

Chapter 19

Telling us what you think

Customer feedback

We welcome any form of feedback, including suggestions, compliments and complaints. We are committed to making sure that we use customer feedback to help us improve our services and focus on the needs of our customers. Our staff will accept feedback from you in any form, and as a customer you should never hesitate to offer feedback of any kind.

You can make a suggestion, give us a compliment or complain in the following ways.

- Fill in and return the tear-out form in our feedback leaflet, 'Complaints, compliments and suggestions,' which you can get from any Customer Services Centres.
- Contact the relevant Homes for Haringey service in writing, by phone, in person, by fax, by e-mail, or on our website. Use the online form on our website at www.homesforharingey.org.

We know that not everyone can access our services in the same way. To give everyone an equal opportunity to give feedback, we offer:

- translators and interpreters;
- audio tapes;
- sign language;
- documents in Braille; and
- minicom and textphone services.

Suggestions and compliments

- When we receive a suggestion, we will write to thank you within two working days. A manager will let you know within 15 working days how we are taking your suggestions on board.
- It is important that you tell us what we are doing well - so we make sure we keep doing it. If we receive a compliment, we will write to you within 10 working days to let you know we have passed your compliment to the officer concerned.

Complaining to us

We want to provide good quality services for everyone, but we know that things sometimes go wrong. If they do, we need to know so that we can put them right and learn from them.

If you want to make a complaint about a service that we provide, you can contact us by:

- filling in the form in our booklet 'Complaints, compliments and suggestions';
- filling in the online form on our website at www.homesforharingey.org;
- phoning us on 020 8489 4337, 020 8489 4321, 020 8489 4235 or 020 8489 4646;
- e-mailing us at complaints@homesforharingey.org;
or
- writing to us at:

**Homes for Haringey
Feedback Team**

Freepost RRBE-JGLA-ATLY
13-27 Station Road, Wood Green
London N22 6UW.

If you make a complaint to us and a council service should deal with your complaint, we will pass it on to the right team and let you know that we have done so. There may also be other occasions when we cannot investigate your complaint. Again, we will let you know and, where possible, put you in touch with someone else who may be able to help.

The complaints process

First, it is always better to try to get problems solved by your local office. If you would like some informal advice on making a complaint, please call the Feedback Team on the phone numbers above.

Our complaint process has three stages and is designed to be as user-friendly as possible. Please let us know if you need help with your complaint so that we can organise an interpreting service or arrange for Braille or signing facilities.

Stage zero – sorted out sooner

- When we receive a basic complaint, we will try to sort it out in two working days. If that is not possible and you remain unhappy we will automatically carry out a stage one investigation.

Stage one – local solution

- We will write to you within two working days to acknowledge your complaint and to give you the name and contact number of the person dealing with your complaint.
- We will then aim to investigate your complaint fully within 10 working days, and the

investigator will write to you with their findings. If we are not able to meet this target, we will let you know, and usually say when we will be able to respond to you.

Stage two – service investigation

- If you are not happy after the first stage of our complaints process, you can contact a member of the Feedback Team to let them know why. If we are not able to sort out the problem, we will write to you within two working days with details of the person who will be investigating your stage two complaint.

A senior manager who was not previously involved with your complaint will investigate it, and write to you with their findings within 20 working days. If they are not able to meet this target, we will let you know and usually say when we will be able to respond to you.

Stage three – independent review

If you are still not happy after stage two of our complaints process, you can contact Haringey Council's Central Feedback Team to say why. The Central Feedback Team will independently review how we have

handled your complaint and carry out an investigation.

The Central Feedback Team will write to you within two working days of receiving your complaint to give you details of the person dealing with your complaint. The investigator will reply to you in full within 20 working days.

Central Feedback Team

Phone: 020 8489 2550

Fax: 020 8489 2533

E-mail:

centralfeedback@haringey.gov.uk

Minicom: 020 8489 2535

Taking your complaint further

Local Government Ombudsman

If you are still not happy after complaining to us you can contact the Local Government Ombudsman. The ombudsman will usually only investigate your complaint after you have been through at least stage one of our complaints process.

The ombudsman is an independent person who investigates complaints about local authorities. The ombudsman does not investigate all cases and will only consider matters

such as neglect, unjustifiable delay or failure to follow our policy. When the ombudsman receives a complaint, he or she will investigate it, taking evidence from both sides to reach a decision. This decision will be final. Investigations by the Local Government Ombudsman can last a long time and should be used only as a last resort when you feel you have a very serious complaint.

If you feel we have not dealt with your complaint satisfactorily, you can contact the ombudsman.

Local Government Ombudsman
Millbank Tower, Millbank
London SW1P 4QP
Phone: 020 7217 4620
Fax: 020 7217 4321
Advice line: 0870 602 1983
Website: www.lgo.org.uk

Your elected representative

Your local councillor or Member of Parliament can also help you to make a complaint. If you want to contact either a councillor or a Member of Parliament, you can write to them or go to one of their surgeries. You can get details from your local Customer Services Centre, Haringey libraries, council offices and other buildings.

Mediation

If you are disputing your service charge and have been through at least the first two stages of our complaints process, we may agree for the Leasehold Advisory Service (LEASE) to mediate and find a solution.

If we agree to use the LEASE mediation scheme, we will pay the £200 LEASE application fee if the service charge you are disputing is more than £1,000 as at January 2008. You will have to pay £100 (and we will pay the other £100) if the service charge you are disputing is less than £1,000. In some cases, we may not agree to mediation, for example:

- if the amount you are disputing is too small;
- if there are legal issues involved and it is more appropriate that they are dealt with by the courts or the Leasehold Valuation Tribunal; or
- if you have not been through at least the first two stages of the complaints process first.

You can get details from the Home Ownership Team or LEASE.

Leasehold Advisory Service (LEASE)

31 Worship Street, London
EC2A 2DX

Phone: 020 7374 5380

E-mail: info@lease-advice.org

Website: www.lease-advice.org

Leasehold Valuation Tribunal (LVTs)

The Leasehold Valuation Tribunals (LVTs) help to deal with disagreements between leaseholders and landlords, including disputes about service charges. See chapter 6, 'Your rights' for more details.

Legal action

In some circumstances you can take us to court. If you are considering this option, you should get expert advice first from a solicitor, an advice bureau or a law centre. If there is current legal action, we cannot investigate your feedback at the same time. Legal action overrules the feedback process.

Disagreeing with decisions — reviews and appeals

If you disagree with a Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit decision, you must first contact the

Benefits Service in writing within one calendar month of the date on their decision letter. An appeals officer will check the decision again and let you know in writing whether the decision can be changed.

If you are still not happy with the decision, you must write to the Benefits Service giving your reasons for disagreeing with the decision of the appeals officer. You may also have the right to appeal to an independent tribunal. You can get more information about your rights to appeal against a benefit decision in a leaflet from the Benefits Service.