



Date of consultation: 11/8/2017

Consultation Title: Complaints Policy

Number of tenants/customers involved in consultation: 43 respondents

Method of Consultation: Survey

1. Overview of the consultation:

We reviewed our complaint policy between June – September 2017. It used to be called the Customer Complaints, Compliments and Comments Policy.

The review is to make sure that our policy meets the standards set out by the Housing Ombudsman Service and the Homes and Communities Agency in their Tenant involvement and Empowerment Standard. We also check what other housing providers offer their customers to make sure that we learn good points from other organisations.

It is important to Plus Dane that our customers have the opportunity to comment on policies that affect you so during August 2017 we asked those customers signed up to Plus Dane Voices to let us know what they thought of the proposed changes to the complaint policy and process. The consultation took the form of a survey which ran from 4th to 11th August.

During the consultation period, we sent 150 emails and 81 texts to tenants who are signed up to our Plus Dane Voices. We invited those tenants to participate in the on-line survey. We also issued 64 postal surveys to customers who aren't on-line.

The survey was also promoted on the Plus Dane Voices webpage on our Facebook and Twitter pages.

We put forward five questions in the consultation, asking for views on the proposed changes to the policy: 43 respondents completed the questionnaire, 88% of customers responded positively to the proposed changes. From those responding 'no', there were a variety of comments. The main theme of these was that customers wanted the current process to be improved by ensuring that complaints are taken seriously and complainants are kept informed of the progress of their complaint.

2. Key recommendations from the consultation:

The following is a summary of the questions asked and the tenant's responses.

Q1: We asked customers "We would like to change the name of our policy to 'Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy' to help with the introduction of the revised policy name following the review"

A1: 88% of tenants who responded agreed with the name change (38/43)

*The respondents who answered "no" told us that they wanted assurance that complaints regardless of how they were received are taken seriously.

Q2: We asked customers if they agreed to the simplified 3 stage process, and if they felt it provided customers with a more straightforward and accessible complaint handling process especially for complex cases.

A2: 84% of respondents agreed that it would (36/43)

*Of the 7 customers who disagreed, 2 of which told us that they would prefer complaints to be looked into by a manager of another area to that of the complaint.

Q3: We asked customers if the improved response times would achieve the best outcomes for our customers in the quickest time.

A3: 81% agreed that the new policy would achieve this objective (33/41)

*Customers who disagreed felt that complaints should be addressed more quickly and complainants should be kept informed of progress and advised of delays sooner.

Q4: We asked customers to make suggestions on how we can provide a better service based on their own experiences of complaint handling in other organisations.

A4: Over a third of the customers surveyed gave some suggestions on how we can provide a better service when responding to complaints (18/43):

- Learn from the issues that customers are complaining about
- Keep complainants up to date with progress
- Take complaints seriously
- Improve communications
- Make vulnerable customers feel at ease
- Do what you say you are going to do, follow up on promises
- Improve complaint handling training

Q5: Customers were asked if they agreed that the guidance for handling unreasonable, vexatious and persistent complainants is a reasonable and fair approach to for us to take.

A5: Overall, customers agreed that this is a fair and reasonable approach to take. 10 out of 43 customers answered no and suggested complainants such as these could be managed independently of the service area involved in the complaint.

3. What will Plus Dane do as a result of this consultation:

Q1: We asked customers “We would like to change the name of our policy to ‘Customer Feedback and Complaints Policy’ to help with the introduction of the revised policy name following the review”

Comments were made requesting assurance that ‘complaints regardless of how they were received are taken seriously’.

Our process will be changed to reflect these views through:

- A revised policy which reflects good practice across similar organisations
- A clear process for staff and customers to follow
- Ongoing training and development for staff who handle complaints
- Monitoring the quality of complaint handling and compliance with the agreed timescales
- A regular review of the reasons for complaints to be able to put things right.

CHANGE – We are going to call the policy the Customer Complaints and Feedback Policy to take account of the strong feelings that complaints are the most important part of the policy.

Q2: We asked customers if they agreed to the simplified 3 stage process, and if they felt it provided customers with a more straightforward and accessible complaint handling process especially for complex cases.

Our response: The majority of tenants agreed with the proposed simplified process, which is;

Stage 1 - Quick resolution (5 working days)

Stage 2 - Complaint investigation (10 working days)

Stage 3 - Complaint Review (20 working days)

A small number of customers asked if complaints could to be looked into by a manager of another area to that of the complaint – we think it is important that it is usually the manager responsible for the service being complained about as they have the greatest knowledge about how things should have been done. They would not normally have been involved in the case at this stage.

Q3: We asked customers if the improved response times would achieve the best outcomes for our customers in the quickest time.

Our response: A significant number of tenants agreed that this proposal would achieve better outcomes for our customers. A number of customers felt that complaints should be addressed more quickly and complainants should be kept informed of progress and advised of delays sooner. Our complaint team will keep a record of every complaint and make sure that the person responsible responds on time.

Q4: We asked customers to make suggestions on how we can provide a better service based on their own experiences of complaint handling in other organisations.

Our response: Points and concerns raised have been considered and are included in the full version of the revised policy.

These include:

- Learn from the issues that customers are complaining about

- Keep complainants up to date with progress
- Take complaints seriously
- Improve communications
- Make vulnerable customers feel at ease
- Do what you say you are going to do, follow up on promises
- Improve complaint handling training

CHANGE – We will look at all complaints every three months to see if there are any themes and will make changes to our procedures if we keep getting the same thing wrong.

Q5: Customers were asked if they agreed that the guidance for handling unreasonable, vexatious and persistent complainants is a reasonable and fair approach to for us to take.

CHANGE - We have changed the policy so that the Director of Customer Services who is independent of the service being complained about, will make the decision regarding when a complainant is making unreasonable demands and decide what restrictions, if any, should apply.