

UNHAPPY WITH OUR SERVICE – HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT



1. **INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 At Clanmil Housing we are committed to delivering efficient and effective services that meet the needs and aspirations of our customers. It is important that the value offered by complaints and all forms of related feedback are embraced so that they act as key drivers of continuous improvement and increase overall customer satisfaction.

2. **POLICY STATEMENT**

- 2.1 We recognise that on occasions things may go wrong and customers receive services that do not meet acceptable service levels, or they feel aggrieved in the way they have been treated. A clear and systematic three stage procedure has been developed for handling complaints so that complaints are addressed speedily, in accordance with good practice, and meet with customer satisfaction.

2.2 **Policy Aims**

(1) In the application of this policy, we will endeavour to meet the following aims:-

- deliver services in accordance with existing service standards wherever possible. When things go wrong we will seek to rectify issues as quickly as possible;
- resolve all complaints at the first point of contact wherever possible;
- make it easy to complain and in a way which is most convenient for the person who wishes to complain – either verbally or in writing (e.g. in person, by telephone, by email, letter or via our web site)
- ensure all complaints are responded to within 10 working days or less, unless the investigation has not been concluded and requires longer;

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- maintain a dialogue with aggrieved customers to keep them informed of progress at all times until the complaint is successfully resolved, and wherever possible, to the satisfaction of all parties concerned;
- ensure all issues raised in a complaint are addressed, and that responses are effective, comprehensive, high quality and provide appropriate redress;
- record, monitor and analyse complaints in order to examine our service performance and help to improve service delivery;
- learn from feedback and tell customers how we have used it to improve services
- carry out satisfaction surveys to identify satisfaction levels regarding the outcome of complaints.

2.3 Definition

(1) A complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard and/or quality of service, action or lack of action by Clanmil or its staff affecting a customer or a group of customers.

2.4 Who can make a complaint?

(1) Someone who receives service from Clanmil Housing, or someone on their behalf can make a complaint. This includes:-

Clanmil Housing tenants or advocates (e.g. friends or family acting on their behalf with permission)

Clanmil Housing applicants

Non Clanmil Housing tenants or members of the public who receive a service from us or are affected by a service delivered by us;

Elected representatives e.g. MPs, MLAs and Councillors.

(2) We will investigate and respond to all complaints even if the source of the complaint is unknown. Therefore anonymous complaints will be dealt with using the complaints process but without a response.

2.5 What is a complaint? Although not exhaustive, the types of issues that may constitute a complaint could include the following:-

- dissatisfaction with standards or quality of services;
- delays in responding to enquiries or not acting on a request for a service;
- poor staff attitude or performance (i.e. not calling back or responding to enquiries)

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- failure to follow any of our policies/procedures/legislation or contractual obligations;
- unfair treatment on the grounds of equality.

2.6 A complaint is not:-

- a neighbour complaint or a report of anti-social behaviour or harassment, all of which are covered by separate policies;
- a service request, for example, advising about a responsive repair request for the first time;
- complaints about domestic or stray animals
- Issues with pests or rodents
- an act of any party providing services which are not instructed by our staff;
- complaints regarding issues that are currently subject to legal proceedings against Clanmil (this does not preclude customers from making a complaint prior to legal action);
- a complaint from work colleagues;
- claims for compensation as these matters are dealt with by a separate policy;
- a complaint about a particular policy/legislation/tenancy agreement which has been executed correctly but which the customer believes has disadvantaged them in some way e.g. arrears collection;
- a matter which occurred longer than six months ago (unless there are exceptional circumstances);

2.7 All staff should understand that, on those occasions where feedback received from our customers is not considered a complaint, that does not mean it will not be investigated further by us. Feedback provided to us and requires a response will be passed to the relevant department and dealt with at the time of receipt, and in line with timescales included in our Customer Feedback Strategy.

3. UNREASONABLE COMPLAINTS

3.1 Clanmil Housing defines complaints as unreasonable if:-

- the complainant has previously made the same complaint that was investigated but not upheld and there is no further information in support of a new complaint;
- the complaint is considered to be vexatious due to its nature or the excessive number of complaints submitted and not upheld;
- the complainant is aggressive or abusive to staff.
- the correct procedures have been followed by Clanmil staff and the tenant has been treated fairly

3.2 Each complaint will be considered separately – it will not be assumed that someone who has been unreasonable in the past will be with the next complaint.

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- 3.3 The complainant will be reminded of our complaints policy and procedures, and their right following this procedure being exhausted, to take their complaint to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman.
- 3.4 When Clanmil receives a complaint we reserve the right to consider:
- terminating a complaint early;
 - restricting all communication to writing;
 - declining further communication about a specific issue;
 - dealing with the complaint in a different way to that outlined in the policy and procedures
- 3.5 Whatever is the outcome above, our position will be confirmed to the complainant in writing where contact details are available, unless the complainant specifically requests that they do not want this

4. **COMMUNITY CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 Our complaints policy is for use by customers who are unhappy with the service(s) they have received from us, or who have been affected in a negative way through the activities of the Association.
- 4.2 We acknowledge that some people may be dissatisfied with its proposals to provide social housing in areas in which they live. All expressions of dissatisfaction received during periods of community consultation will be handled in accordance with its Community Consultation policy. This policy sets out clearly how the Association will engage with local communities and how we will deal with and respond to any expressions of dissatisfaction which are received during community consultation.

5. **IMPLEMENTATION**

- 5.1 It is our aim to resolve all complaints at the first point of contact, however, where a solution cannot be achieved at this stage we will commence an investigation.
- 5.2 In accordance with good practice, and to maximise the potential for successful resolution, there are three stages to the Association's complaints process and all internal stages should be completed in no longer than 8 weeks. The three stages are as follows:-

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The complaints process

There are three stages to our complaints process which is set out below:

Stage 1 - Front Line Resolution

We try to resolve most complaints when you first contact us. We aim to do this within 10 day working days or less.



Stage 2 - Investigation

If you are dissatisfied with the resolution by our front line staff, you will be required to put this in writing, and tell us why you are dissatisfied and your desired outcome. We will then carry out an investigation within 15 working days from this date.



Stage 3 - Independent Review

If you don't feel as though we have resolved your complaint following the investigation, within reason, you can ask for an independent review. Your complaint will then be looked at by an independent panel within Clanmil. They will decide if we have treated you fairly and done everything we can to resolve your complaint, and respond to you within 20 working days.

We will do our best to resolve your complaint within the target times shown above. However, some issues can take longer to investigate. If this is the case, we will contact you and make you aware of the new response date.

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6. **TAKING IT FURTHER**

- 6.1 Where complaints have progressed through to Stage 3 and customers have received a final written response, if they remain dissatisfied, they can take their complaint to the Northern Ireland Ombudsman at the following address:-

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
Progressive House
33 – 37 Wellington Place
Belfast
BT1 6HN

Tel: 028 9023 3821 nipso@nipso.org.uk
<https://nipso.org.uk/nipso/>

6.2 **Housing with Care**

(1) For complaints that originate at any of our Housing with Care Homes, they will be dealt with by the relevant Home Manager, however, if a resident has been placed in a Home through a Health Social Care Trust, they can forward their complaint directly to the Trust.

(2) Where any complaint has been made to Clanmil or the HSC Trust, the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) will, as part of their inspection process, assess the effectiveness of our procedures to see if there are any wider issues for the purposes of raising standards. The contact address for the RQIA is:-

RQIA
9th Floor Riverside Tower
5 Lanyon Place
Belfast
BT1 3BT

Tel: 028 9051 7500 info@rqia.org.uk

7. **LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS**

- 7.1 Clanmil Housing view complaints as an opportunity for learning. When lessons have been learnt as a result of a complaint the complainant will be told of any changes that have been made to prevent the problem recurring.

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8. **SATISFACTION AND MONITORING**

- 8.1 Following the Association's final response of the complaints procedure, we will follow up the response with a telephone call to the complainant to ask if the customer is satisfied with the outcome of the complaint and request feedback on the way their complaint was handled.
- 8.2 If there is no response in our requests for feedback within 15 days, we will assume that the complaint has been resolved satisfactorily and will therefore close the complaint.
- 8.3 Complaints Handling is a key performance indicator (KPI) for us and results regarding performance and satisfaction are presented to the Senior Management Team, Audit Committee and communicated to various stakeholders through published material e.g. Annual Report and Tenant Newsletters.