

TRANS-PENNINE HOUSING

POLICY & PROCEDURES

COMPLAINTS



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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Trans-Pennine Housing aims to provide quality services which meet the needs of its customers. However, there may be occasions when customers are dissatisfied with the level or type of service they have received and wish to make a complaint.
- 1.2 This policy outlines Trans-Pennine Housing's approach to complaints. It does not describe in detail the formal procedure for complaints. That information is summarised in the appendices to this policy.

2. Definition

- 2.1 Trans-Pennine Housing recognises a complaint to be an expression of dissatisfaction whether justified or not.

3. Policy

- 3.1 This policy applies to Trans-Pennine Housing, Pennine Housing 2000 and Green Vale Homes. Trans-Pennine Housing, as the parent organisation, has an overview role in relation to complaints made about either subsidiary, but where possible complaints will be resolved at the local level.
- 3.2 Other references to "Trans-Pennine Housing" within this policy include Pennine Housing 2000 and Green Vale Homes.
- 3.3 Any customer of Trans-Pennine Housing may make a complaint. A customer is regarded as anyone who has contact with the company. Complaints may be received directly from customers, or from their representatives, the media or other organisations.
- 3.4 Trans-Pennine Housing will investigate all complaints made about its service to customers and aims to resolve complaints effectively and efficiently. Where possible, complaints will be resolved at the initial point of contact without initiating the official complaint procedure.
- 3.5 In implementing its complaints policy Trans-Pennine Housing will adhere to the following principles:
 - Complaints are welcome and will be used as an opportunity to improve services.
 - Complaints will be dealt with promptly, systematically and without bias.
 - Complaints will be dealt with in confidence.
 - Complainants will be kept informed of any progress.In respect of complaints that progress into the official procedure:
 - Complaints will be recorded and monitored.
 - The official complaint procedure will be clearly outlined and the various stages fully explained.

- Staff involved in implementing the complaint procedure will be properly trained.
- 3.6 There are five key steps that we will take when dealing with a complaint:
- Credibility - we must be willing to tell the truth without creating blame or excuse.
 - Dependability - we must do what we say we will do and personally make sure it happens.
 - Consistency - we must be predictable in our actions so people know what to expect of us.
 - Think like a customer - if we place ourselves in the customer's position, what would we want to happen and how?
 - Learn from problems - when things go wrong, discuss what happened and why, in a no-blame way, with colleagues; why did it go wrong, what did we do to recover the customer's trust, and how can we stop it happening again?
- 3.7 Trans-Pennine Housing is always pleased to hear from customers who would like to tell us about the good service they have received, or customers who want to make suggestions about how the service could be improved. Compliments are equally as welcome as complaints.
- 3.8 Trans-Pennine Housing aims to continually improve its service provision in all areas of operation and where appropriate will learn from the cause and outcome of customers' complaints, compliments and suggestions. Each team will discuss recent complaints and compliments at their regular team meeting to ensure that lessons are learned and shared.
- 3.9 Complaints, as well as compliments and general enquiries, do not need to be made in writing, and can be made in a variety of ways:
- By contacting or visiting one of our offices.
 - Staff are readily available in the community, at meetings and on our estates to try and resolve issues informally and quickly.
 - The "Tell us what you think" booklet is openly displayed in each reception area. For Pennine Housing customers it provides a reply-paid means of registering a compliment, complaint or other comment in one place.
 - Compliments, comments and complaints can be made via the website or direct email 24/7.
 - A "Customer Feedback" telephone service is available 24/7 to Pennine Housing customers.
 - Questionnaires and surveys on specific subjects such as the repair service.
- 3.10 Trans-Pennine Housing will publish information about its performance against standards and targets in handling complaints.

- 3.11 Trans-Pennine Housing will deal with vexatious complainants in an appropriate way. A vexatious complainant may be someone who makes repeated complaints, either related or unrelated, or who fails to accept a response within the existing policy and procedure and attempts to gain a different response by attempting to circumvent the policy, or by raising the same (or a very similar) complaint in another way.
- 3.12 Further information can be found in appendix 3 - the protocol for complaints that are pursued unreasonably.

4 Procedure

- 4.1 The official complaint procedures for Pennine Housing 2000 and Green Vale Homes can be found in the "Tell Us What You think" leaflets and in the appendices to this policy. In summary, there are three stages to the procedure.
- 4.2 Stage 1 - If the staff member who receives a complaint cannot resolve it, they will arrange for the complaint to be passed to the relevant manager, who will respond to the customer within ten working days.

Stage 2 - If the customer is unhappy with the response they receive, they may request that the relevant director/head of service reviews their complaint. For Pennine Housing customers the director may then arrange for a panel hearing with members of the Board or agree an appropriate resolution with the Chair of the Board.

Housing Ombudsman Service - If, after any such review and/or panel hearing, the customer remains unhappy, they have the option of contacting the Housing Ombudsman Service.

5. Housing Ombudsman Service

- 5.1 Trans-Pennine Housing will co-operate fully in any investigation by the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman will usually only deal with complaints about Trans-Pennine Housing from someone who:
- a) is (or was at the time of the matter complained about) a resident of the Trans-Pennine Housing Group or a representative of a resident;
 - b) has completed Trans-Pennine Housing's internal complaint procedures.
- 5.2 To contact the Housing Ombudsman Service:
- a) Write to Housing Ombudsman Service, 81 Aldwych, London, WC2B 4HN.
 - b) Telephone 020 7421 3800.
 - c) Email info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk.

6. Remedies

- 6.1 At any stage of the complaint procedure, Trans-Pennine Housing may make use of one or more of the following remedies:
- Offer an apology.
 - Explain what has been changed as a result of the complaint.
 - Arrange independent mediation.
 - Compensate the customer (after reference to the Tenant Compensation Policy).

7. Reference to other policies

- 7.1 It may be that a complaint, by its nature, is better addressed through other procedures. For example, where discrimination, harassment or staff misconduct is alleged. In these circumstances, the customer will be advised of the appropriate procedure.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 Trans-Pennine Housing will regularly consult with its customers on the effectiveness of this policy and take account of feedback in any future updates.

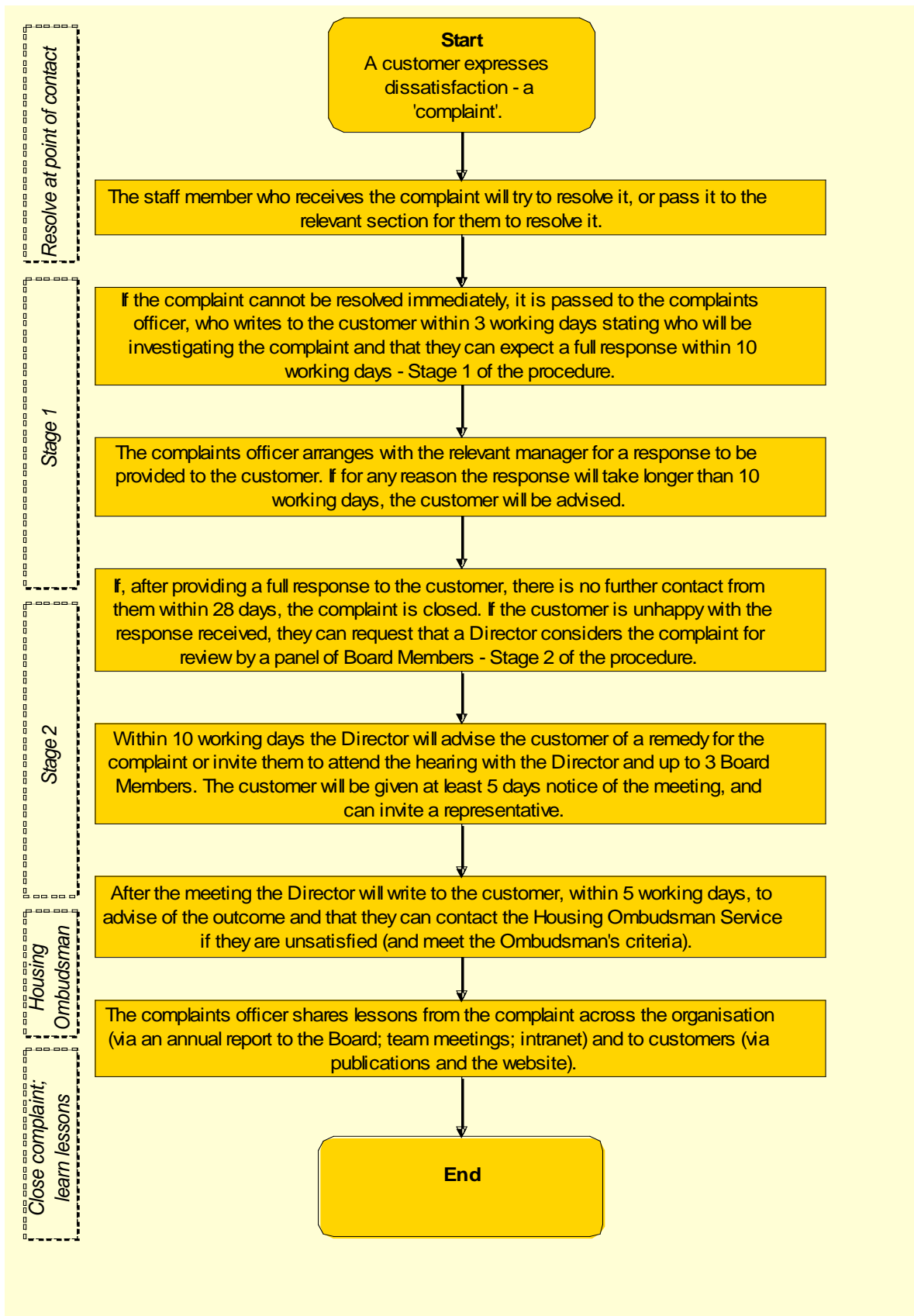
9. Review

- 9.1 A report covering the number and type of complaints received as well as action taken to resolve them will be taken to the relevant Board regularly, and at least every 12 months. Any positive feedback regarding service delivery will be highlighted to the Board.
- 9.2 This policy will be reviewed in line with the relevant service review or at least every 3 years.

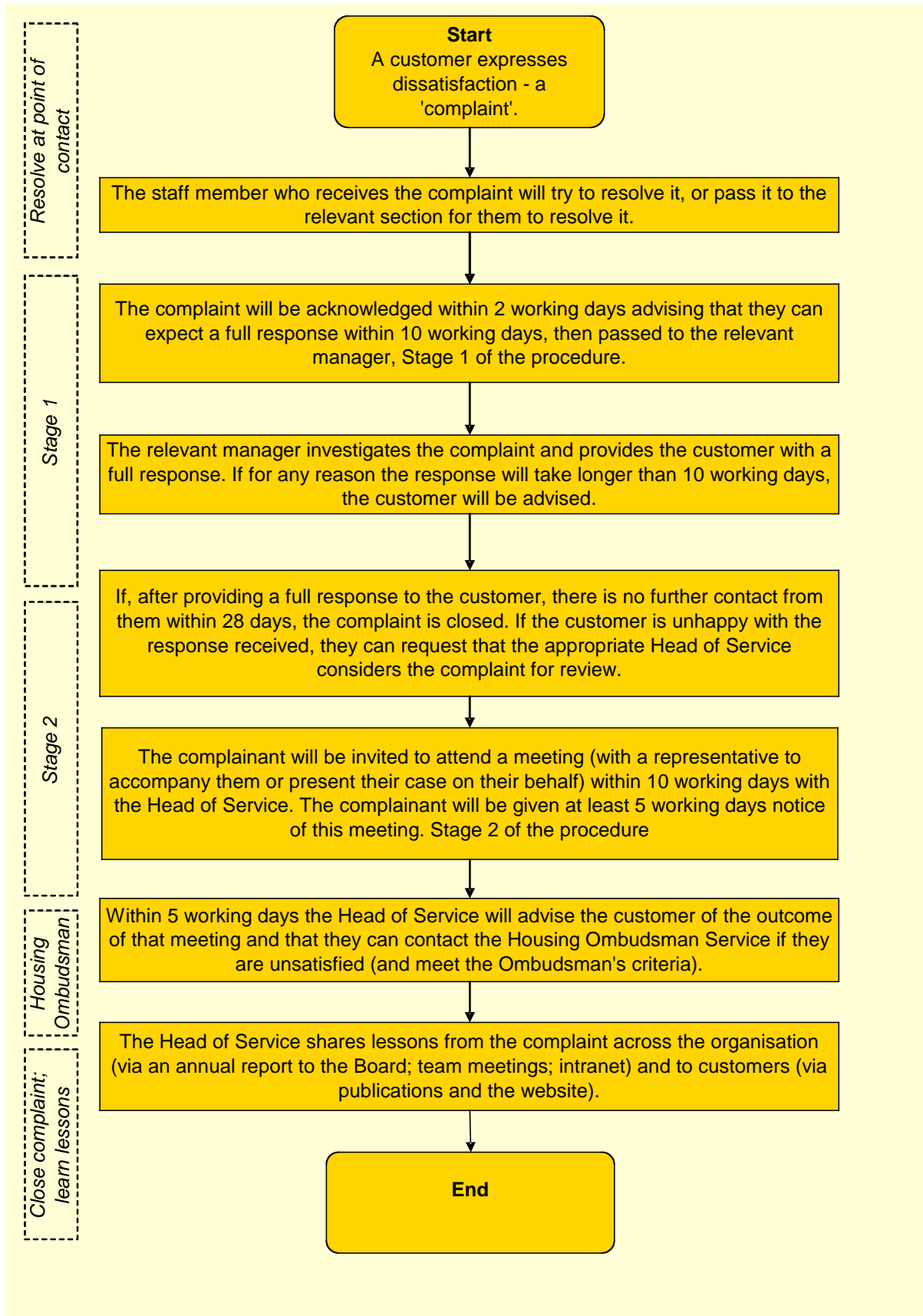
10. Responsibility

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|------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 10.1 | Responsible body | Board |
| | Policy development and monitoring | Board |
| | Implementation | Director of Corporate Services |

Appendix 1 - Pennine Housing 2000 official complaint procedure



Appendix 2 - Green Vale Homes official complaint procedure



Appendix 3 - Protocol for complaints that are pursued unreasonably

1. Aim of protocol

To deal fairly, honestly and properly with complainants who pursue complaints in an unreasonable manner while ensuring that other service users, officers and Trans-Pennine Housing do not suffer any detriment.

2. Identifying an individual who complains in an unreasonable manner

This protocol deals with individuals who contact Trans-Pennine Housing and complain about issues that they consider to be within the remit of Trans-Pennine Housing but whose behaviour is characterised by:

- (a) Actions that are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious and/or
- (b) An insistence on pursuing unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason and/or
- (c) An insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints in an unreasonable manner
- (d) Making the same enquiry through a number of officers without providing Trans-Pennine Housing with an opportunity to respond within appropriate timescales
- (e) Complaints that are non-specific

3. Consideration of representations

Where officers form the view that they are dealing with a complainant pursuing their complaint in an unreasonable manner, the case should be referred as soon as possible to the relevant Head of Service/Director for the purpose of considering whether this protocol should be applied to that complainant.

Before applying this protocol the relevant Head of Service/Director should consider whether the complainant has been supplied with all appropriate information about relevant decision making processes. Consideration should then be given to alternative methods of managing the complaint, for example by:

- The relevant officers from Trans-Pennine Housing meeting the complainant to address any outstanding issues
- Employing an independent person to mediate

If no alternative means are appropriate or if they are tried without success and this protocol is to be applied, the Head of Service/Director will determine how Trans-Pennine Housing responds to the complainant by considering the following options:

- (a) Whether to convene a strategy meeting to co-ordinate the service(s)/Trans-Pennine Housing's approach
- (b) Whether to restrict direct contact from and to the complainant to a single named officer
- (c) The additional support to be given to any officer identified in (b) above
- (d) Whether to impose any restriction on the means and manner of contact available to the complainant
- (e) Whether a plan for relations with the media is required
- (f) What assistance might be offered by external agencies
- (g) Whether Trans-Pennine Housing should consider any formal legal action
- (h) Whether any other action would be prudent and/or appropriate in the circumstances of the particular case

Any action under (b) and (d) and, where appropriate, under (f) and (h) should be clearly and promptly communicated to the complainant, with reasons where appropriate.

In any eventuality, the strategies adopted, whether in a particular case or generally, should be formally reviewed by Joint Management Team at least once every six months.

If a complainant is being dealt with under this protocol, this information should be shared in confidence with the Director of Corporate Services and/or nominated officers of other service(s) to avoid duplication of the same or a similar complaint and, where appropriate, to ensure that responses are co-ordinated.

4. Responses when a complaint has been dealt with in Trans-Pennine Housing's complaint procedure

If a complainant continues to express dissatisfaction with Trans-Pennine Housing's final response to a complaint:

- a) Where possible the complainant should be offered further clarification of the decision reached. They should also be reminded of their right to refer their complaint to:

- The Housing Ombudsman Service
- The Housing Corporation if the complainant considers that Trans-Pennine Housing has failed to meet a statutory duty

In addition, the complainant may be reminded of their right to take independent legal advice.

- b) If the complainant continues to complain, Trans-Pennine Housing should repeat the advice in (a) above and add that the matter is now at an end and that Trans-Pennine Housing will not enter any further communication unless it relates to a fresh complaint unrelated to the current one.
- c) If the complaints continue then Trans-Pennine Housing should send a response in the following terms:

"I acknowledge your letter/email/telephone call dated { }, the contents of which are noted. Unfortunately, I am unable to add to the comments and explanations in my letter dated { }, a further copy of which is enclosed for your convenience."
- d) If contact continues, subject to authorisation by the Director of Corporate Services, Trans-Pennine Housing should inform the complainant in writing that it will not respond further.

An officer who receives further telephone calls about the complaint may advise the complainant that they do not intend to continue with the call and may terminate it.

N.B. Correspondence and any other communication must be monitored to ensure it does not contain a new complaint or fresh relevant information about a previous complaint that the complainant neither knew nor ought to have known about at the time of making the original complaint. If a fresh issue is raised that needs to be addressed, it should first be referred to the appropriate service manager or to their nominee(s) so that consideration may be given to whether a strategy meeting is appropriate. (See 3 above.)