



Customer Service and Complaints Policy & Procedure

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Introduction

Empowering People, Inspiring Communities Ltd (EPIC) is committed to providing high quality services to all of its customers. This includes all tenants, leaseholders, applicants, contractors and agents or anyone else who may use our services, or is affected by our decisions.

The policy should be used for complaints about EPIC and the service that we deliver, including contractor's performance. The policy is not to be used for complaints relating to a tenancy (e.g. nuisance neighbours etc). However, it can be used to complain about our failure to deal with a tenancy appropriately.

EPIC will actively promote the Customer Care and Complaints Policy and access to the policy will be encouraged at all times. Summary leaflets about the complaints policy and our service standards are available from the office and from our website.

Aims of the Policy

The aim of the policy is to ensure that matters are resolved as quickly as possible in the most prompt, efficient and courteous manner. It will establish guidelines for setting levels of customer service, monitoring performance, measuring customer satisfaction and dealing with complaints.

Policy Statement

Customer Care

- To assist in achieving our levels of customer service EPIC will operate an efficient, helpful and customer orientated reception service during normal office hours to all of its customers whether they be in person or on the telephone. A stand by service will also be available to respond to repairs and maintenance emergencies outside office hours.
- EPIC will set Service Standards, in conjunction with its customers, which aim to deliver a high quality service that is continuously improving.
- EPIC will communicate with its customers and seek feedback via the Service Improvement Panel, and other methods as detailed in the Resident Involvement Policy, on all of its key policies and services.

- The Customer Service Standards are published in leaflet form and are available to all customers. They set out the minimum standards that you should expect when dealing with us.
- EPIC will consider the demographics of its customers and residents and stakeholders when implementing its policies and procedures.
- Where our services do not meet these standards we want to hear from you.

Performance Monitoring

- EPIC will establish performance targets for key areas of its service and monitor its achievement of those targets in accordance with Tenant Services Authority guidelines.
- The Management Board of EPIC will review performance targets regularly and will receive information detailing actual performance against targets.
- An annual report detailing EPIC's performance against its targets will be published and will be available to all tenants and other interested bodies upon request.

Customer Satisfaction Surveys

- We will seek suggestions from our customers via feedback questionnaires and other appropriate methods, for improvements and use the information provided in future policy and procedure reviews.
- Any feedback received of a negative nature will be treated as a complaint and dealt with as such.
- Performance will also be monitored by means of regular postal surveys, questionnaires and through dialogue with the Service Improvement Panel.
- EPIC will conduct a comprehensive customer satisfaction survey every 3 years.

By investigating and processing complaints, EPIC will learn from its customers and service users where mistakes have been made, where genuine grievances have arisen and ensure that these are rectified to the satisfaction of the customer/service user, wherever possible and that the circumstances do not recur.

EPIC's Definition of a Complaint:

"An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, action or lack of action by the Company or their staff affecting an individual or group of customers on a matter which is the responsibility of EPIC."

This Complaints Policy deals with complaints in any form, that is, where an individual is dissatisfied with the nature or quality of service they have received from EPIC. The following list gives examples of the types of things that people may complain about:

- How your application has been dealt with,
- Discrepancies or dissatisfaction with your tenancy or lease,
- Dissatisfaction with repairs or the way that they have been carried out,
- Dissatisfaction in how we have dealt with discrimination or harassment,
- Unsatisfactory treatment by members of staff, contractors or agents,
- Discrepancies or dissatisfaction with your rent or arrears,

- Dissatisfaction in how we have dealt with nuisance,
- Broken appointments,
- Dissatisfaction in the way EPIC has carried out its policies (but not dissatisfaction or criticism of the policy itself).
- EPIC's failure to provide a good quality service / achieve its standards.
- EPIC's failure to fulfil a statutory responsibility.

Where a customer or service user would like to complain about a company policy or procedure they will be invited to take part in the next review of that document.

EPIC's view is that all complaints are important, therefore, we decide not to distinguish between formal and informal complaints and will handle all expressions of dissatisfaction that fall within the above definition as complaints under this policy unless the complainant specifically requests not to proceed through the system.

EPIC's Promise

- At EPIC we respect your rights:
 - To be treated fairly and with dignity and respect.
 - To receive an acknowledgement of your complaint.
 - To have your complaint dealt with quickly.
 - To confidentiality at all times.
 - To representation.
 - Assistance, translation and interpretation if required.
 - To have your complaint dealt with within the timescale set out.
 - To receive a formal response explaining the actions we have taken or will be taking.
 - To be taken seriously and to have your complaint investigated thoroughly.
- EPIC will take a fair and impartial approach in order to resolve the complaint as quickly and amicably as possible.
- All complaints received will be treated in the strictest confidence.
- The making of a complaint will not affect in any way, any other application or other contact you may have with EPIC.

Equality and Diversity Statement

EPIC is committed to ensuring and promoting equality of opportunity for all. We are therefore opposed to discrimination on any grounds, including race, religion, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, age, or any unjustifiable criteria. We are committed to developing a culture that values people from all sections of society and the contribution, which each individual can make. We will also seek to apply these values to work undertaken with our partners or on our behalf by our contractors.

Monitoring and Reporting

All complaints received will be logged, analysed and reported to the Operations Committee on a quarterly basis.

Responsibilities

- The Corporate Services Co-ordinator will act as the 'Complaints Administrator' and will ensure that all complaints are recorded and handled in accordance with this policy and in an impartial and objective manner.
- The Customer Services Team are responsible for receiving and logging all feedback questionnaires, ensuring that compliments are logged and

forwarding any negative comments to the Corporate Services Co-ordinator to put through the complaints system.

- All Staff are responsible for promoting this policy to customers and service users and should ensure that any complaints that they receive are passed onto the Corporate Services Co-ordinator without delay.
- The Management Team are responsible for ensuring that all complaints are thoroughly investigated and responded to in line with this policy.
- The Corporate Services Co-ordinator is responsible for ensuring that all new staff receive training on this policy as part of their induction programme and that refresher training for all staff takes place at least every 3 years.

Review Mechanism

- The ongoing implementation of this Policy will be monitored through quarterly reports to the Operations Committee.
- This policy will be reviewed on a tri-ennial basis unless changing circumstances require an earlier review.
- Wherever possible we will involve customers and service users in the review of this policy via feedback questionnaires and the Service Improvement Panel.
- All comments received on feedback questionnaires will be used in the next review of this policy.
- Any complaints that are upheld will result in action being taken to ensure that similar complaints are avoided. This action will be reported to the Operations Committee as part of the quarterly report.

Complaints Procedures

Complaints against Wrekin Housing Trust)

As EPIC have a partnership agreement in place with Wrekin Housing Trust to deliver the Repairs function, complaints relating to this may not be able to follow the normal complaints procedure. Therefore, the following procedure should be used to deal with any such issues in a timely and effective manner.

1. All complaints regarding the repairs service or Wrekin Housing Trust should be directed to the call centre provided by Wrekin Housing in the first instance. These complaints are then logged onto their complaints system and forwarded to their Maintenance Co-ordinator to investigate.
2. The Maintenance Co-ordinator, where appropriate will liaise with the Asset Management Team at EPIC to ensure all complaints are resolved in the most appropriate manner.
3. Wrekin Housing Trust aim to resolve all complaints within 15 days.
4. Where a complainant is not happy with the response from Wrekin Housing Trust, they may then forward a complaint to EPIC for investigation. This complaint will enter the system at Stage 1 of our general procedure and will be handled by the Asset Manager. Our procedure will continue to be followed until the complaint is resolved.
5. The Corporate Services Co-ordinator will report on the number of complaints dealt with directly by Wrekin Housing Trust via the Quarterly Operations Committee report, along with the number then referred onto and investigated by EPIC.

The General Complaints Procedure

- Complaints will be accepted in any format and will be dealt with as efficiently and effectively as possible, keeping the complainant informed fully throughout.
- This procedure may be used by users of any of EPIC's services including tenants, stakeholders, leaseholders, etc.
- Complaints will be accepted verbally or in writing. Anonymous complaints will also be accepted for initial investigation in order to encourage people who would not otherwise lodge a complaint for fear of reprisals. However, unless the complainant can be identified it is impossible to take the matter further.
- Where possible complaints should be resolved by the front line staff responsible for service delivery (i.e. Administration Assistants, Trainee Housing Officers etc). It is envisaged that most complaints could be resolved in this way.

The General Complaints Procedure has 4 stages which are as follows:

- Stage 1
Where a customer is not satisfied with the response from front line staff, he/she may complain to a member of the Management Team (excluding the Chief Executive). All complaints will be acknowledged in writing within 3 working days of receipt. We will respond to the complaint within 10

working days. Where a complaint cannot be resolved within 10 working days, a further holding letter should be sent out with a new intended date of resolution.

- Stage 2
Where a customer is not satisfied with the response from the member of the Management Team, they may complain to the Chief Executive. All complaints will be acknowledged in writing within 3 working days of receipt. We will respond to the complaint within 10 working days. Where a complaint cannot be resolved within 10 working days, a further holding letter should be sent out with a new intended date of resolution.
- Stage 3
Where a customer is still dissatisfied they have a final right of appeal, to a panel of members of the Management Board of EPIC (usually 2 members plus the Chair of the Operations Committee or Chair of the Board). Only the most serious complaints should need to be resolved at this level. An acknowledgement will be sent out within 3 working days and a thorough investigation will be carried out and a meeting of the Panel within 1 month of the complaint being lodged. After the meeting the complainant will be advised of the outcome within 5 working days.
- Stage 4
In the small minority of cases where the complainant is still not happy they should then pursue the matter with the Independent Housing Ombudsman. The complainant must make their complaint to the Ombudsman within the 12 months after reaching the end of EPIC's Complaints Procedure. The Ombudsman will only deal with claims that have been previously pursued through our own complaints procedure. The Independent Housing Ombudsman can be contacted at 81 Aldwych, London, WC2B 4HN or via email at info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk.

Investigations should include contact with the complainant to clarify the issues, clarify the outcome being sought and to check their understanding of the process. This can be done either by telephone or post but should where possible be undertaken via a face to face meeting with appropriate notes taken.

When a complaint has been investigated and an outcome offered to the complainant, a period of 10 working days must be given before the complaint is considered closed. For all complaints received, investigated and closed a feedback questionnaire should be sent to the complainant seeking their views on how we handle complaints including time scales for responses etc. This will be done by the Corporate Services Co-ordinator.

If a complaint is forwarded to the Independent Housing Ombudsman for consideration, EPIC will co-operate fully and comply with all reasonable findings or recommendations.

Recording Complaints

All complaints (excluding Repairs Complaints which are detailed above) should be dealt with as follows:

- All Complaints in whatever form, should in the first instance be passed to the Corporate Services Co-ordinator.

- The Corporate Services Co-ordinator should then log all details onto the Complaints Log Database, ensuring that each complaint has a unique reference number so that they are easy to track.
- Once it has been logged the Corporate Services Co-ordinator will pass the complaint onto the most appropriate member of staff depending on which stage within the procedure it falls.
- The Corporate Services Co-ordinator should on a fortnightly basis chase progress regarding the complaint and record any details on the database as required.
- A quarterly report on the Complaints received should be presented to the Operations Committee for information.
- An annual overview of complaints received during the year will be presented to the Operations Committee, usually in May each year.
- In the absence of the Corporate Services Co-ordinator, the Administration Assistant, must ensure all complaints are received and passed onto the appropriate person.

How to Make a Complaint

Stage 1

If you are not satisfied with the response from front line staff, you may complain to a member of the Management Team (excluding the Chief Executive), All complaints will be acknowledged in writing within 3 working days of receipt. We will respond to the complaint within 10 working days.

If you are still dissatisfied you can go to:



Stage 2

The Chief Executive. All complaints will be acknowledged in writing within 3 working days of receipt. We will respond to the complaint within 10 working days.

If you are still dissatisfied you have:



Stage 3

A final right of appeal to a panel of members of the Management Board of EPIC. An acknowledgement will be sent out within 3 working days and a thorough investigation will be carried out and a meeting of the Panel held within 1 month of the complaint being lodged. After the meeting the complainant will be advised of the outcome within 5 working days.

If you are still dissatisfied you have:



Stage 4

Contact the Independent Housing Ombudsman. You must make your complaint to the Ombudsman in the 12 months after you have reached the end of our complaints procedure. EPIC will co-operate fully and comply with any findings or recommendations made.