



Title: Complaints Procedure – Sanctuary Students

Business Function: Sanctuary Students

Author(s): Operations/Accommodation Manager

Other Contributors: Regional Managers

Authorised by: Director – Sanctuary Students

Sanctuary Group:

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a subsidiary of Sanctuary (Liverpool) Housing Association Limited.

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General Information

1. Objective of this procedure

- 1.1 Complaints are a valuable source of business information and Sanctuary Students (Sanctuary) can learn important lessons that can drive service improvements.
- 1.2 The aim of this guidance is to provide a simple but effective method of resolving customer dissatisfaction. It sets out what Sanctuary defines as a complaint, the stages of the complaints procedure, records management and complaint outcomes.

2. Responsibilities for implementation

- 2.1 The Director – Sanctuary Students has ultimate responsibility to ensure the procedure is adhered to. This is supported by the Regional Managers who are responsible for overseeing complaints management across Sanctuary Students, and ensuring that key lessons are learnt from complaints.
- 2.2 Sanctuary has an appointed Complaints Champion with responsibility for:
 - providing assistance and training to staff in using the complaints handling procedure and complaints IS system;
 - monitoring use of the complaints system and highlight any training issues;
 - monitoring complaints not yet resolved and issue reminders to officers to help meet target timescales for dealing with complaints;
 - re-assigning complaints where they have not been resolved and staff members are absent, for example, through sick leave;
 - logging and assigning generic complaints received, for example, received through the general email address;
 - helping decide who should deal with a complaint where the complaint is received by someone who is not responsible, or where the complaint is complex and covers more than one service area;
 - re-opening complaints on the complaints system where this is required;
 - ensuring that appropriate lesson learned from complaints are recorded;
 - carrying out audits of system use and progressing issues with senior managers; and
 - recording that satisfaction surveys are not sent on system.

3. Definitions

- 3.1 A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the service provided or the action taken (or not taken), where an initial response has not proven satisfactory. An example of a complaint could be:
 - anything perceived to have been done incorrectly or poorly;
 - something not done, for example, failure to complete a repair within the stipulated time;
 - impolite or unhelpful staff; or
 - failure to provide a specified service within agreed timescales.

3.2 An example of a serious complaint could be:

- a situation that could be considered to contravene Sanctuary Group's equal opportunity or diversity strategies;
- a serious breach of policies and procedures;
- a complaint of a sensitive nature; or
- a neighbour complaint or a report of Anti Social Behaviour or Harassment.

Such complaints should be discussed with a Senior Manager for progression to Stage 2.

3.3 A complaint is not:

- an issue which is reported for the first time, for example, advising that windows need cleaning, the property heating has failed;
- an act of any party providing services which are not commissioned by staff;
- a complaint about a policy which has been executed correctly which the customer feels has disadvantaged them in some; or
- a matter which occurred longer than 12 months ago, or within a previous tenancy cycle.

4. Principals

- Sanctuary will not consider complaints where the service or incident being reported occurred over 12 months ago.
- If an anonymous complaint is received and it is of a genuine nature then this must still be investigated through the complaints process and monitored, although no response will be possible.
- For some complaints, it may be necessary to use other procedures, for example, complaints about neighbours must be referred to the Code of Conduct or tenancy/licence agreements.
- Wherever possible, staff must have personal contact with the complainant at all stages to resolve the complaint.
- The complainant must be informed, in writing, at all stages of the process, including confirming verbal communication. Template letters are located on SOLIS. These letters are for guidance; they are not prescriptive and allow for changes to reflect the individual nature of each complaint.
- Where a complaint is received from a third party, for example, a resident's parent, an acknowledgement must be sent to the third party advising that future correspondence will be with the tenant. This is in accordance with data protection. Discretion can be applied if the resident confirms in writing that they wish correspondence to go to the third party.
- Designated officers must initially focus on conciliation and finding a solution to the problem when a complaint is received.
- If a complaint is made against a member of staff, their line manager must be informed immediately to investigate any allegations. If a complaint has been made against a Manager, then the Senior Manager, or an officer delegated with the task by the Senior Manager, will investigate the complaint. There will be no occasions where a member of staff who is the subject of a complaint will investigate that complaint.

- If an offensive complaint is made, for example, where the complainant has made racist or discriminatory remarks, a designated officer must refer the complaint to the Senior Manager to investigate and respond.

Detailed Procedures

1. Receiving a complaint

1.1 When receiving a complaint, staff are expected to:

- contact the complainant, either in person or by telephone;
- be professional, understanding and patient by showing an interest and actively listening to the complainant;
- decide if this constitutes a complaint and if so whether it would be considered a serious complaint;
- focus on resolving the complaint at the point of origin;
- find out if the matter has been raised before;
- investigate and take all complaints seriously;
- refrain from criticising or blaming the Complainant if the problem has arisen from a misunderstanding on their part; and
- avoid blaming other parties.

1.2 If a complaint is received in person or over the telephone, the staff member must complete the 'Complaints Form' found under **Appendix 1**.

1.3 If a complaint is received in writing, by letter or email, provided full details are included, the email may be accepted as notification of their complaint.

1.4 All complainants must be issued with a copy of the 'Complaints Procedure Leaflet' found under **Appendix 2**.

2. Stages of the complaint process

2.1 There are two stages to the complaints process, as detailed below.

- Stage 1** -
- Stage 1 is for initial complaints
 - The complaint is investigated by the designated officer. For example, Site staff with designated responsibility
 - The complaint must be acknowledged within **two working days** and receive a full written response. or detailed verbal explanation (supported by file notes), within **10 working days**
 - If the complainant does not respond within four weeks, the complaint will be closed
 - If on response the complainant meets the criteria to progress to Stage 2, then the complaint must be acknowledged within **two working days** to confirm escalation to Stage 2

- Stage 2** -
- Stage 2 is appropriate where the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome at Stage 1, and has justifiable grounds to move the complaint to the next stage or the initial complaint

is of a serious nature

- The complaint is investigated by a Senior Manager. For example, City/Operations Manager
- The complainant must receive a full written response, or detailed verbal explanation (supported by file notes), within **10 working days**
- If the complainant does not respond within four weeks, the complaint will be closed
- If the complainant remains unsatisfied with the Stage 2 response:
England - this is final and complaint is closed
Scotland - advise they can refer to the University or Ombudsman
- Close the complaint on the system.

3. Investigating a complaint

3.1 Whilst investigating the complaint:

- keep the Complainant informed of progress with the complaint at all stages;
- gather as much information as possible to enable the complaint to be resolved quickly;
- ensure that any failure in service delivery is rectified, and apologise on behalf of Sanctuary Students to the Complainant if a failure in service delivery is proven;
- ensure that effective services are maintained to the Complainant and to any other parties involved in the complaint, e.g. that no one is treated unfairly because of the complaint;
- confidentiality must be maintained as far as possible when dealing with a complaint and care must be taken when discussing details with other staff *members*;
- if the complaint is complicated and it proves to be impossible to give a properly considered response within the timescale, the complainant must be kept informed of the reason for the delay and when they are likely to receive a response – it is important that the complainant does not get the impression that the complaint is not being dealt with. The complaint must be extended on the system and relevant correspondence uploaded.

4. Reaching a decision

4.1 To reach a reasonable and appropriate decision, the person responsible should:

- consider all the information presented;
- consider the complaint made against Sanctuary and decide whether to uphold or overturn the previous decision(s) made;
- ensure that any policies have been correctly implemented;

- ensure that reasonable care has been taken in the manner with which the complaint has been dealt with, and that there have been no unreasonable delays; and
- recommend future changes to policy or practice.

5. Response letters

5.1 Response letters should include:

- the detail of the complaint;
- details of the steps taken to investigate the complaint;
- the decision, providing reasons for the decision;
- any steps that have been, or will be taken to rectify the complaint; and
- where appropriate, an apology if a service failure is proven; and
- the process and timescale for the complainant to follow if they are not satisfied with the outcome.
- the three stages of grounds for escalation (refer to guidance)

6. Applying Compensation/ Good Will Gesture in the Absence of a Formal Complaint

6.1 Compensation in the form of cash/credit payment, vouchers or goodwill gestures (for example, delivery of pizza to the flat) can be applied where the Accommodation Manager is aware of an issue, such as protracted heating/hot water failure, and would prefer to offer an informal approach rather than the complaint be escalated formally.

6.2 The Accommodation Manager must seek approval from the City or Operations Manager before this method is applied.

6.3 The complaint system must be used to record the information; completing in the same way as a formal complaint. Please refer to the 'Additional Guidance – Complaints Step by Step Guide' and 'How to use the Complaints system' found on the Sanctuary Students Best Practice pages on SOLIS. This provides an audit trail to support Government Procurement Card (GPC) or Expenses Claim and records detail of the issues which warrant the compensation/goodwill approach.

6.4 A note must be added stating action taken for example, 'further to discussion with the residents it was agreed provision of a £20 voucher for Marks and Spencer in recognition of the inconvenience caused' and emails/communication with the residents should be recorded.

6.5 The complaint can then be closed. Details must be given on the compensation/type that were offered. For a cash/credit refund, this will be detailed as compensation. Vouchers or similar can be detailed as a goodwill gesture, confirming date purchased with the information reconciling with that logged on the GPC site; for example, the resident name / flat details / key issue information. It is good practice to add in a 'learning outcome'.

6.6 Should the complaint become formal, then a new complaint must be raised on the complaint system.

7. Record Keeping and Reporting

7.1 The person(s) responsible for dealing with the complaint at each stage of the complaints process must ensure that the details of the complaint are recorded on the complaints system, and that the system is updated to reflect the progress of the complaint.

7.2 Please refer to the 'Additional Guidance – Complaints Step by Step Guide' found on the Sanctuary Students Best Practice pages on SOLIS.

7.3 Managers must also ensure that full and accurate file notes are kept of all correspondence, visits and phone calls relating to the complaint. Any verbal communication requires to be followed up with a letter to the complainant.

7.4 Learning outcomes must be added on closing the complaint.

7.5 Managers must complete a Customer Journey form for the complaint and review with relevant staff through team meetings.

8. Unreasonable or unreasonably persistent complainants

8.1 For Sanctuary, an unreasonable or unreasonably persistent complaint is a service user who takes up a repeated and excessive pursuit of:

- unreasonable complaints and/or unreasonable outcomes;
- persistent complaints about a series of issues;
- reasonable complaints, but in an unreasonable manner.

8.2 The behaviour may be:

- Persistent - incessant, repeated, unrelenting.
- Serial - story told in instalments, usually at regular intervals.
- Vexatious - when used legally, a specific term where actions or proceedings are being undertaken without sufficient grounds designed to cause annoyance. This term should only be used in these limited cases.

8.3 Designated officers are advised to refer to the unacceptable customer behaviour section within the Group's Complaint Procedure when dealing with such complaints.

Supporting Information

1. Client procedures

1.1 Due to the diverse nature of Sanctuary Student's business, there may be specific guidelines/procedures that individual clients may wish Sanctuary to use in tandem with the complaint procedure. In such instances staff should adhere to

Sanctuary's procedures/system use and update in notes section regarding variances.

- 1.2 For Halls governed by the ANUK National Code of Standards there is an option for a complainant who is unsatisfied to complain to the National Code Administrator for issues that are covered by the National Code.

2. **Dealing with complaints lodged directly to Head Office**

- 2.1 Head Office personnel will contact Sanctuary Student staff to advise of how complaints submitted to Head Office will be handled for example, where there is Member of Parliament involvement. Sanctuary Students will be guided by such requests.