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**Title:** Customer Contact, Complaints Handling, and Compensation - Scotland Procedure

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Sanctuary Homes (Scotland) Limited

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## CONTENT

<b>General Information</b>	<b>3</b>
1. Objective of this procedure	3
2. Legislative/Regulatory context	3
3. Responsibilities for implementation	4
4. What's new - What's different?	4
5. Definitions	5
<b>Detailed Procedures</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>A. Customer Contact</b>	<b>7</b>
1. Introduction	7
2. Staff and contractors	7
3. Telephone calls	7
4. Communication from customers	8
5. Visiting offices and home visits	9
6. Interviews and meetings	10
<b>B. Complaints Handling</b>	<b>11</b>
1. Definition of a complaint	11
2. Handling anonymous complaints	12
3. What if the customer doesn't want to complain?	12
4. Who can make a complaint?	13
5. Complaints involving more than one service or organisation	13
6. Sheltered housing complaints	14
7. Significant performance failures; serious, high-risk, or high-profile complaints	15
8. Complaints handling process - introduction	16
9. Stage one: Frontline Resolution	17
10. Stage two: Investigation	25
11. Governance of the Complaints Handling Procedure	32
12. Complaints about staff or governing body members	35
13. Recording, reporting, learning from and publicising complaints	35
14. Maintaining confidentiality and data protection	37
15. Expected behaviours	38
16. Unreasonable or unreasonably persistent complaints	39
17. Supporting the customer	41
18. Time limit for making complaints	42
<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix 1 - Foreword for SPSO Model Complaints Handling Procedure	
Appendix 2 - Complaints at Frontline Resolution Guidance	
Appendix 3 - Complaint Roles and Responsibilities Guidance	
Appendix 4 - Complaints Scenarios	
Appendix 5 - Complaints Handling Timelines	
Appendix 6 - Complaints Handling Procedure Flowchart	
<b>Additional Guidance</b>	
AG01 - Compensation Guidance	
AG02 - Handling complaints against staff or governing body member	

## General Information

### 1. Objective of this procedure

- 1.1 This procedure describes how Sanctuary Scotland (Sanctuary) aims to deliver high standards of customer service; including how we handle communications with customers, how we deal with complaints, and how we deal with compensation requests.
- 1.2 This procedure and its associated policy is relevant for housing operations within Sanctuary.

### 2. Legislative/Regulatory context

- 2.1 The following legislation, references and sources are relevant to the development and delivery of this policy and associated procedure:
  - [Care Inspectorate](#)
  - [Disability Discrimination Act 1995](#)
  - [Data Protection Act 1998](#)
  - [General Data Protection Regulation](#)
  - [Human Rights Act 1998](#)
  - [Equality Act 2010](#)
  - The [Model Complaints Handling Procedure for Registered Social Landlords](#), Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) (2020) sets out statutory guidance on complaints handling.
  - The [Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002](#) (as amended by the [Public Service Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#)), Ombudsman has notified all Registered Social Landlords in Scotland to inform them that the relevant Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MHCP) applies to them. The 2002 Act was updated further on 31 January 2020; section 16B(5) presents the updated [Model Complaints Handling Procedures \(MCHP\)](#).
  - The [Scottish Secure Tenants \(Right to Repair\) Regulations 2002](#) sets out rules on compensation for when social landlords do not complete qualifying repairs within target timescales.
  - The [Land Compensation \(Scotland\) Act 1973](#) and the [Home Loss Payment \(Specification of Amount\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 1989](#) set out rules on compensation amounts for tenants and owners if they are to be displaced due to demolition or other redevelopment proposals affecting their home.
  - The [Housing \(Scotland\) Act 2001](#) sets out rules in relation to compensation for tenants who have carried out improvements to their home.
  - [Mental Health \(Care and Treatment\) \(Scotland\) Act 2003](#)
  - [Managing Challenging and Unacceptable Behaviour Policy and Procedure](#)
  - [Scottish Social Housing Charter \(2017\)](#) Section 2 Communication
  - [Antisocial Behaviour and Harassment - Scotland Policy and Procedure](#)
  - [Adult Support and Protection \(Safeguarding\) - Scotland Policy and Procedure](#)

- [Safeguarding Children and Young People - Scotland Policy and Procedure](#)
- [Customer Contact, Complaints Handling and Compensation - Scotland Procedure](#)
- [Social Media - Group Policy and Procedure](#)
- [SPSO Customer Facing Guide \(MCHP Part 5\)](#)

### 3. Responsibilities for implementation

- 3.1 The Director - Sanctuary Scotland has responsibility to ensure this policy is followed within Sanctuary Scotland and managed appropriately.
- 3.2 All staff have day to day responsibility for the implementation of this policy in practice.
- 3.3 To assist Sanctuary in carrying out its obligations, all employees must:
- be aware of, understand and comply with this policy and any related operational guidance;
  - participate in any training which Sanctuary makes available; and
  - communicate any issues with implementing this policy to their line manager or the Service Development team and identify opportunities for continuous improvement.

### 4. What's new - What's different?

- 4.1 September 2023 - Formal review, with the following changes have been implemented:
- Updated link to new [VulnerabilitiesGuidance.pdf \(spsso.org.uk\)](#).
  - Made wording changes to reflect that all staff have day-to-day responsibility for implementing this policy in practice.
  - Reworked Section 13.3 - Reporting of complaints, to more closely match the SPSO model.
  - Merged 11.7 (Investigation stage) with 11.5 (Complaints Investigators).
  - Split Appendix 2 - Complaints at FRL Guidance into two parts: **Appendix 2** - Complaints at FRL Guidance, and **Appendix 3** - Complaints Roles and Responsibilities Guidance.
  - Updated roles and responsibilities throughout the procedure and appendices, ensuring alignment with the new operating model.

## 5. Definitions

5.1 The following definitions aim to support the user's understanding of this procedure.

<b>Customer</b>	<p>For the purpose of this procedure, the term 'customer' includes anyone with a formal relationship with Sanctuary Scotland and could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• clients;</li> <li>• service users;</li> <li>• residents/tenants;</li> <li>• carers/relatives/advocates; and/or</li> <li>• external stakeholders.</li> </ul>
<b>Complaint</b>	<p>A complaint is defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about Sanctuary's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of Sanctuary. Where an employee also receives a service from Sanctuary as a member of the public, they may complain about that service, whether or not ultimately justified'. For example, a complaint could be about the failure or refusal to provide a service.</p> <p>A complaint may relate to the following, but is not restricted to this list:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• failure or refusal to provide a service</li> <li>• inadequate quality or standard of service, or an unreasonable delay in providing a service</li> <li>• delays in responding to enquiries or requests</li> <li>• unfairness, bias or prejudice in service delivery</li> <li>• lack of provision, or the provision of misleading, unsuitable or incorrect advice or information</li> <li>• a repair that has not been carried out properly or in an agreed timeframe</li> <li>• dissatisfaction with one of our policies or its impact on the individual</li> <li>• failure to properly apply law, procedure or guidance when delivering services</li> <li>• failure to follow the appropriate administrative process</li> <li>• conduct, treatment by or attitude of a member of staff or contractor (<b>except</b> where there are arrangements in place for the contractor to handle the complaint themselves: see <b>Complaints about contracted services</b>); or</li> <li>• disagreement with a decision, (<b>except</b> where there is a statutory procedure for challenging that decision, or an established appeals process followed throughout the sector).</li> </ul>
<b>Resolved complaints</b>	<p>Where Sanctuary has taken action <i>without</i> reaching any conclusions about whether there were failings (for example, because a solution is agreed before the problem is investigated). If Sanctuary knows that the organisation fell short of expected standards, the complaint should always be upheld, or partly upheld, and an apology given to the customer.</p>
<b>Upheld complaints</b>	<p>Complaints where Sanctuary has found some failing by our organisation.</p>

5.2 Some areas that may seem like a complaint in the first instance may not be and will need addressing through different means, these areas include (but are not limited) to:

- a complaint raising potential safeguarding concerns, which must be dealt with in accordance with the respective Scotland Safeguarding policies and procedures;
- a neighbour complaint or a report of ASB or harassment, which must be dealt with in accordance with the [ASB and Harassment - Scotland Policy and Procedure](#);
- a routine request for a first-time service;
- an appeal against a decision where there is an established appeal process, or an attempt to have an appeal reconsidered where Sanctuary has already given its final decision;
- an issue that is being or has been dealt with through legal action or an insurance or liability claim;
- a matter which occurred longer than six months ago, and has not previously been reported;
- a complaint that has already been considered under and exhausted Sanctuary's complaints process;
- a complaint that relates to a service provided by a third party;
- a dispute regarding the content of a lease or tenancy agreement; or
- a dispute that falls within the jurisdiction of the First-Tier Tribunal or Housing and Property Chamber remit (Mid-Market Rent and Factoring services).

5.3 In such cases, the customer will be advised that no complaint has been raised and they will be informed how their concerns or dissatisfaction will be handled. A named member of staff will be provided as a point of contact in relation to their concerns and an appropriate timescale for action or response provided.

5.4 If a customer is dissatisfied with the content of a policy or procedure, this should not be investigated as a complaint, but the comments should be forward to Group Customer Services for the next policy review. The customer should be advised of this in writing. Examples include (but are not limited to) dissatisfaction with the:

- time taken to complete works where this has been completed within the published timescales;
- need to relay messages where a named member of staff is unavailable; and/or
- evidence needed to progress and investigate an alleged ASB incident.

**Note:** There may be exceptional circumstances where the complaint is negligible or has no substance. In these circumstances, it may be appropriate not to use the complaints procedure at all. Such instances should be approved by the Head of Housing or Head of Complaints following discussion with the relevant staff member. The customer must be advised of this in writing.

## Detailed Procedures

### A. Customer Contact

#### 1. Introduction

1.1 This section gives detail on specific areas of customer contact and sets the standards for the following areas:

- staff and third parties working on Sanctuary's behalf;
- telephone calls (incoming and outgoing);
- letters, emails and other written correspondence;
- visiting Sanctuary offices and home visits;
- interviews and meetings; and
- enquiries from MPs and MSPs and Councillors.

#### 2. Staff and contractors

2.1 When dealing with customers, staff and contractors will:

- be friendly, professional respectful and welcoming;
- ensure Sanctuary preserve professional boundaries;
- treat all customers with respect and dignity;
- when in a customer's home, respect this fact;
- carry and always show identification when needed;
- wear a name badge and introduce themselves by name and job role;
- be willing to listen to customers and have access to relevant information enabling them to respond to customer enquiries;
- respect confidentiality and privacy;
- deal with requests from customers quickly;
- be sensitive, patient and understanding when dealing with customers;
- provide accurate information;
- keep customers updated on any matter which takes some time to resolve and respond to customers within the agreed timescale; and
- never use foul or abusive language or speak to a customer in a raised voice.

#### 3. Telephone calls

3.1 Sanctuary wants to ensure the highest standards of telephone answering across the organisation. The following standards apply to telephone answering:

- to answer all calls to local offices within one minute where direct contact is made, or where a call is transferred internally from the Customer Hub. The Customer Hub will have its own competitive targets for waiting times and abandonment rates;
- where this is not possible and a telephone message is left, Sanctuary aims to respond to the message within one working day; and
- where this is not possible Sanctuary aim to update the caller and inform them of any delays.

3.2 In addition, when answering telephone calls staff will:

- be polite and respectful;
- provide a helpful, polite and satisfactory answer where ever possible;
- transfer the caller to the most relevant member of staff when that staff member cannot help;
- record and follow-up on a message at the earliest opportunity;
- obtain all relevant information to deal with the query efficiently;
- give callers an indication of when Sanctuary will call them back when a message is taken; and
- pass on the call to the appropriate line manager if the caller is persistent in asking to speak to someone who is not available.

3.3 Staff should refer to the [Tone of Voice Guide](#).

3.4 Telephone calls can get passed to the wrong person. Where this happens staff will not transfer the caller again unless they are certain of the person who can help. In these cases, staff will take the details of the caller and ensure the most relevant person calls them back at the earliest opportunity.

3.5 Sanctuary may need to confirm important telephone conversations in writing. Where this is the case or where someone is asking for information, staff will respond as soon as possible. Sanctuary aims to do this within five working days and where this is not possible Sanctuary will write and tell of the reasons for any delay.

#### **4. Communication from customers**

4.1 Sanctuary receives contact from customers in many forms including letters, emails, phone calls, face to face conversations. Sanctuary will respond to customers quickly and clearly. The information provided or requested in these communications includes the following:

- Suggestions;
- Comments;
- requests for information;
- compliments; and
- requests for services.

4.2 It is the responsibility of the staff member receiving the communication to decide which category of communication it falls under. If the communication is a failure in service standards, then Sanctuary must log this as a complaint.

4.3 Sanctuary should acknowledge all other types of communications within 24 hours of receipt unless there are exceptional circumstances such as office closures or limited access which means that post cannot be received every working day. If required, staff should aim to answer any queries fully within five working days after first receipt. Occasionally, it is not possible to answer queries fully within five days. In such cases the acknowledgement letter, email or telephone call will include the date when we aim to respond in full.



- 4.4 Every customer contact should be logged appropriately on Sanctuary's systems and ensure that full records of all contacts and any actions taken are kept.
- 4.5 Where people have limited literacy, or English as a second language, Sanctuary will ensure that any communication is in a format that they can understand. For further detail on this please see [Translation, Interpretation Services and Accessibility – Group procedure](#).

## 5. Visiting offices and home visits

- 5.1 Office opening times will be clearly published in a range of communications including: the tenants' handbook, newsletters, website, auto-response emails and signage outside offices. Outside these times, Sanctuary has out of hours telephone contact numbers available for customers.
- 5.2 When necessary, Sanctuary can arrange an appointment outside normal office hours, if it is reasonable to do so. Where the technology is available, staff can also offer customers virtual meetings where it is not safe or possible to physically meet in person. This is also applicable to section 6 - Interviews and Meetings.
- 5.3 The following approach applies when customers visit offices:
- if the staff member they need to see or speak to is available, they will be dealt with as soon as possible;
  - if this staff member is not available, the customer will be informed when they will become available and offer an appointment at the office or if preferable a home visit; and
  - as an alternative, another member of staff may be able to deal with their enquiry.
- 5.4 Whatever the circumstances, customers will not be left without Sanctuary resolving their enquiry or advising them of a time and date by which the appropriate member of staff will respond to them.
- 5.5 When a customer is visited in their own home Sanctuary will:
- where possible, let them know the date and time of the visit and the name of the visiting officer in advance;
  - make every possible effort to keep arranged appointments;
  - if staff cannot keep an arranged appointment or have to change a visit, Sanctuary will tell customers immediately and agree a new date and time;
  - if Sanctuary does not keep appointments or prearranged visits, customers will receive an apology and an explanation of why this happened within three working days; and
  - Sanctuary will, where possible, let customers know before the visit if any extra information or documentation is needed.
- 5.6 The visiting officer will always show their identification, which will show the officer's photograph, name and job title.

## 6. Interviews and meetings

6.1 In relation to meetings and interviews with customers the following principles apply:

- all staff will be well prepared for meetings or interviews with customers;
- staff will have all relevant information and records available;
- staff will ensure a suitable room is available for the interview / meeting;
- Sanctuary will take notes of the interview and keep a record of all meetings where appropriate. This will include a written account of the issues raised, recommendations, actions to be taken and any time scales agreed; these will be circulated to customers where necessary
- where there is a need to confirm an interview in writing Sanctuary will do this within five days of the interview;
- where notes of a meeting are circulated, they will be dispatched within a reasonable timescale, and before any subsequent meeting;
- when people need communication or language support, we will provide this to enable customers to express their views or needs accurately and fully; and
- Where people require or request support from a support worker/family member or equivalent, they are invited to attend the meeting.

## B. Complaints Handling

### 1. Definition of a complaint

- 1.1 The definitions outlined in section 5 of this procedure do not provide an exhaustive list and further examples can be found in **Appendix 2 - Complaints at FLR Guidance** with guidance on how these may be handled.
- 1.2 A complaint is not:
- a routine first-time request for a service;
  - a request for compensation only;
  - issues that are in court or have already been heard by a court or a tribunal;
  - an appeal against a decision where there is a statutory procedure for challenging that decision (such as for freedom of information and subject access requests), or an established appeals process followed throughout the sector (these should be heard through the appropriate appeal process);
  - a request for information under the Data Protection or Freedom of Information (Scotland) Acts;
  - a grievance by a staff member or a grievance relating to employment or staff recruitment;
  - a concern raised internally by a member of staff (which was not about a service they received, such as a whistleblowing concern);
  - a concern about a child or an adult's safety;
  - an attempt to reopen a previously concluded complaint or to have a complaint reconsidered where we have already given our final decision;
  - abuse or unsubstantiated allegations about our organisation or staff where such actions would be covered by our [Managing Challenging and Unacceptable Behaviour - Housing Policy and Procedure](#); and/or
  - a concern about the actions or service of a different organisation, where we have no involvement in the issue (except where the other organisation is delivering services on our behalf: see Complaints about contracted services).
- 1.3 Staff should not treat these issues as complaints, and should instead direct customers to use the appropriate procedures. Some situations can involve a combination of issues, where some are complaints and others are not, and each situation should be assessed on a case-by-case basis.
- 1.4 If a matter is not a complaint, or not suitable to be handled under the CHP, we will explain this to the customer, and tell them what (if any) action we will take, and why. We will also tell them what action (if any) we will take (for example, if another procedure applies), and advise them of their right to contact the SPSO if they disagree with our decision not to respond to the issue as a complaint.

1.5 **Appendix 4 - Complaints Scenarios**, gives more examples of 'what is not a complaint' and how to direct customers appropriately. This includes an example of when an ASB complaint may and may not be considered a complaint.

## 2. Handling anonymous complaints

2.1 Sanctuary values all complaints, including anonymous complaints and takes action to consider them further, wherever this is appropriate. Generally, anonymous complaints will be considered if there is enough information to enable further enquiries. If, however, not enough information is provided, the decision may be made not to pursue it. Any decision not to pursue an anonymous complaint must be authorised by a senior manager.

2.2 If an anonymous complaint makes serious allegations, it must be referred to a senior officer immediately and should be dealt with in a timely manner under relevant procedures. This may not be the complaints procedure and could instead be relevant child protection, adult protection or disciplinary procedures.

2.3 If an anonymous complaint is pursued further, the issues must be recorded as an anonymous complaint together with any learning from the complaint and action taken. This will help to ensure the completeness of the complaints data we record and allow corrective action where appropriate.

## 3. What if the customer doesn't want to complain?

3.1 If a customer has expressed dissatisfaction in line with the definition of a complaint but does not want to complain, they should be advised that Sanctuary does consider all expressions of dissatisfaction and that customer complaints offer the opportunity to improve services where things have gone wrong. Encourage the customer to submit their complaint and allow Sanctuary to deal with it through the CHP. This will ensure that the customer is updated on the action taken and gets a response to their complaint.

3.2 If, however, the customer insists they do not wish to complain, we are not required to progress the complaint under this procedure. However, the issues should be recorded as an anonymous complaint (including minimal information about the complaint, without any identifying information) to enable us to track trends and themes in complaints. Where the complaint is serious, or there is evidence of a problem with our services, we should also look into the matter to remedy this (and record any outcome). Please refer to the example in **Appendix 2 - Complaints at FLR Guidance**, for further details.

#### **4. Who can make a complaint?**

- 4.1 Anyone who receives, requests or is affected by Sanctuary services can make a complaint. This includes tenants but it also includes members of the public or 'non-direct customers', who could have access to or be affected by Sanctuary services; including our ASB/neighbour nuisance services. For any business relationships (companies), Sanctuary will handle these outside of the complaints process in line with the terms of their contract. In this procedure these people are termed 'customers', regardless of whether they are or were using a service. Sanctuary also accepts complaints from the representative of a person who is dissatisfied with our service.
- 4.2 Sometimes a customer may be unable or reluctant to make a complaint on their own. Sanctuary will accept complaints brought by interested third parties which may include relatives, friends, advocates and advisers, as long as the customer has given their personal consent for them to act on their behalf, or it is reasonable to assume their consent has been given. It is good practice to ensure the customer understands their personal information will be shared as part of the complaints handling process (particularly where this includes sensitive personal information). This can include complaints brought by parents on behalf of their child, if the child is considered to have capacity to make decisions for themselves. The Third-Party Authority process 'Adding a Business Partner' should be followed to obtain a mandate if one cannot be found, see [Pulse](#) for details.
- 4.3 In certain circumstances, a person may raise a complaint involving another person's personal data, without receiving consent. The complaint should still be investigated where possible, but the investigation and response may be limited by considerations of confidentiality. The person who submitted the complaint should be made aware of these limitations and the effect this will have on the scope of the response. See also section 14 'Maintaining Confidentiality and data protection'.
- 4.4 These complaints are treated in the same way as any other, regardless of who has brought the complaint.

#### **5. Complaints involving more than one service or organisation**

- 5.1 If a complaint relates to two or more of Sanctuary's services, staff must explain to the customer which service will take the lead in dealing with the complaint and explain that only one response covering all issues raised.
- 5.2 If a customer complains about the service of another agency or public service provider, but Sanctuary has no involvement in the issue, staff must inform the customer to contact that organisation directly.
- 5.3 If the complaint relates to one of Sanctuary's services and includes one or more of its contractors or the service of another organisation or public service provider and Sanctuary has a direct interest in the issue, Sanctuary would normally handle the complaint through the CHP.

- 5.4 However, depending on circumstances, Sanctuary may agree with the contractor or organisation on who will take the lead; but will work together to investigate all the matters simultaneously. Staff must also inform the customer who will take the lead in dealing with the complaint and explain that they will receive only one response covering all issues raised.
- 5.5 When enquiries are regarding an outside agency or contractor, in relation to a complaint, Sanctuary will always take account of data protection legislation and its guidance on handling customers' personal information. The Information Commissioner has detailed guidance on data sharing and has issued a data sharing code of practice.
- 5.6 Such complaints may include a complaint about:
- rent arrears that is partly caused by problems with a claim for Housing Benefit to the local authority or Universal Credit to the Department for Work and Pensions; or
  - ASB that relates to Sanctuary's service and a local authority service.
- 5.7 Complaints about contracted services
- 5.7.1 Where we use a contractor to deliver a service on our behalf, we recognise that we remain responsible and accountable for ensuring that the services provided meet Sanctuary's standard (including in relation to complaints). We will either do so by ensuring the contractor:
- complies with this procedure; or
  - has their own procedure in place, which fully meets the standards in this procedure. At the end of the investigation stage of any such complaints the contractor must ensure that the customer is signposted to the SPSO.
- 5.7.2 We will confirm that service users are clearly informed of the process and understand how to complain. We will also ensure that there is appropriate provision for information sharing and governance oversight where required.
- 5.7.3 Sanctuary has discretion to investigate complaints about organisations contracted to deliver services on its behalf.

## **6. Sheltered housing complaints**

- 6.1 Anyone receiving sheltered housing services from us has the right to either complain directly to the Care Inspectorate or complain to Sanctuary. When a sheltered housing service user has exhausted Sanctuary's CHP, they may take their complaint to the relevant local authority.
- 6.2 Customers may also receive care or support from other agencies under a contract with Sanctuary. They may complain about these services either to Sanctuary (just like complaints about any of our other services), or directly to the Care Inspectorate.

### 6.3 The Care Inspectorate's contact details:

- Website - <http://www.careinspectorate.com>
- Telephone - 0345 600 9527
- Online complaints form - <http://www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/online-complaint-form>
- Email - [enquiries@careinspectorate.gov.scot](mailto:enquiries@careinspectorate.gov.scot)

## 7. Significant performance failures including serious, high-risk, or high-profile complaints

7.1 The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) has a duty to consider issues raised with them about 'significant performance failures'. A significant performance failure is defined by the SHR as something that a landlord does or fails to do that puts the interests of its tenants at risk, and which the landlord has not resolved. This is something that is a systemic problem that does, or could, affect all of a landlord's tenants. A significant performance failure happens when a landlord is not:

- delivering the outcomes and standards in the Scottish Social Housing Charter over a period of time; or
- achieving the regulatory standards on governance or financial management.

7.2 It is important to distinguish between a complaint, which should be dealt with through the normal CHP, and a significant performance failure. If a customer feels that an issue affecting them is a significant performance failure, then they may contact the SHR directly and the issue will not be dealt with through the CHP. Information about SHR can be found on its website: [www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk](http://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk).

7.3 Sanctuary will take particular care to identify complaints that might be considered serious, high-risk or high-profile, as these may require particular action or raise critical issues that need senior management's direct input. Serious, high-risk or high-profile complaints should normally be handled immediately at stage 2 ([see Part 3: Stage 2: Investigation](#)).

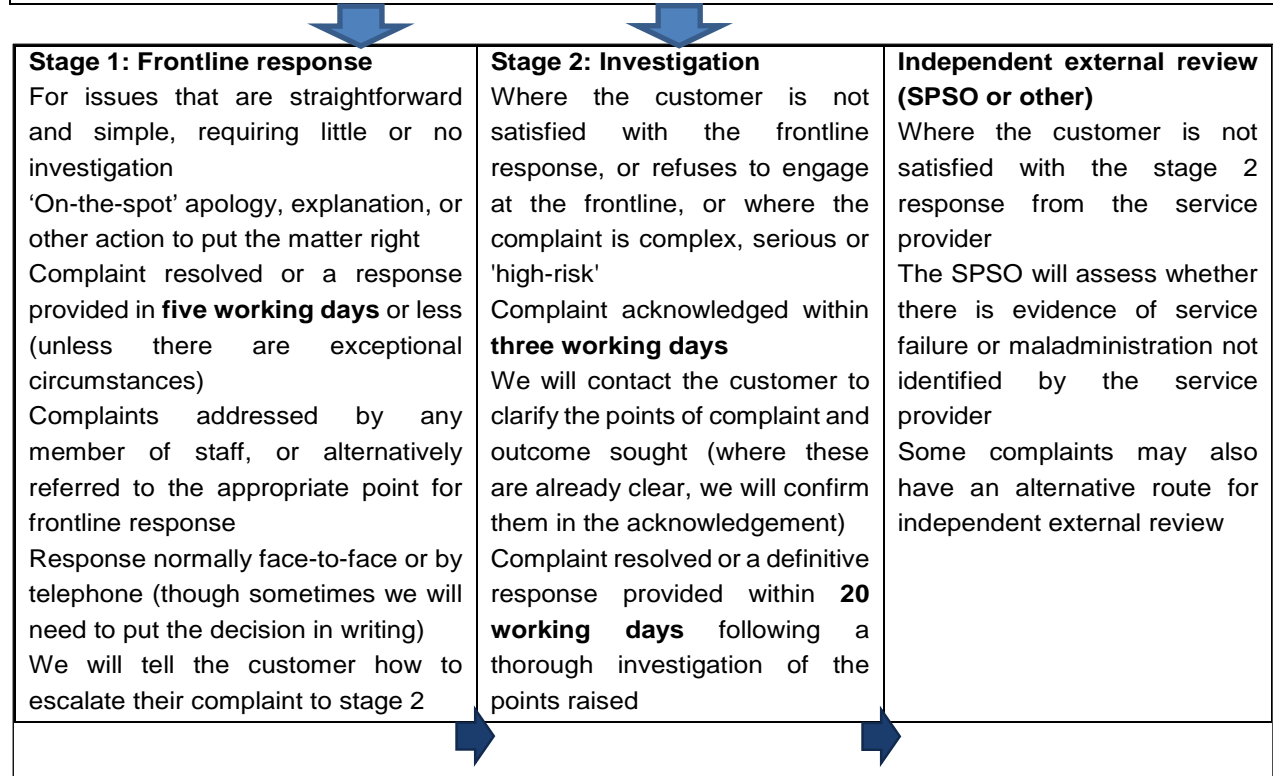
7.4 Sanctuary defines potential high-risk or high-profile complaints as those that may:

- involve a death or terminal illness
- involve serious service failure, for example major delays in providing, or repeated failures to provide, a service
- generate significant and ongoing press interest
- pose a serious risk to our operations
- present issues of a highly sensitive nature, for example concerning:
  - immediate homelessness
  - a particularly vulnerable person; or
  - child protection.

## 8. Complaints handling process - introduction

- 8.1 Our CHP aims to provide a quick, simple and streamlined process for responding to complaints early and locally by capable, well-trained staff.
- 8.2 Our complaints process provides two opportunities to resolve complaints internally:
  1. FLR; and
  2. Investigation.

**Complaint received** - A customer may complain either verbally or in writing, including face-to-face, by phone, letter or email.



**Resolution**

The complainant and organisation agree what action will be taken to resolve the complaint. Where a complaint is resolved, it is not usually necessary to continue investigating, although an organisation may choose to do so, for example to identify learning. We must signpost the customer to stage 2 (for stage 1 complaints) or to the SPSO as usual.

**Reporting, recording and learning**

Action is taken to improve services on the basis of complaint findings, where appropriate. We record details of all complaints, the outcome and any action taken, and use this data to analyse themes and trends.

Senior management have an active interest in complaints and use complaints data and analysis to improve services.

Learning is shared throughout the organisation.



- 8.3 For clarity, the term 'FLR' refers to the first stage of the CHP. It does not reflect any job description but means seeking to resolve complaints at the initial point of contact where possible.
- 8.4 Resolving a complaint
- 8.4.1 A complaint is resolved when both Sanctuary and the customer agree what action (if any) will be taken to provide full and final resolution for the customer, without making a decision about whether the complaint is upheld or not upheld.
- 8.4.2 We will try to resolve complaints wherever possible, although we accept this will not be possible in all cases.
- 8.4.3 A complaint may be resolved at any point in the complaint handling process, including during the investigation stage. It is particularly important to try to resolve complaints where there is an ongoing relationship with the customer or where the complaint relates to an ongoing issue that may give rise to future complaints if the matter is not fully resolved.
- 8.4.4 It may be helpful to use alternative complaint resolution approaches when trying to resolve a complaint. See Section 10.5 - Mediation and Alternative complaint resolution approaches.
- 8.4.5 Where a complaint is resolved, we do not normally need to continue looking into it or provide a response on all points of complaint. There must be a clear record of how the complaint was resolved, what action was agreed, and the customer's agreement to this as a final outcome. In some cases, it may still be appropriate to continue looking into the issue, for example where there is evidence of a wider problem or potential for useful learning. We will use our professional judgment in deciding whether it is appropriate to continue looking into a complaint that is resolved. In all cases, we must record the complaint outcome (resolved) and any action taken, and signpost the customer to stage 2 (for stage 1 complaints) or to independent external review as usual (see section 10.7).
- 8.4.6 If the customer and Sanctuary are not able to agree a resolution, we must follow this CHP to provide a clear and reasoned response to each of the issues raised.

## **9. Stage one: Frontline Resolution**

### **9.1 Introduction**

- 9.1.1 The SPSO refer to this first stage of the complaints process as 'Frontline Response'. In Sanctuary, the same approach is adopted and is referred to internally as FLR. FLR aims to quickly resolve straightforward customer complaints that require little or no investigation. Any member of staff may deal with complaints at this stage.

- 9.1.2 The main principle is to resolve complaints to the satisfaction of the customer wherever this is possible. Where this isn't possible, we will give the customer a clear response to each of their points of complaint.
- 9.1.3 We will always try to respond as quickly as we can (and on the spot where possible). This may mean a face-to-face discussion with the customer at the first point of contact or asking an appropriate member of staff to deal directly with the complaint.
- 9.1.4 **Appendix 2** - Complaints at FLR Guidance, gives examples of the types of complaint Sanctuary may consider at this stage, with suggestions on how to resolve them.
- 9.1.5 Staff may settle the complaint by providing an on-the-spot apology where appropriate, or explaining why the issue occurred and, where possible, what will be done to stop this happening again. Staff may also explain that, as an organisation that values complaints, the information given maybe used to review service standards in the future.
- 9.1.6 A customer can make a complaint verbally in person or by telephone, in writing by letter, email or online (for example on digital platforms including social media), or by having an interested third party complain on their behalf. Staff should always consider FLR, regardless of how the customer's complaint is received.
- 9.1.7 Where a complaint is made verbally, we will make a record of the key points of complaint raised. Where complaints are raised on a digital channel, see appropriate action for responding in section 9.6; Sanctuary will be mindful of our data protection obligations when responding to issues online or in a public forum).
- 9.1.8 FLR requires a more innovative approach where staff "go the extra mile" to resolve a complaint. There is no requirement to write to customers at FLR stage, although a customer may request this.
- 9.1.9 On progression to FLR staff should:
- explore with the customer what needs to be done to resolve the complaint, manage expectations of the customer and be clear what you can and cannot do;
  - treat the issue with the uppermost priority and try to resolve it in the shortest possible time (normally within five to 10 working days, but in many cases sooner);
  - keep in close contact with the customer, by phone where possible, and inform them of progress at every opportunity;
  - always contact the customer when agreed;
  - make the necessary enquiries to put in place the measures to address the complaint;
  - when a resolution is developed and agreed timescales put in place, speak to the customer to ensure they are satisfied;

- keep records of the issue and action to resolve the issue on the complaints system; and
- monitor progress of the measures put in place to address the complaint and follow up with the customer on the agreed date.

## 9.2 What to do upon receipt of a complaint

9.2.1 On receiving a complaint, first decide whether the issue can indeed be defined as a complaint. The customer may express dissatisfaction about more than one issue. This may mean treating one element as a complaint, while directing the customer to pursue another element through an alternative route (see **Appendix 4** - Complaints Scenarios).

9.2.2 If it is identified as a complaint, record the details on the complaints system.

9.2.3 Next, decide whether or not the complaint is suitable for FLR. Some complaints will need to be fully investigated before the customer can receive a suitable response. Staff must escalate these complaints immediately to the Investigation stage.

9.2.4 Where FLR is appropriate, staff must consider four key questions:

- **What exactly is the customer's complaint (or complaints)?**
  - It is important to be clear about exactly what the customer is complaining about. You may need to ask the customer for more information and probe further to get a full understanding.
  - We will need to decide whether the issue can be defined as a complaint and whether there are circumstances that may limit our ability to respond to the complaint (such as the time limit for making complaints, confidentiality, anonymity or the need for consent). We should also consider whether the complaint is serious, high-risk or high-profile.
  - If the matter is not suitable for handling as a complaint, we will explain this to the customer (and signpost them to SPSO).
  - In most cases, this step will be straightforward. If it is not, the complaint may need to be handled immediately at stage 2 (see Stage 2: Investigation).
- **What does the customer want to achieve by complaining?**

At the outset, clarify the outcome the customer wants. Of course, the customer may not be clear about this, and you may need to probe further to find out what they expect, and whether they can be satisfied.
- **Can I achieve this, or explain why not?**

If you can achieve the expected outcome by providing an on-the-spot apology or explain why you can't achieve what the customer wants, you should do so.

  - If you consider an apology is appropriate, you may wish to follow the SPSO's guidance on the subject: [SPSO guidance on apology](#).

- The customer may expect more than we can provide. If so, you must tell them as soon as possible. An example would be where the customer is so dissatisfied with a kitchen refurbishment that they demand a new kitchen, but we are only willing to repair any broken units
- You are likely to have to convey the decision face to face or on the telephone. If you do so face to face, by telephone or by email, you are not required to write to the customer as well, although you may choose to do so, or the customer may ask you to. It is important, however, to keep a full and accurate record of the decision reached and passed to the customer.
- Complaints which can be resolved or responded to quickly should be managed at stage 1 (see Stage 1: FLR).
- If I cannot resolve this, who can help with FLR?
- **If I cannot respond, who can help?**
  - If the complaint is simple and straightforward, but the staff member receiving the complaint deal with it because, for example, you are unfamiliar with the issues or area of service involved, you should be able to pass details of the complaint immediately to someone who can respond quickly.
  - If it is not a simple and straightforward complaint that can realistically be closed within five working days (or ten, if an extension is appropriate), it should be handled immediately at stage 2. If the customer refuses to engage at stage 1, insisting that they want their complaint investigated, it should be handled immediately at stage 2. See Stage 2: Investigation.

### 9.3 Receiving correspondence from MPs and MSPs

- 9.3.1 Where correspondence is received from an MSP or MP about a customer's concerns or dissatisfaction, we will assess this to consider whether a complaint is appropriate and if so, a complaint will be raised and handled in line with the MCHP. Where the issue would not meet the definition of a complaint, we will handle this as an enquiry and a response will be given with a reasonable timescale.
- 9.3.2 Enquiries from MPs and MSPs should be passed in the first instance to the Director of Sanctuary Scotland or Head of Housing.
- 9.3.3 Enquiries from Councillors should be passed in the first instance to the relevant Area/Housing Manager or Head of Housing.
- 9.3.4 If staff members, other than the Director of Sanctuary Scotland or Head of Housing, are replying to an MP, MSP or Councillor enquiry, both Group Customer Services and the Director - Sanctuary Scotland are to be copied into the acknowledgment and full reply.
- 9.3.5 Sanctuary will refer to the special arrangements for elected members in relation to seeking third party consent (from the [Information Commissioner's Office](#)).

## 9.4 Compensation and complaints

9.4.1 Where a customer is seeking financial compensation only, this is not a complaint. However, in some cases the customer may want to complain about the matter leading to their financial claim, and they may seek additional outcomes, such as an apology or an explanation. Where appropriate, we may consider that matter as a complaint, but deal with the financial claim separately. It may be appropriate to extend the timeframes for responding to the complaint, to consider the financial claim first.

9.4.2 If the complainant's issue is that Sanctuary has caused an injury, exacerbated an existing health condition, caused a direct injury or caused damage to property, then Sanctuary will immediately contact the Group Insurance team (see Section 9.5), who will provide advice on how to manage the complaint.

9.4.3 If it is not considered to be an insurance issue, then Sanctuary will process the complaint as normal in line with the current complaints procedure, and consider whether compensation is reasonable through the process of managing the complaint.

9.4.4 Further guidance on how to deal with compensation requests can be found in **AG01** - Compensation Guidance.

## 9.5 Potential insurance claims

9.5.1 In some complaints Sanctuary may have a legal liability. Sanctuary Group's insurance policy provides cover to protect it and details of the excess can be found on Solis. If there is any doubt, staff should contact Group Insurance at [insurance@sanctuary.co.uk](mailto:insurance@sanctuary.co.uk) or call 01905 334000.

9.5.2 The Group Insurance team should be contacted immediately if a compensation request or complaint includes one or both of the following elements is received, allegations of:

- significant loss or damage to property; and
- injury (both mental and physical) to a person.

9.5.3 If the complaint is judged by Group Insurance to be wholly an insurance matter, no further action should be taken regarding a complaint.

9.5.4 In some instances, the complaint will be both an insurance matter and complaint. Group Insurance will deal with the insurance aspect and the complaint will be handled under the CHP. In dealing with the complaint the insurance aspect should not be mentioned, referred to or explored by staff. To ensure this is the case, all correspondence regarding the complaint must be approved by Group Insurance before being sent, this includes any initial acknowledgment of the complaint.

- 9.5.5 Where Sanctuary decides that a complaint is an insurance matter, the complainant must be advised that insurers are dealing with it and will contact them as soon as possible. The staff member involved should take their contact details and pass these to Group Insurance, which will arrange for the insurers to call as a matter of urgency.
- 9.5.6 For scenarios other than those set out in paragraph 9.5.2, the potential value of the compensation claim will be the key factor in determining whether the claim should be dealt with by the Group Insurance team.
- 9.5.7 For further examples of situations which should be referred to the insurance team for advice, see the [Pulse pages](#).
- 9.6 Complaints and legal action
- 9.6.1 Where a customer says that legal action is being actively pursued, this is not a complaint.
- 9.6.2 Where a customer indicates that they are thinking about legal action, but have not yet commenced this, they should be informed that if they take such action, they should notify the complaints handler and that the complaints process, in relation to the matters that will be considered through the legal process, will be closed. Any outstanding complaints must still be addressed through the CHP.
- 9.6.3 If an issue has been, or is being, considered by a court, we must not consider the same issue under the CHP.
- 9.7 Receiving comments on Social Media
- 9.7.1 If staff are contacted by a customer through social media about a work matter, staff should not respond but should immediately contact the Social Media team for guidance. Avoid forwarding information or screen shots to ensure best practice where possible; should there be a Data Subject Access Request.
- 9.7.2 Staff should not respond directly to the individual but make an acknowledgement which directs people to how they can make a complaint and discourage a complex discussion about their issue(s) on social media.
- 9.7.3 For more information staff should refer to the [Social Media - Group Procedure](#). Staff may also ask for guidance regarding any social media matter from the Social Media team by emailing [socialmedia@sanctuary.co.uk](mailto:socialmedia@sanctuary.co.uk).
- 9.7.4 If staff are contacted by a customer through social media and the comment involves a threat to the staff member, their Manager must be notified immediately, and the incident must be reported to the police.

## 9.8 Timelines

9.8.1 FLR should be completed within five working days, although in practice it is often expected to resolve the complaint much sooner.

9.8.2 Staff may need to get more information from other services to resolve the complaint at this stage. However, it is important to respond to the customer within five working days, either resolving the matter or explaining that their complaint is to be investigated.

## 9.9 Extension to the timeline

9.9.1 In exceptional circumstances, where there are clear and justifiable reasons for doing so (for example unforeseen absence of a key staff member), a senior member of staff may agree an extension of no more than five working days with the customer. This must only happen when an extension will make it more likely that the complaint will be resolved at the FLR stage.

9.9.2 If, the issues are so complex that they cannot be resolved in five days, it may be more appropriate to escalate to the Investigation stage. The customer must be informed about the reasons for the delay, and when they can expect a response.

9.9.3 If the customer does not agree to an extension but it is unavoidable and reasonable, a senior manager should decide on the extension. Staff must then inform the customer about the delay and explain the reason for the decision to grant the extension.

9.9.4 It is important that such extensions do not become the norm; the timeline at FLR should be extended only rarely. All attempts to resolve the complaint at this stage must take no longer than ten working days from the date of receipt.

9.9.5 The proportion of complaints that exceed the five day limit will be evident from reported statistics. These statistics go to senior management teams and governing bodies on a regular basis.

9.9.6 If a complaint has not been closed within 10 working days, it should be escalated to stage 2 for a final response.

9.9.7 **Appendix 4 - Complaints Scenarios** provides further information on timelines.

## 9.10 Closing the complaint at FLR

9.10.1 Staff can resolve a complaint by agreeing any action to be taken with the customer; this can be conveyed face-to-face or on the telephone. There must however be a clear record of the outcome of the complaint:

- tell the customer if the complaint outcome is:
  - resolved or unresolved
  - upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.
- explain the reasons for our decision or the agreed action taken to resolve the complaint; and
- explain that the customer can escalate the complaint to stage 2 if they remain dissatisfied and how to do so.

9.10.2 Staff are not obliged to write to the customer, although they may choose to do so, or the customer may request this. If we are not able to contact the customer by phone, or speak to them in person, we will provide a written response to the complaint where an email or postal address is provided, covering the points above. Staff must ensure that responses address all areas of the complaint that Sanctuary is responsible for and explains the reasons for the decision reached.

9.10.3 It is also important to keep a full and accurate record of the decision reached and given to the customer. The complaint should then be closed, and the complaints system updated accordingly.

**Note:** Any lessons learned in resolving the complaint which have led to service improvements should be recorded in the Notes section (log as 'Learning outcomes') within the CIC complaint case.

## 9.11 When to escalate to the Investigation stage

9.11.1 A complaint should be escalated to the Investigation stage when:

- The FLR stage has been completed, but the customer remains dissatisfied and insists on an investigation into the complaint:
  - This may be immediately on communicating the decision at the FLR stage or could be some time later.
  - Normally, if the customer has not responded after 20 working days since a decision was communicated, the complaint will be closed.
  - If a complainant responds after this deadline to raise dissatisfaction and the complaint has been closed, the case must be judged on its own merits and a decision made by the Group Customer Services Manager whether the complaint should be re-opened.
  - If a request for investigation is received after six months from the date after a decision was communicated, normally a new complaint will be created.
  - In both instances, the customer will need to provide further information in relation to their ongoing dissatisfaction and provide reasons for the delay.
- the customer refuses to take part in the FLR process;
- the issues raised are complex and will require detailed investigation;  
or
- the complaint relates to serious, high risk or high profile issues.



9.11.2 Particular care should be given to identify complaints that might be considered serious, high risk or high profile, as these may require particular action or raise critical issues that need senior management's direct input. The SPSO defines potential high risk or high profile complaints as those that may:

- Involve a death or terminal illness.
- Involve serious service failure, for example major delays in providing, or repeated failures to provide, a service.
- Generate significant and ongoing press interest.
- Pose a serious risk to our operations.
- Present issues of a highly sensitive nature, for example concerning:
  - Immediate homelessness
  - A particularly vulnerable person
  - Child protection.

## 10. Stage two: Investigation

### 10.1 Introduction

10.1.1 Complaints handled at the Investigation stage of the CHP are typically complex or require a detailed examination before Sanctuary can state its position. These complaints may already have been considered at FLR, or they may have been identified from the start as needing immediate investigation. Where they have been considered at FLR, there should be a continuation of where the details are recorded (as part of the Complaints Case in CIC on OneSanctuary) to ensure the officer responsible for investigation has access to all relevant case notes and associated information.

10.1.2 An investigation aims to establish all the facts relevant to the points made in the complaint and to give the customer a full, objective and proportionate response that represents Sanctuary's final position. Wherever possible, complaints should be investigated by someone not involved in the complaint (for example, a line manager or the Customer Resolution Team).

10.1.3 The beginning of stage 2 is a good time to consider whether complaint resolution approaches other than investigation may be helpful (see section 10.5 - Mediation and Alternative complaint resolution approaches).

### 10.2 What to do upon receipt of a complaint for investigation

10.2.1 It is important to be clear from the start of the investigation stage exactly what the investigation will cover, and to ensure that both the customer and Sanctuary understand the investigation's scope. The SPSO has specified in the updated CHP that staff must agree the points of complaint and outcome sought with the complainant at the start of stage 2.

10.2.2 It is helpful to discuss and confirm these points with the customer at the outset, to establish why they are dissatisfied and whether the outcome they are looking for sounds realistic. We may also need to manage the customer's

expectations about the scope of our investigation. In discussing the complaint with the customer, staff should consider four key questions:

- **What are the points of complaint to be investigated?**  
While the complaint may appear to be clear, agreeing the points of complaint at the outset ensures there is a shared understanding and avoids the complaint changing or confusion arising at a later stage. The points of complaint should be specific enough to direct the investigation, but broad enough to include any multiple and specific points of concern about the same issue.  
We will make every effort to agree the points of complaint with the customer (alternative complaint resolution approaches may be helpful at this stage, see section 10.5). In very rare cases, it may not be possible to agree the points of complaint (for example, if the customer insists on an unreasonably large number of complaints being separately investigated, or on framing their complaint in an abusive way). We will manage any such cases in accordance with our [Managing Challenging and Unacceptable Behaviour - Housing Policy and Procedure](#), bearing in mind that we should continue to investigate the complaint (as we understand it) wherever possible.
- **Is there anything we can't consider under the CHP?**  
We must explain if there are any points that are not suitable for handling under the CHP (see [Part 2: What to do if the CHP does not apply](#)).
- **What outcome does the customer want to achieve by complaining?**  
Asking what outcome the customer is seeking helps direct the investigation and enables us to focus on resolving the complaint where possible.
- **Are the customer's expectations realistic and achievable?**  
It may be that the customer expects more than we can provide, or has unrealistic expectations about the scope of the investigation. If so, we should make this clear to the customer as soon as possible.

10.2.3 When these points are established, they should be confirmed in writing with the customer.

10.2.4 Where the points of complaint and outcome sought are not clear, we must contact the customer to confirm these. We will normally need to speak to the customer (by phone or face-to-face) to do this effectively. In some cases, it may be possible to clarify complaints in writing. The key point is that we need to be sure we and the customer have a shared understanding of the complaint. When contacting the customer, we will be respectful of their stated preferred method of contact. We should keep a clear record of any discussion with the customer.

10.2.5 It may be that the customer expects more than Sanctuary can provide. If so, staff must make this clear to the customer as soon as possible.

10.2.6 Where possible, staff should also clarify what additional information will be needed to investigate the complaint. The customer may need to provide more evidence to allow for a decision to be reached.

10.2.7 Details of the complaint must be recorded on OneSanctuary as a CIC complaints case. Where appropriate, this will be done as a continuation of the FLR action. The details must be updated when the investigation ends. CIC cases should only be created for housing management complaints. If the complaint received is related to Repairs//Maintenance, Assets, Development or Gas, email details to [Complaints@sanctuary.co.uk](mailto:Complaints@sanctuary.co.uk) and quote relevant CIC interaction numbers.

10.2.8 It is important to plan the investigation before beginning. The staff member investigating the complaint should consider what information they have and what they need about:

- what happened? (this could include, for example, records of phone calls or meetings, work requests, recollections of staff members or internal emails);
- what should have happened? (this should include any relevant policies or procedures that apply); and
- is there a difference between what happened and what should have happened, and is Sanctuary responsible?

10.2.9 In some cases, information may not be readily available. We will balance the need for the information against the resources required to obtain it, taking into account the seriousness of the issue (for example, it may be appropriate to contact a former employee, if possible, where they hold key information about a serious complaint).

10.2.10 If we need to share information within or outwith the organisation, we will be mindful of our obligations under data protection legislation. See Section 14 - Maintaining confidentiality and data protection.

10.2.11 The SPSO has resources for conducting investigations, including:

- [Investigation plan template](#)
- [Decision-making tool for complaint investigators](#)

### 10.3 Timelines

10.3.1 The following deadlines apply to cases at the Investigation stage:

- Complaints must be acknowledged within three working days in a format which is accessible to the customer, taking into account their preferred method of contact; and
- A full response to the complaint should be provided as soon as possible, but no later than 20 working days from the date of receipt at the Investigation stage.

## 10.4 Extension to the timeline

10.4.1 Not all investigations will be able to meet this deadline. For example, some complaints are so complex that they require careful consideration and detailed investigation beyond the 20 working day timeline. It is important to be realistic and clear with the customer about timeframes, and to advise them early if we think it will not be possible to meet the 20 day timeframe, and why. We should bear in mind that extended delays may have a detrimental effect on the customer; any extensions should be an exception and staff must always try to deliver a final response to a complaint within 20 working days.

10.4.2 If there are clear and justifiable reasons for extending the timescale, senior management will set time limits on any extended investigation, as long as the customer agrees. Staff must keep the customer and any member/s of staff complained about updated on the reason for the delay and provide a revised timescale for completion. We will contact the customer and any member/s of staff complained about at least once every 20 working days to update them on the progress of the investigation. If the customer does not agree to an extension but it is unavoidable and reasonable, then senior management should consider and confirm the extension.

10.4.3 The reasons for an extension might include but are not limited to the following:

- Essential accounts or statements, crucial to establishing the circumstances of the case, are needed from staff, customers or others but they cannot help because of long-term sickness or leave.
- Sanctuary cannot obtain further essential information within normal timescales.
- Operations are disrupted by unforeseen or unavoidable operational circumstances, for example industrial action or severe weather.
- The customer has agreed to mediation/alternative complaint resolution approaches as a potential route for resolution.

10.4.4 These are only a few examples, and staff must judge the matter in relation to each complaint. However, an extension would be the exception and staff must always try to deliver a final response to the complaint within 20 working days.

10.4.5 As with complaints considered at FLR, the proportion of complaints that exceed the 20 day limit will be evident from reported statistics. These statistics go to senior management teams and to Sanctuary's governing bodies on a regular basis.

10.4.6 Where a customer wishes to escalate from stage 1 to stage 2 because they are unhappy with the initial response, they must request this either within:

- six months of when they first knew of the problem; or
- two months of receiving their stage 1 response (if this is later).

10.4.7 After this time, any additional complaint will be considered as a new FLR. See section 18 for further detail on time limits.

10.4.8 **Appendix 5** - Complaints Handling Timelines provides further information on timelines.

## 10.5 Mediation or Alternative Complaint Resolution Approaches

10.5.1 Some complex complaints, or complaints where customers and other interested parties have become entrenched in their position, may require a different approach. Where appropriate, Sanctuary may consider using external services; using suitably trained and qualified mentors to try to resolve the matter and to reduce the risk of further escalation. Examples of complaint resolution approaches are:

- facilitated discussions (for example, a round-table discussion chaired by an independent person, or 'shuttle' discussions, with an independent person acting as go-between);
- mediation: a qualified independent third party (mediator) helps parties in dispute to try and reach an agreement. The people in the dispute, not the mediator, decide whether they can resolve things and what the outcome should be; or
- conciliation: similar to mediation but the third party is instrumental in assessing the situation and proposing a possible resolution to both parties.

10.5.2 These approaches may help all parties to understand what has caused the complaint, and so is more likely to result in mutually satisfactory solutions.

10.5.3 If the customer agrees to mediation or attending a meeting, Sanctuary must be mindful of the requirement to investigate complaints (including holding any meetings) within 20 working days wherever possible. Where there are difficulties arranging a meeting, this may provide grounds for extending the timeframe. Any revised timescales will need to be agreed and reasons for the extension must be fully recorded so if the complaint escalates to SPSO, there is a clear account of what happened and why. Extending timescales should not discourage the use of alternative complaint resolution approaches. The focus should be on resolving complaints wherever possible and different approaches should be encouraged. Other approaches may include negotiation (structured settlement meetings), quick conversations (informal process to reach an agreement) and expert evaluation. For further information see the [SPSO Alternative Complaint Resolution](#) guide.

10.5.4 As a matter of good practice, a written record of the meeting should be completed and provided to the customer. Alternatively, and by agreement with the person making the complaint, we may provide a record of the meeting in another format. We will notify the person making the complaint of the timescale within which we expect to provide the record of the meeting.

## 10.6 Closing the complaint at the investigation stage

10.6.1 Staff must let the customer know the outcome of the investigation in writing, or by their preferred method of contact and must be signed off by a manager or officer who is empowered to provide the final response on behalf of Sanctuary. Sanctuary's response to the complaint must address all areas that Sanctuary is responsible for and explain the reasons for decision that has been reached. Staff must record the decision, and details of how it was communicated to the customer, on the system for recording complaints. The outcome of the complaint will be recorded as:

- resolved or unresolved; or
- upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.

10.6.2 Staff must also make clear to the customer:

- their right to ask the SPSO to consider the complaint;
- the time limit for doing so; and
- how to contact the SPSO.

10.6.3 The SPSO has additional guidance on responding to a complaint which we will adhere to, for example:

- template decision letter; and/or
- apology guidance

10.6.4 At the earliest opportunity after the closure of the complaint, the staff member handling the complaint should consider whether any learning has been identified.

10.6.5 At the point the complaint is closed and recorded as upheld or partially upheld, a recommendation will be made to the Group Customer Service team who will oversee the 'learning outcomes database'.

10.6.6 Where a complaint has been resolved, the response does not need to provide a decision on all points of complaint, but should instead confirm the resolution agreed. See Resolving the complaint.

10.6.7 If the complaint is about the actions of a particular staff member/s, we will share with them any part of the complaint response which relates to them, (unless there are compelling reasons not to).

## 10.7 Independent external review

10.7.1 Once the investigation stage has been completed, the customer has the right to approach the SPSO if they remain dissatisfied.

10.7.2 The SPSO considers complaints from people who remain dissatisfied at the conclusion of our complaints procedure. The SPSO looks at issues such as service failure and maladministration (administrative fault), as well as the way Sanctuary has handled the complaint.

10.7.3 Sanctuary will use the following wording in informing customers of their right to ask SPSO to consider the complaint. The SPSO also provides [leaflets and guidance](#) which may be helpful in deciding how and when to refer someone to the SPSO.

#### 10.7.4 Information about the SPSO

The SPSO is the final stage for complaints about public services in Scotland. This includes complaints about Scottish housing associations or co-operatives. The SPSO considers complaints from people who remain dissatisfied at the conclusion of our complaints procedure. The SPSO looks at issues such as service failure and maladministration (administrative fault), and the way we have handled the complaint. There are some subject areas that are outwith the SPSO's jurisdiction, but it is the SPSO's role to determine whether an individual complaint is one that they can consider (and to what extent). All investigation responses must signpost to the SPSO. The SPSO cannot normally look at complaints:

- where you have not gone all the way through the housing association's or co-operative's complaints handling procedure;
- more than 12 months after you became aware of the matter you want to complain about, and
- the matters has not been (and is not being) considered in court.

The SPSO's contact details are:

SPSO

Bridgeside House  
99 McDonald Road  
Edinburgh  
EH7 4NS

(if you would like to visit in person, you must make an appointment first)

Online contact: [www.spsso.org.uk/complain](http://www.spsso.org.uk/complain) or [www.spsso.org.uk/contact-us](http://www.spsso.org.uk/contact-us)

Website: [www.spsso.org.uk](http://www.spsso.org.uk)

Freephone: 0800 377 7330

10.7.5 The SPSO does not normally look at complaints about Sanctuary's factoring service, shared owners or mid-market rent tenancies (private residential tenancies or short assured tenancies). Instead complaints must be referred to the [Housing and Property Chamber, First-tier Tribunal for Scotland \(HPC\)](#). The HPC work to resolve complaints and disputes between home owners and property factors. This service is therefore available for factoring customers still dissatisfied after investigation stage.

10.7.6 Sanctuary must still signpost these complaints to the SPSO, as there may be some aspects of the complaint that the SPSO can consider (for example, if the customer is dissatisfied with how we have handled their complaint, or if a private owner is impacted by the actions of the organisation). However, we should also notify the customer of their right to approach the Tribunal if they are dissatisfied with our response to these kinds of complaint.

10.7.7 Sheltered Housing customers, who remain dissatisfied after our investigation, must be referred by letter to the Care Inspectorate and their Local Authority. (See Section 6 for more information).

## 10.8 Post-closure contact

10.8.1 If a customer contacts us for clarification when they have received our final response, we may have further discussion with the customer to clarify our response and answer their questions. However, if the customer is dissatisfied with our response or does not accept our findings, we will explain that we have already given them our final response on the matter and signpost them to the SPSO.

## 11. Governance of the Complaints Handling Procedure

### 11.1 Roles and responsibilities

11.1.1 Overall responsibility and accountability for the management of complaints lies with Director of Sanctuary Scotland and Sanctuary's governing bodies.

11.1.2 Sanctuary's conclusion to the complaint will be authorised by an appropriate senior manager and it will be confirmed to the customer in writing that this is Sanctuary's final response. This ensures that senior management owns and is accountable for the decision. It also reassures the customer that their concerns have been taken seriously.

### 11.2 Board of Management and delegated committees

11.2.1 As the governing body with responsibility for overseeing Sanctuary's work, the Board of Management and delegated committees must provide leadership and strategic guidance. It will also have overall oversight of our affairs to enable it to ensure compliance with Sanctuary's policies and procedures.

11.2.2 In relation to complaints, its role is threefold:

- To approve the adoption of the CHP;
- To ensure that staff keep to this CHP and associated internal processes (through involvement with senior management or directly);
- To ensure that information and learning from complaints are used to improve Sanctuary's understanding of, and to steer, policies and practices.

11.2.3 Particularly important is the Board of Management's role in developing and fostering a culture that values complaints. The management committee must ensure that recording and reporting of complaints is thorough and effective, so that reports to committee reflect a true picture of all complaints.



#### 11.2.4 The management committee values all complaints and will:

- support all staff in resolving complaints locally, quickly and effectively, to reduce the potential for a complaint to escalate;
- encourage frontline staff to be 'active listeners' and to understand and act on the information they receive;
- set out how complaints data will be reported and used to promote continual improvement; and
- ensure that tenants and other customers are kept informed about how Sanctuary has used feedback to improve services.

#### 11.3 Director - Sanctuary Scotland

11.3.1 The Director provides leadership and direction in ways that guide and enable effective performance across all services. This includes ensuring that there is an effective CHP, with a robust investigation process that demonstrates how Sanctuary learns from the complaints it receives. The Director may take a direct role in all or some complaints, or may delegate responsibility for the CHP to senior staff. Regular management reports will inform the Director of the quality of complaints performance.

#### 11.4 Senior managers

11.4.1 On the Director's behalf, senior managers are responsible for:

- managing complaints and the way Sanctuary learns from them;
- ensuring that recording and reporting on complaints is thorough and effective;
- overseeing the implementation of actions required as a result of a complaint;
- investigating complaints; and
- deputising for the Director on occasion.

11.4.2 Senior management will ensure that:

- Sanctuary's final position on a complaint investigation is signed off by an appropriate manager or officer in order to provide assurance that this is the definitive response of Sanctuary and that the complainant's concerns have been taken seriously
- it maintains overall responsibility and accountability for the management and governance of complaints handling (including complaints about contracted services)
- it has an active role in, and understanding of, the CHP (although not necessarily involved in the decision-making process of complaint handling)
- mechanisms are in place to ensure a consistent approach to the way complaints handling information is managed, monitored, reviewed and reported at all levels in Sanctuary; and
- complaints information is used to improve services, and this is evident from regular publications.

11.4.3 However, senior managers may decide to delegate some elements of complaints handling (such as investigations and drafting of response letters) to other senior staff. Where this happens, senior managers should retain ownership and accountability for the management and reporting of complaints. They may also be responsible for preparing and signing decision letters to customers, so they should be satisfied that the investigation is complete, and their response addresses all aspects of the complaint.

## 11.5 Complaints investigators

11.5.1 Sanctuary in Scotland has designated complaints investigators who are responsible and accountable for the management at the Investigation stage. Their roles and responsibilities will be documented and subject to regular review, as outlined in **Appendix 3**. They may work in a service delivery team or as part of a centralised customer service team. They will be involved in investigating and coordinating all aspects of the response to the customer. This may include preparing a comprehensive written report, including details of any procedural changes in service delivery that could result in wider opportunities for learning across the organisation. Once the investigation concludes, a comprehensive report on the complaint's outcome is presented to a senior staff member for agreement and authorisation of the approach and conclusion. The authorisation is usually undertaken by either the Director of Sanctuary Scotland, the Head of Housing in Scotland, the Head of Complaints, or the Head of Development in Scotland.

## 11.6 All our staff

11.6.1 A complaint may be made to any member of our staff. So, all staff must be aware of:

- the CHP;
- how to handle and record complaints at the FLR stage;
- who they can refer a complaint to, in case they are not able to handle the matter;
- the need to try and resolve complaints early and as close to the point of service delivery as possible;
- their clear authority to attempt to resolve any complaints they may be called upon to deal with; and
- training which must be completed as part of the induction process for all new staff and refresher training on this procedure for current staff which should be completed on a regular basis.

## 12. Complaints about staff or governing body members

12.1 Complaints about staff may arise and if this occurs, Sanctuary must share relevant parts of the complaint and response with any staff members complained about. At stage 2, staff members must be given information about the complaint process and support available for their wellbeing/HR procedures (including a named contact) and should be kept updated on any timeframe extensions. The right to be heard, understood and respected also applies to the person being complained about. A detailed process that describes what action should be taken following a complaint about a member of staff can be found in **AG02**. This includes complaints about senior staff and Governing Body members, and where complaints may relate to disciplinary or whistleblowing processes also.

## 13. Recording, reporting, learning from and publicising complaints

### 13.1 Introduction

13.1.1 Complaints provide valuable customer feedback. One of the aims of the CHP is to identify opportunities to improve services across the business. All complaints must be recorded in a systematic way so that Sanctuary can use the complaints data for analysis and management reporting, in order to identify and address the causes of complaints and, where appropriate, identify training opportunities and introduce service improvements. Sanctuary also has arrangements in place to ensure complaints about contractors are recorded, reported on and publicised in line with this CHP.

### 13.2 Recording complaints

13.2.1 To collect suitable data that will enable us to fully investigate and respond to a complaint and to track themes and trends, the following information should be recorded in line with SPSO minimum requirements:

- the customer's name and address;
- the date the complaint was received;
- the nature of the complaint;
- staff member responsible for handling the complaint
- how the complaint was received (for example by email, post etc.);
- the service the complaint refers to;
- the date the complaint was closed at the FLR stage (where appropriate);
- the date the complaint was escalated to the investigation stage (where appropriate);
- action taken at the investigation stage (where appropriate);
- the outcome of the complaint at each stage resolved or unresolved, upheld, partially upheld or not upheld;
- the date the complaint was closed at the investigation stage (where appropriate);
- the underlying cause of the complaint and any remedial action taken; and
- the outcome of the SPSO's investigation (where applicable).

13.2.2 If the customer does not want to provide any of this information, we will reassure them that it will be managed appropriately, and record what we can.

13.2.3 Individual complaint files will be stored in line with our document retention policy.

13.2.4 Sanctuary has structured systems for recording complaints, their outcomes and any resulting action. The primary means for recording complaints is the One Sanctuary CIC complaints cases where learning outcomes should also be noted (see 9.9.2).

### 13.3 Reporting of complaints

13.3.1 Complaint details are analysed to identify service failures and inform necessary improvements, aiding management decisions and Annual Return on the Charter (ARC) reporting.

13.3.2 Sanctuary publishes complaint outcomes and responses annually on our website, showcasing positive impact, ensuring transparency, and emphasising regard for complaints.

13.3.3 Sanctuary must:

- Publicise complaints outcomes, trends, and actions taken on a quarterly basis.
- Utilise case studies and examples to demonstrate how complaints contribute to service enhancements.

### 13.4 Learning from Complaints

13.4.1 After investigations, findings and recommendations are promptly communicated to service users and staff.

13.4.2 The senior management team regularly reviews individual complaints, regardless of their outcome, and analyses complaints data to identify scope for service improvements or updates in policies and procedures. In cases of necessary service enhancement, appropriate actions are taken. Monitoring of performance in the relevant service area ensures successful resolution. (See also section 12.6 'Using data to improve our services').

13.4.3 Sanctuary will:

- Utilise complaints data to identify the root cause of complaints.
- Take action to minimise the risk of recurrence.
- Document corrective actions in the complaints file.
- Systematically review complaints performance reports to enhance service delivery.

13.4.4 Where Sanctuary identifies the need for service improvement, and it is feasible and cost-effective to make such improvements:

- Authorisation for the required actions must be given.
- An assigned staff member (or team) will take ownership of the issue and ensure the action is executed.
- A target date will be set for action implementation and, if possible, completion.
- The designated individual will oversee that the action occurs within the agreed timescale and monitor the resolution in the service area. Staff and management committee members will learn from complaints, recording learning outcomes, and sharing information between teams.

### 13.5 Publicising Complaints Performance Information

13.5.1 Sanctuary periodically reports its performance in handling complaints to the SHR through the ARC. Performance statistics, including complaint volumes, types, and key details, such as resolution times and outcomes (upheld, partially upheld, not upheld), are provided in alignment with the SPSO's published performance indicators.

13.5.2 The reports demonstrate the impact of complaints on improving services and reaffirm Sanctuary's commitment to valuing customer feedback. They enhance transparency in the complaints handling service and are accessible to the public in alternative formats upon request.

### 13.6 Using Data to Improve Our Services

13.6.1 Sanctuary reports complaints statistics to senior management, analysing complaint areas and customer service issues. Efforts are made to identify and enhance access for vulnerable groups through adjustments, partnerships, and project work.

## 14. Maintaining confidentiality and data protection

14.1 Confidentiality is important in complaints handling. This includes maintaining the customer's confidentiality and confidentiality in relation to information about staff members, contractors or any third parties involved in the complaint and explaining to them the importance of confidentiality generally.

14.2 Confidentiality and complying with data protection regulations should not prevent Sanctuary from being open and transparent, as far as possible, in how we handle complaints. This includes sharing as much information with the complainant (and, where appropriate, any affected staff members) as we can. When sharing information, staff should be clear about why the information is being shared and our expectations on how the recipient will use the information.

- 14.3 Sanctuary must always bear in mind legal requirements, for example data protection legislation, as well as internal policies on confidentiality and the use of customer information.
- 14.4 There may be situations where a response to a complaint may be limited by confidentiality, such as:
- Where a complaint has been raised against a staff member and has been upheld - we will advise the customer that their complaint is upheld, but would not share specific details affecting staff members, particularly where disciplinary action is taken.
  - Where someone has raised a concern about a child or an adult's safety and is unhappy about how that has been dealt with - we would look into this to check whether the safety concern had been properly dealt with, but we would not share any details of our findings in relation to the safety concern.

## 15. Expected behaviours

- 15.1 We expect all staff to behave in a professional manner and treat customers with courtesy, respect and dignity. We also ask customers bringing a complaint to treat our staff with respect. We ask customers to engage actively with the complaint handling process by:
- telling us their key issues of concern and organising any supporting information they want to give us (we understand that some people will require support to do this);
  - working with us to agree the key points of complaint when an investigation is required; and
  - responding to reasonable requests for information.
- 15.2 People may act out of character in times of trouble or distress. The circumstances leading to a complaint may result in the customer acting in an unacceptable way. Sometimes a health condition or a disability can affect how a person expresses themselves. The circumstances leading to a complaint may also result in the customer acting in an unacceptable way.
- 15.3 Customers who have previously displayed challenging or inappropriate behaviour, or who have difficulty expressing themselves, may still have a legitimate grievance, and Sanctuary will treat all complaints seriously.
- 15.4 Sanctuary also recognises that the actions of customers who are angry may result in unreasonable demands on time and resources or unacceptable behaviour towards our staff. Sanctuary will, therefore, apply its policies and procedures to protect staff from unacceptable behaviour; such as unreasonable persistence, threats or offensive behaviour from customers.

- 15.5 Where Sanctuary decides to restrict contact with a customer, it will communicate that decision, notify the customer of a right of appeal, and review any decision to restrict contact with Sanctuary in line with the [Managing Challenging and Unacceptable Behaviour - Housing Policy and Procedure](#). Sanctuary will allow the customer to demonstrate a more reasonable approach later and will also make clear to the customer that they can still request other services, such as repairs, while their access is restricted.
- 15.6 If Sanctuary decides to restrict a customer's contact, Sanctuary will be careful to follow the process set out in our policy and to minimise any restrictions on the customer's access to the complaints process. Sanctuary will normally continue investigating a complaint even where contact restrictions are in place (for example, limiting communication to letter or to a named staff member).
- 15.7 In some cases, it may be possible to continue investigating the complaint without contact from the customer and in limited circumstances to restrict access to the complaint process entirely. This would be as a last resort, should be as limited as possible (for a limited time, or about a limited set of subjects) and requires manager approval. Where access to the complaint process is restricted, staff must signpost the customer to the SPSO (see [Signposting to the SPSO](#)).
- 15.8 The SPSO has [guidance on promoting positive behaviour and managing unacceptable actions](#).

## **16. Unreasonable or unreasonably persistent complaints**

- 16.1 Unreasonable or unreasonably persistent complainants are those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts, hinder Sanctuary's consideration of their complaints, or complaints made by other customers. Such complainants may pursue a justified complaint in an inappropriate way, pursue complaints which appear to have no substance, or continue with complaints that have already been investigated and determined. Even though contact between the complainant and Sanctuary may be amicable, it can still place heavy demands on staff time. The complainants may also be emotionally charged, and this can be distressing for all involved.
- 16.2 Sanctuary must not assume that someone who has displayed unacceptable customer behaviour in the past does so with any subsequent complaint.
- 16.3 The types of behaviour listed below may result in a customer being regarded as either unreasonable or unreasonably persistent:
- Refusing to cooperate with the complaints procedure, despite being offered assistance from staff.
  - Refusing to accept that certain issues are outside the scope of Sanctuary's complaints procedure.
  - Making unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with complaints.
  - Introducing trivial or irrelevant new information at a later stage.

- Raising many detailed but unimportant questions and insisting that these are all answered.
- Covertly recording meeting and conversations without the prior knowledge and consent of other people involved.
- Adopting a 'scatter-gun' approach by raising concerns with different staff across Sanctuary.
- Making excessive demands on the time and resources of staff or members while their complaint is being investigated.
- Refusing to accept Sanctuary's decision and repeatedly arguing points with no new evidence.
- Making bullying, physical or psychological threats against staff.

16.4 In cases where a complainant is unreasonable or unreasonably persistent, the measures below are open to Sanctuary:

- Declining to follow the complaints procedure - there may be exceptional circumstances where the complaint is negligible or has no substance. In these circumstances it may be appropriate not to use the complaints procedure at all.
- Declining further communication on a specific complaint after consideration under the procedure - where the contact from a customer is unreasonably persistent and all matters have been addressed, Sanctuary may choose to close the complaint with a final letter outlining its actions and response to the issues originally raised. Under these circumstances Sanctuary will no longer enter into any further communication regarding the matter.
- Limiting communication on a complaint - sometimes a complainant persistently telephones, emails, sends letters or makes personal visits. In these cases, it may be reasonable to limit the complainant to one method of contact with Sanctuary (telephone, letter or email) or to require the complainant to communicate with only one named member of staff. This limitation will only apply to their complaint.

16.5 When using any of the above measures the local Housing Manager should be consulted, and approval sought from them in the first instance. Should the situation be particularly complex, the Head of Housing and/or Group Customer Services Manager must be consulted, with particular attention given to any disability or other factor (for example, where English is not the first language) which may be pertinent. The customer must then be notified in writing of the course of action proposed. The letter of notification must make it clear that the customer can appeal regarding the actions proposed within ten working days. Any appeals must be reviewed by the Head of Housing.

16.6 Complainants may have mental health issues or learning difficulties. A sensitive approach must be taken to ensure that the health needs of those involved are addressed and taken into account. Further information is available in the [Adult Support and Protection \(Safeguarding\) - Scotland Policy and Procedure](#).



- 16.7 Any appeal will be referred to the Director of Sanctuary Scotland for consideration. The complainant should be advised that if they would like the decision to be reviewed, they should raise their concerns with the appropriate ombudsman service.
- 16.8 Sanctuary must confirm the outcome of the appeal in writing to the customer and inform all relevant staff.
- 16.9 Where a customer continues to contact us about the same issue, we will explain that we have already given them our final response on the matter and signpost them to the SPSO. We may also consider whether we need to take action under our [Managing Challenging and Unacceptable Behaviour - Housing Policy and Procedure](#). The SPSO has issue a [template letter for explaining when the CHP does not apply](#) which can also be used for these circumstances.

## 17. Supporting the customer

- 17.1 All members of the community have the right to equal access to our CHP. Sanctuary must always take into account our commitment and responsibilities to equality by recognising vulnerabilities or customers with specific needs and to recognise the barriers that some customers may face complaining. These may be physical, sensory, communication or language barriers, but can also include their anxieties and concerns. Customers may need support to overcome these barriers. This includes making reasonable adjustments to our service to help the customer where appropriate (see section 5 of the Policy for further information).
- 17.2 Identifying a vulnerability will not automatically mean it is appropriate to take any further actions or change how we do things. For example, it may not be proportionate or necessary to fast track a case involving a vulnerability. In each case, Sanctuary will whether practical steps can be taken to improve a customer's journey and whether not making adjustments might actively result in harm. Actions that Sanctuary may take in individual cases to recognise and respond appropriately may include, but are not limited to:
- fast tracking individual cases;
  - prioritise the progress of individual cases within our own caseloads;
  - manage expectations clearly from the outset;
  - identify and signpost to sources of independent support or advocacy;
  - change how we communicate with someone, for example how we contact them and how often;
  - helping vulnerable customers identify when they might wish to make a complaint (for example, by training frontline staff who provide services to vulnerable groups); and
  - providing a neutral point of contact for complaints (where the relationship between customers and frontline staff is significant and ongoing).

- 17.3 Several independent support and advocacy groups are available to support customers in pursuing a complaint and help them understand their rights and communicate their complaints. Customers should be advised of and signposted to these as appropriate for example, through the Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance or Citizen's Advice Scotland. See [Catalogue of advice providers](#) for more information.
- 17.4 Customers who do not have English as a first language may need help with interpretation and translation services, and other customers may have specific needs that we will seek to address to ensure easy access to the CHP.
- 17.5 Where any reasonable adjustments have been agreed, it is important that this is noted and delivered consistently by all staff who may have contact with the complainant. Any adjustment should be clearly noted in complaint files or cases and CIC. Staff should also record where there has been a discussion or consideration, and a decision made not to offer an adjustment as part of the complaints handling case.

## **18. Time limit for making complaints**

- 18.1 This model CHP sets a time limit of six months from when the customer first became aware of an issue (see also section 10.4.5), within which time they may ask Sanctuary to consider the complaint, unless there are special circumstances for considering complaints beyond this time (for example, where a person was not able to complain due to serious illness or recent bereavement).
- 18.2 Sanctuary will apply this time limit with discretion taking into account the seriousness of the issue, the availability of relevant records and staff involved, how long ago the events occurred, and the likelihood that an investigation will lead to a practical benefit for the customer or useful learning for the organisation.
- 18.3 In decision making, Sanctuary will also take account of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002 (Section 10(1)), which sets out the time limit within which a member of the public can normally ask the SPSO to consider complaints. The limit is one year from when the person first knew of the problem they are complaining about, unless there are special circumstances for considering complaints beyond this time. The SPSO have discretion to waive this time limit in special circumstances (and may consider doing so in cases where we have waived our own time limit).
- 18.4 If it is clear that a decision not to investigate a customer's complaint will lead to a request for external review of the matter, Sanctuary may decide that this satisfies the special circumstances criteria. This will enable us to consider the complaint and try to resolve it.