

Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy

1. PURPOSE

- Make giving feedback as easy and accessible as possible.
- Enable staff to seek feedback from clients as part of day-to-day support, checking with clients how best we can support them to achieve their individual goals
- Provide feedback opportunities that suit the abilities and preferences of individual clients
- Maximise the number of clients who provide feedback and use this feedback as a means of driving service improvement.
- Enable clients to have a key role in ensuring we deliver excellent quality services – taking collective responsibility for any shortfalls in service or accommodation provision identified through complaints.
- Use client experiences as a valuable asset in delivering high quality support services that meet the needs of individuals
- Ensure clients understand the value we place on feedback
- Identify and share good practice and innovation, both within and outside the organisation
- Be able to demonstrate the impact of the services clients have received from Southdown

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Southdown wishes to comply with good practice guidelines issued by the regulatory authorities and the National Housing Federation.

Care homes and supported living schemes are required by the Care Quality Commission to have a publicly available complaints procedure. It is also a requirement of contracting authorities and health trusts, for housing support, mental health recovery and community wellbeing support services.

The RSH's (Regulator of Social Housing) Consumer Standard requires Registered Provider to have procedures in place for dealing promptly and fairly with complaints from residents about services. The Housing Ombudsman has issued its Complaints Handling Code against which Southdown must assess its performance on an annual basis.

Southdown has opted to adopt one complaints procedure across its diverse range of operation, utilising the Ombudsman's' code as the basis for this.

3.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

- C-Suite have overall accountability for the implementation of organisational policies.
- The Operational Performance Group are responsible for:

- ✓ Ensuring the organisation has appropriate policies, procedures, standard operating procedures (SOP) and guidelines in place for the safe and effective running of the business
- ✓ Ensuring policies, procedures, SOPs and guidelines remain in date and holding owners to account where this is not the case
- ✓ Overseeing the work of the Policies Group
- The Policies Group is responsible for:
 - ✓ Reviewing new, or major revisions to policies and procedures
 - ✓ Ensuring the content is workable and proportionate
 - ✓ Supporting the author in implementation and communication
 - ✓ Ensuring policies and procedures align to the Beacon
- All staff must be aware of this policy and, where appropriate, receive training in receiving and dealing with feedback in a positive and professional manner.
- Complaints will be investigated by Managers skilled in dealing with complaints. It is Southdown's aim to have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments.
- Records of formal complaints will be held by the Manager, Operational Support.
- Lessons learnt meetings will take place following investigation of a complaint. Responsibility for this varies, as per the procedure, depending on the stage of the complaint and who the complaint is about.
- Feedback may be verbal or in writing, but complaints must be recorded in writing. It does not have to be the client who writes the complaint down.

4.0 POLICY - GENERAL

Feedback will be accepted from anyone, including external individuals and organisations, in person, by telephone, letter, email, via our website and social media.

This policy covers issues for which Southdown holds responsibility the linked procedure provides guidance to staff when responding to clients and tenants where some or all of the complaint relates to another party.

Where people provide positive or negative feedback about things beyond the scope of Southdown's responsibility, the service manager will discuss with the person giving the feedback how to proceed.

Southdown encourages feedback and sees this as essential as a learning organisation. Southdown provides a feedback form for clients and tenants on its website and through service

leaflets, in its annual reports to tenants, within tenant handbooks and at service and wellbeing venues. Southdown publishes details of its complaints policy and how to provide feedback alongside its annual client and tenant survey.

Feedback will be viewed positively, be part of monitoring and improving service quality, and will be dealt with promptly, efficiently and in a fair manner and take into account all relevant circumstances including contradictory views.

Staff emails and all communication about individual cases must be kept concise, factual and contain only what is needed.

Southdown will respond as requested to comments or compliments, but acknowledges the nature of formal complaints and has a Complaints Procedure 1.10b.

Southdown should not stop their efforts to address the service request or the cause of the complaint if the resident complains – efforts to continue to provide a service to clients, and tenants, and resolve any issues which may have given rise to the complaint can ordinarily be addressed in parallel with the complaints process.

5.0 COMPLAINTS

Receiving and accepting complaints

A complaint is defined as *“an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by Southdown, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual client or group of clients.”*

In some limited circumstances we may not deal with a complaint via our Complaints Procedure. These circumstances include but are not limited to:

- Where the issue being complained about happened more than 12 months ago (unless the complaint is about a recurring issue and some instances occurred more recently than 12 months ago or the complainant has only just become aware of the issue)
- Where the complainant has already started legal proceedings to address the issues being complained of, the issue will be dealt with as part of the legal process.
- Where the issue being complained about has already been investigated and responded to via both stages of our Complaints Procedure and there are no material changes that suggest that the matter is substantially different to the original complaint.
- Where the complaint is the first report of anti-social behaviour relating to a Southdown property or tenant. Complaints which relate to Southdown’s handling of previous reports of anti-social behaviour are deemed to be within scope of the complaints process, subject to the above exclusions.

If we decide not to accept a complaint, a detailed explanation must be provided to the complainant explaining the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right for tenants to take that decision to the Housing Ombudsman.

Southdown’s Unacceptable Behaviour policy allows it to place some restrictions on contact where a client continues to correspond on a wide range of issues in a way that is considered significantly disruptive or excessive. The client must be told that only a certain number of issues will be considered in a given period and be asked to limit or focus their requests accordingly.

Investigating Complaints

When dealing with a complaint, the Investigating Officer will:

- Deal with the complaint on its own merits
- Act independently and with an open mind
- Take measures to address actual or perceived conflict of interest
- Consider all information and evidence carefully
- Keep the complaint confidential as far as possible, with information only disclosed if necessary to properly investigate the matter or to resolve issues raised.

Where a complaint investigation highlights a failing, the remedy offered will reflect the extent of the failure and the level of detriment caused to the complainant as a result. This can include:

- acknowledging where things have gone wrong
- providing an explanation, assistance or reasons
- apologising
- taking action to provide redress for an issue
- reconsidering or changing a decision
- amending a record
- providing a financial remedy
- changing policies, procedures or practices.

If a complainant is unhappy with the stage 1 complaint investigation and wishes to escalate to stage 2, they should do so within 30 days of receiving our response letter.

Clients will not be discriminated against because they have made a complaint.

All Feedback will be treated confidentially and information will only be shared with those who 'need to know' or who are being consulted, except where explicit permission is given to share information.

All records and documentation will be held securely.

6.0 Compliments

A compliment is defined as *“a direct, significant expression of praise from a client or tenant, their family member or a member of the public, which they have initiated and would like recorded, regarding a service provided by Southdown or the specific behaviour of a member of Southdown staff”*.

Compliments must be recorded locally by divisional services, as per procedure 1.10c, and will be collected for periodic reporting.

We use compliments to:

- understand that our service is to the clients', families' and stakeholders' particular satisfaction
- provide positive feedback to our staff
- influence our organisational and service development
- inform us on ways that we might adjust our procedures or practices to incorporate lessons learnt from good practice

7.0 REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

We will make all reasonable adjustments to meet clients'/tenants' specific needs where possible. If a translator or a sign-language interpreter is needed to assist in making a complaint, we will make reasonable attempts to help with this.

Clients/tenants may be supported by advocates, interpreters or other appropriate facility or person they choose, to help give their feedback.

We will assist clients/tenants to make a complaint in a way easiest for them. We will not insist on complaints being made in writing but will record complaints as dictated by clients where needed.

We will consider requests from clients/tenants for more time to comply with our complaints procedure if they feel they would otherwise be unfairly disadvantaged as a result of their disability.

8.0 SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLANS

To ensure that promises of service improvements are supported by action, the administrator of complaints will seek to capture and track any service improvements or changes to policy identified through complaints. Where appropriate, we will provide feedback on action undertaken in response to complaints to the originator of the complaint. Our Annual Review of Complaints will be published on the website and provide a summary of service improvements undertaken in response to complaints received.

9.0 MONITORING & TRANSPARENCY

Southdown's routinely monitors complaints and the service improvement themes identified via its Operational Performance Group (OPG). The OPG Chair – currently the Director of Housing and Assets - holds overall accountability for the handling of complaints.

In line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, we will complete a self-assessment of our Housing complaints policy, procedure and complaints statistics annually. This will also be presented to the board.

Board will receive regular updates on complaints through its Service Quality Sub-Committee and has a nominated a Board Member who will act as the lead for complaints. This sub-committee will receive regular updates as to the number of complaints received across the organisation, any themes from these complaints and service improvement steps identified.

Annually Southdown will undertake a qualitative and quantitative review of the complaints received, including details of those complaints it has refused to accept. Southdown will publish an overview of complaints on the '*Openness and Transparency*' pages of its website, providing details of its complaints handling performance and assessment of its performance in responding to Housing complaints with reference to the Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code.