policy
- Damp and Mould Policy (effective from January 2024)
- Customers with Additional Needs policy
- Customer Communication Needs and Preferences policy

4. COMPLIANCE

This policy encompasses the legal and regulatory compliance:

- Data Protection Act 2018
- General Data Protection Regulation 2018
- Housing Ombudsman Complaints Code 2024

5. BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

Definition of a Complaint

The area of difficulty in dealing with complaints is actually defining a complaint. If we do not have a shared understanding across the organisation of what a complaint is, we run the risk of treating customers in an inconsistent way. For clarity our definition of a complaint is:

An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by Bournville Village Trust, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting a customer or group of customers.

In everyday terms, this means that a complaint can be made where it refers to:

- Dissatisfaction in the way we have delivered or have failed to deliver a service
- Delay or not acting on a request for a service
- Dissatisfaction with the way we apply policies, decisions or procedures
- Refusal to answer reasonable questions or giving misleading or unsuitable advice
- Failure to follow our policies /procedures or legislation
- Impoliteness, rudeness, unfairness, bias or prejudice or poor staff attitude
- An inappropriate use of personal information.

It is important to note that a customer does not have to use the word 'complaint' for it to be treated as such. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative must still be handled in line with the landlord's complaints policy.

Whenever a customer expresses dissatisfaction, we will attempt to resolve the issue at the first point of contact where appropriate; however, regardless of this we will always offer them the choice to make a complaint.

Some examples of complaints are delay in providing a service requested, poor attitude of staff or contractor, not following policy or failure of service. Customers can and may complain about a policy if they do not agree with them and although such complaints are unlikely to be upheld it is useful to know that customers are not satisfied with a policy as this may help us to shape future policies.

Each request to raise a complaint must be considered on its own merits. The following are examples that would not <u>normally</u> fall within the scope of the complaints policy:

- Reporting complaints about anti-social behaviour – note, this does not cover complaints about our <u>handling</u> of anti-social behaviour, which are treated in the same way as any other complaint about a service failure by BVT
- First time request for service. A service request is a request from a customer to us requiring action to be taken to put something right. (Note- a complaint must be raised if the customer expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service

request remains ongoing. We should not stop our efforts to address the service request if the customer complains).

- Issue where legal proceedings have started (this is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court). This will not delay associated work that is required
- Issue being dealt with by Insurance claim – again, this will not delay associated work that is required. However, complaints can be made about our handling of an insurance claim.
- Complaint that has already been through BVT complaints process – this does not include complaints about re-occurring damp and mould
- An appeal against a decision where there is an appeals process, e.g. offer of accommodation decision
- Over 12 months since the issue occurred or since the customer became aware of the issue, and not reported before

An explanation of Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints is given below in Section 6. Any decisions not to accept a complaint must sit with Business Improvement. If it is decided not to accept a complaint, we must (a) still try to resolve the customer's issue where possible outside of the complaints process, and (b) explain the reasons for our decision and inform the customer that they have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review our decision.

Compliments

A compliment is where a service user makes contact to express satisfaction with the way in which we have delivered a service or dealt with a customer. It is important to capture this information so that we can recognise good service.

Giving us feedback

Customers can contact us in a variety of ways:

- Online (webpage)
- E-mail (enquiries@bvt.org.uk)
- Letter
- Telephone our Customer Services Team (0300 333 6540)
- Personal contact with staff

6. POLICY DETAIL

Record keeping

For both Stage 1 and Stage 2, the investigating officer must also promptly upload all complaints responses and correspondence concerning the complaint onto the INVU system and inform Business Improvement. They should also complete the final action checklist sent by Business Improvement, detailing any learning points / actions required to prevent future service failures. Business Improvement are responsible for filing complaint acknowledgments to INVU.

All attempts to contact the customer about their complaint, whether successful or not, should also be recorded on CRM.

Complaints

When a customer contacts us with a concern or queries that are considered a complaint, the Business Improvement team will acknowledge the complaint within 3 working days of the complaint being received, and the complaint will be passed to the relevant Service Manager/Head of Service. This will give adequate time to check that that all options to resolve the complaint have been exhausted and a full investigation is required. This may mean contacting the customer for further information. If it is possible to resolve an issue to the mutual satisfaction of both parties this will be attempted by the Service Manager/Head of Service. The acknowledgement letter will include the name of the investigating officer, the target date for resolution and the complaint reference number.

Damp and Mould Complaints

It is important to distinguish between a customer reporting damp and mould at their property (a service request) and a customer complaining about how we have dealt with their service request.

Any complaints received relating to damp and mould at the property will be raised as a formal complaint at Stage 1. The complaint will follow the timescales and escalations detailed at Stage 1 and 2 of this policy. It is expected that any remedial work associated with the complaint should continue regardless of the outcome of the complaint up until the damp and mould issue has been resolved. Actions associated with the complaint will be monitored beyond the closure of the complaint.

If the damp and mould issue is not resolved following remedial work then the customer is able to raise a further complaint and is eligible for compensation regardless of whether it has been paid previously.

See the Damp and Mould Policy and Compensation Policy for further information.

Stage 1 – Investigating the Complaint (target 10 working days)

The relevant Service Manager/Head of Service will investigate the complaint within a target of 10 working days. The 10 working days will commence from the day the complaint is acknowledged. Wherever possible personal contact (e.g. visit, telephone call or interview) will be made with the complainant in order to get full details of the service failure and reach a resolution that all parties are happy with.

Within the 10 working days the investigating officer should provide a full response to the complainant or give an update on progress and/or in exceptional circumstances, a revised date for resolution of the complaint and reason(s) for the extension. Examples of cases where a revised date may be acceptable include delays due to needing to speak to third parties, an agreed face to face meeting with the complainant, etc. Where a revised date is required, we must agree with the complainant how often we will keep them updated with progress. The complainant must also be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman in cases when an extension is required.

Where a full response takes beyond 10 working days, we will only report the complaint as responded to on time where the extension has been agreed with the Head of Business Improvement or the Insight & Project Lead in Business Improvement. An extension will not be agreed where it has been caused by staff absence.

Where customers raise additional complaints during the investigation, these will be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related and the stage 1 response has not been issued. Where the stage 1 response has been issued, the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being investigated or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues will be logged as a new complaint.

Any extension must not exceed a further 10 working days without very good reason.

When a complaint investigation has been completed the full findings should be confirmed in writing to the complainant.

The Stage 1 letter will also include information on who to contact if they wish to escalate the complaint to Stage 2.

Both Stage 1 and Stage 2
Where we acknowledge a Stage 1 complaint or a Stage 2 escalation, we will set out our understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the customer is seeking. We will also make it clear which aspects of the complaint we are, and are not, responsible for.

Stage 1 / 2 responses will be provided to the customer when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions will still be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the customer.

Stage 2 – Independent Review of the Complaint (target 20 working days)
A complainant can escalate to Stage 2, an independent review of the Stage 1 decision, if any part of the complaint is not resolved to their satisfaction at Stage 1.

All requests to escalate to Stage 2 will be accepted, and acknowledged by the Business Improvement team within 3 working days of the request being received. We will liaise with the complainant to find out how we can resolve their complaint at Stage 2, but the onus is on us to understand as best we can why the complainant is unhappy with our Stage 1 response.

The Independent Review will be carried out by the Director/Head of the service alongside the Head of Business Improvement who will offer advice and support.

They will review the grounds for requesting an independent investigation and will send an acknowledgement letter which will advise the name of the officer carrying out the investigation and target date for resolution.

The 20 working days for the independent investigation will commence from the day the escalation is acknowledged.

The Director/Head will contact and meet with the complainant (wherever possible) and relevant staff to gather details regarding the complaint and confirm the understanding of any unresolved issues. They will write a detailed report of their findings including recommendations to avoid similar situations arising in the future.

The investigating officers will share the findings with the relevant Head(s) of Service and managers to agree any remedial actions /changes in working practices or learning from the complaint before writing to the customer to advise of the outcome of the independent review.

The investigating officers will aim to conclude the investigation and advise the complainant of the findings and recommendations within 20 working days via letter. If the complaint cannot be dealt with within the time limit, the customer should be contacted to explain the reason for the delay and provide a revised target date for resolution. Where a revised date is required, the complainant must be provided with the contact details of the Ombudsman. As detailed under Stage 1, the extension should be signed off by the Head of Business Improvement or the Insight & Project Lead in Business Improvement.

Any extension must not exceed a further 20 working days without very good reason.

This would end our complaints procedure.

Reasonable Adjustments
We may at times, need to adapt our policies, procedures, or processes to accommodate an individual's needs. If a customer requests information in a different format, requires an advocate, needs more time to respond to complaints correspondence or any other reasonable and achievable adjustments, we will ensure that these are met. We will refer to the Customers with Additional Needs policy and the Customer Communication Needs and Preferences policy where applicable.

Closing Your Complaint
There will be occasions when a complaint has resulted in the need to carry out new repairs or potentially rectify previous repairs. If the complaint is closed and those works are still outstanding, we will continue to monitor to the complaint to ensure those works are completed to the customer's satisfaction. The final complaint letter will provide details of the works and a timeline for completion.

Repeat Complaints
Please refer to separate guidance notes on dealing with customers who misuse the complaints process or act in an unreasonable manner.

Housing Ombudsman
At the end of the Stage 2 investigation, the customer must be advised that they have reached the end of Bournville Village Trust's Complaints process and

customers have the right if they remain dissatisfied with the outcome to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service at the following address:

Housing Ombudsman Service
PO Box 1484
Unit D
Preston
PR2 0ET
www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

7. RESPONSIBILITIES

Head of Business Improvement is responsible for the implementation of this policy and future updates.

All colleagues who handle complaints and feedback at BVT are responsible for adhering to this policy and related processes.

The CEO is responsible for ensuring that the Customer and Neighbourhoods Committee has oversight of both the complaints process and complaints which could ultimately result in a reputational, financial or legal challenge being made against BVT.

8. IMPLEMENTATION

The policy will be approved by Customer and Neighbourhoods Committee.

The policy will be communicated to the Joint Leadership Team and Teams will be briefed at Team Meetings.

An update on our learnings from complaints is provided to customers in the InView newsletter.

An Annual Complaints report is published on our website, with details of the complaints we have received and our response to them, and information about the Ombudsman's services and the Complaint Handling Code

A complaints service standard is published on our website, with details of the Ombudsman's services.

This policy is also published on our website.

As discussed elsewhere in this policy, the Ombudsman's details are provided with our Stage 2 responses and with any notification of an extension to a complaints timescale.

9. MONITORING & REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed every year in line with the Housing Ombudsman self-assessment requirements or more frequently should an update be required.

10. DATA PROTECTION STATEMENT

Bournville Village Trust manages all of the data referred to in this policy in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations 2018. For more information on how we handle information, please see the Data Protection Policy and further documents contained within our Personal Information Management System.