

Customer Complaints Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Stoll believes that all customers and stakeholders have the right to express their views on how our services are managed; Stoll accepts that this may sometimes come in the form of a complaint.
- 1.2. Stoll is committed to encouraging customers and stakeholders to come forward with any complaints about the services delivered in order to make sure that quality is maintained and enhanced, and customers' needs are appropriately met.
- 1.3. Stoll is required by legislation and regulation to have a complaints policy. As such, we have reviewed this policy to ensure it:
 - Complies with the Housing Ombudsman scheme and complaint handling code.
 - Complies with the Social Housing Regulator's standards, including the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment standard.
 - Helps us to continually improve.

2. Scope and definitions

2.1. The Housing Ombudsman defines a complaint as:

“An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.”

2.2. Matters that may lead to a complaint include when:

- We fail to meet our legal duties, promises or standards we have set.
- We do something wrong, poorly, or fail to do something we should.
- We are impolite or unhelpful.

2.3. We are unable to consider the following as complaints for handling under this policy:

- It is a first request for a service or information, or we have not exceeded the timescales set out in our service standards.
- It is a complaint about another resident, for example a report of anti-social behaviour (ASB). This would be dealt with by our ASB or Tenancy team.
- Legal proceedings against us are started or are already in progress. This is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court.
- Matters that have previously been considered under the complaints policy.
- You refuse to reasonably engage with us after making your complaint, are abusive to staff or act unreasonably.

2.4. A complaint does not need to be made in writing and can be made to us in a number of ways:

- By telephone to 020 7385 2110
- Online at: <https://www.stoll.org.uk/residents/my-tenancy/>
- Face to face with any member of staff.
- By letter to: Corporate Services, Stoll, 446 Fulham Road, London, SW6 1DT
- By email to: info@stoll.org.uk

2.5. The word 'complaint' does not have to be used for it to be logged and handled in line with the Complaints Procedure providing it meets the definition in 2.1 above.

2.6. Complaints are dealt with according to the following stages.

- Stage 1 - a complaint that cannot be resolved immediately and to the complainant's satisfaction.
- Stage 2 – an appeal against the outcome of a complaint at stage 1 or an appeal against a decision under the Allocations Policy.
- Stage 3 – an appeal against the outcome of a complaint at stage 2 reviewed by a member of the Housing Services Committee.
- External process for housing complaints only – an appeal to an independent designated person and / or escalation to the Housing Ombudsman.

3. Legislation and regulation

3.1. Listed below are the key regulatory standards and statutory Acts that have been acknowledged.

- Regulatory framework, including the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard
- Housing Act 1996 (section 51, schedule 2)
- Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code (updated 1 April 2022)
- General Data Protection Regulations 2018
- Data Protection Act 2018

3.2. Under the Data Protection Act 2018, General Data Protection Regulations 2018 and the Human Rights Act 1998, all personal and sensitive organisational information, however received, is treated as confidential, including:

- anything of a personal nature that is not a matter of public record about a customer or stakeholder
- sensitive organisational information

Officers will ensure that they only involve other agencies and share information with the consent of the resident concerned, unless:

- Stoll is required to by law
- the information is necessary for the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults.

4. Policy Objectives

4.1. The objectives of this policy are to:

- resolve complaints quickly and sensitively Be fair – treat people fairly and follow fair process, keeping the complainant updated with progress within published timescales.
- be objective – ensure that the complaint is dealt with impartially at every stage.
- be consistent.
- Learn from outcomes – learn from complaints and use the information to improve services.
- resolve complaints at the first point of contact wherever possible.

- manage all complaints in an open and accountable way, keeping the complainant suitably informed throughout the process.
- provide an independent approach.
- put things right – work to put the customer back into the position they were in before the issue occurred. Acknowledge and apologise for any mistake or service failure, providing an explanation of what went wrong and where we (or a contractor working on our behalf) were at fault.
- monitor serious complaints at Board level.
- use complaints to help us improve our services and reduce the level of complaints in the future.

5. Implementation

5.1. To achieve the policy objectives, Stoll will:

- ensure that all customers and stakeholders know how to complain; complaints should be made within six months of the issue/incident. However, we understand there may be exceptional circumstances that may prevent a complaint being raised earlier and each case will be considered on its own merit.
- follow the complaints procedure fairly and consistently; whether the complaint is made in person, or through another.
- maintain the confidentiality of sensitive information at all times.
- make personal contact with complainants, ideally face to face or by telephone, to understand their complaint, attempt resolution and update them.
- seek to acknowledge and log all complaints in writing within five working days.
- Aim to respond to Stage 1 complaints within ten working days from the date the complaint is logged. Where this is not practically possible, we will give reasons and agree new timescales with the complainant.
- review and respond to Stage 2 complaints within twenty working days following receipt of the escalation request or agree new timetables where further investigation is required.
- review and respond to Stage 3 complaints within twenty working days following receipt of the escalation request or agree new timetables where further investigation is required.
- ensure the complainant knows that they have twenty working days to respond to the outcome letter should they want to escalate the complaint to the next stage.
- support vulnerable customers through the complaints process and, where appropriate, refer them to alternative services that may be able to assist.
- help access independent advocacy where the complainant lacks capacity to make the complaint or take part in the investigation and outcome.
- provide alternative avenues to seek support when the service requested is outside Stoll's remit where appropriate and where possible.
- communicate that unreasonable or abusive complaints will be dealt with under the Unacceptable Behaviour Policy.
- maintain a named independent designated person to function as arbitrator as required following appeal at Stage 3 if required.
- ensure best practice is maintained in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.
- monitor and analyse complaints at senior management meetings.

5.2. Complaints made to the Chief Executive (CE)/Trustees

All letters, emails and telephone calls raising complaints with the CE or Trustees will be forwarded to the Corporate Services team to handle in line with the complaints policy. This approach helps to ensure that everyone receives an equal service and that no-one is able to bypass the complaints procedure.

5.3. Anonymous complaints

Stoll is unable to investigate anonymous complaints under this policy, as there would be insufficient information for us to do so. However, such cases may be passed to the manager responsible for the day-to-day service for action, for example if they relate to safeguarding concerns or reports of tenancy fraud.

5.4. Designated Persons and the Housing Ombudsman

5.4.1. Complainants have the right to contact the Housing Ombudsman throughout the handling of their complaint for guidance and support, and do not have to exhaust our complaints process before doing so. This affords the resident the opportunity to engage with the Ombudsman's dispute support advisors for impartial advice.

5.4.2. If complainants have been through all three stages of our complaints procedure but are still unhappy, they have the right to refer their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman. The Housing Ombudsman is responsible for investigating social housing complaints. This referral may be by a designated person or directly by themselves.

5.4.3. The Housing Ombudsman can be contacted:

- Telephone: 0300 111 3000
- Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk
- Online: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk
- Post: Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool L33 7WQ

5.4.4. Stoll will publicise the complaints policy and process, the Complaint Handling Code and the Housing Ombudsman Scheme in leaflets, posters, newsletters, online and as part of regular correspondence with residents.

5.5. If the complaint covers allegations of discrimination or abuse then the Harassment, Anti-social Behaviour and Safeguarding policies should be referred to.

5.6. If the complaint covers discrimination, then the Equality and Diversity Policy should also be referred to.

5.7. The Chair of the Housing Services Committee has lead responsibility at Trustee level for complaints. The Board of Trustees will monitor complaints that go to appeal at Stage 3 of the procedure.

6. Equality and diversity

6.1. Stoll is committed to giving our customers, staff and stakeholders the information they need in ways they can understand. It is our intention to produce clear written documents so that they can be understood by as many people as possible. We expect staff to be sensitive to the needs of residents who cannot read, this includes having an awareness of the issues surrounding both illiteracy and dyslexia.

6.2. In the implementation of this policy Stoll will ensure that no-one is treated unfairly on the grounds of individual protected characteristics.

6.3. We may offer an adjusted service where necessary, for example to accommodate a specific health or vulnerability need.

7. Monitoring

7.1. Gathering feedback from our customers on their experience of our services is important. We use this feedback to improve the service we provide. All complaints

received are reported to the Corporate Services Team who monitor the progress and outcomes of the complaints and report to senior management meetings, where lessons learned can be disseminated through the teams.

7.2. The executive will report annually on the volume, trends, categories and outcome of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance including compliance with the Ombudsman's orders

7.3. Self-assessment

Stoll will conduct an annual assessment (or following a significant restructure and/or change in procedures) in light of the Housing Ombudsman Code to ensure complaint handling remains appropriate. The results will be published on our website and in our Annual Report.

8. Communication and consultation

8.1. This policy is published on our website, together with guidance on how we will handle complaints. The complaints policy and procedure are also available on request from the Corporate Services team.

8.2. All housing policies are approved by the Housing Services Committee which includes two tenant members

9. Policy Review Form

Date of review:	September 2022
Date of next review:	September 2025
Approved by SMT on:	7 th September 2022
Approval by Trustee Sub-committee on:	22 nd September 2022

Version Control			
Version	Type of Change	Date	Revisions from previous issues
01	Review	2016	New policy
02	Review	2019	Revision of complaints stages Updated legal framework Include external process Addition of Trustee monitoring
02	Review	2022	Revision in accordance with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint's Code

10. Equality Impact

Stoll strives to ensure equality of opportunity for all service users and the workforce. As an employer and a provider of housing and support services Stoll aims to ensure that none are placed at a disadvantage as a result of its policies and procedures. All policies and procedures are written to ensure fairness and consistency for all those covered by it regardless of their individuality.