

SEPTEMBER 2002

(How) Are You Being Served?

*A Good Practice Guide on Complaints Handling
in Housing Associations*

Raising
the Standard
for Homes and
Neighbourhoods





“We believe organisations that work hard to take consumers’ views and opinions into account will be more successful.”

(Housing Corporation, *Communities in Control*, 2000).

“We believe in a positive culture in which providers of housing services should welcome and encourage complaints as an important part of identifying problems with, and improving, services.”

(Housing Ombudsman, *Annual Report*, 2000).

FOREWORD**The Housing Corporation**

Complaints have great business value, and handling complaints effectively can provide valuable insights into what your business does well. I am pleased to introduce this new guide for associations on good practice in handling complaints.

Housing associations which are registered with the Corporation have certain statutory obligations about the way they deal with complaints. In particular, they have a duty to become members of an Ombudsman scheme approved by the Secretary of State. These obligations are set out in Appendix 1 to this guide.

In regulatory terms, we believe customer service is a key part of associations' business. This is why all associations are subject to inspection of the way customers receive services, including complaints management.

By publishing this guide we want to raise awareness of complaints as a business tool. Sometimes it can seem that managing complaints is viewed as separate from service delivery, that complaints are a problem or an inconvenience, getting in the way of business. This is to miss an important opportunity to learn and to discover what residents really want. Effective complaints management will reveal where processes are not user-friendly or where better outcomes might be secured; and it is this knowledge that informs continuous improvement.

Our jointly-funded research with the Independent Housing Ombudsman shows there is demand in the sector to learn more about making the most of residents' complaints. Our guide highlights why complaints are good for residents and good for housing associations and it offers practical advice for associations developing their complaints handling capability.

I take this opportunity to thank those who have been involved in producing the guide: Caroline Pickering Associates, which conducted the primary research; the Board of the Independent Housing Ombudsman Service and the Ombudsman's staff, who steered the research project; and Lynda Hance of Training Plus Consultancy, who wrote the guide. I extend particular thanks to the many housing associations who took part in the research and offered advice, and to the residents who participated in focus groups and whose views underpin the good-practice principles in the guide.

Dr Norman Perry,
Chief Executive, the Housing Corporation.

FOREWORD

FOREWORD**Housing Ombudsman**

I welcome this guide and am pleased to endorse and support it.

There are aspects of it that will benefit all of us who provide services in social housing.

The Independent Housing Ombudsman Scheme is committed to the promotion of a positive complaints culture in housing.

We encourage greater acceptance of an open, flexible, and outcomes-based approach to complaints.

It is in that context that we seek to do justice on the merits of each case.

Additionally, where appropriate, our intervention can lead to the improvement of individual and community amenity for consumers of housing and of management by the providers of those services. I believe that this guide reflects, promotes, and assists those objectives.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Biles'. The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light grey background.

Dr Michael Biles,
Housing Ombudsman.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In 2001 the Housing Corporation and the Independent Housing Ombudsman (IHO) commissioned extensive research into how complaints are currently handled in housing associations, what residents and staff want from complaints procedures, and where lessons can be learnt from other sources. Data from the research on how housing associations handle complaints is available on the IHO website: www.ihos.org.uk.

This good practice guide uses that research to help associations improve performance and comply with the Corporation's Regulatory Code. Appendix 1 sets out their legal and regulatory duties.

The research shows that housing associations which welcome complaints tend to have the highest customer satisfaction. So it follows that they should regard complaints as a positive source of feedback and as learning opportunities that enable them to be responsive to the communities they serve.

Complaints systems should be easily accessible to housing associations' diverse customers and should take into account the different needs of people wishing to make a complaint.

A consistent feature of good procedures is speed – the longer a complaint runs on, the more dissatisfied customers get. Good practice organisations aim to complete all internal stages within eight weeks.

"Handling complaints properly shows how important customer care is to your organisation. It shows that you:

- *Listen to your users*
- *Learn from your mistakes*
- *Are continually trying to improve your service"*

(Service First Unit, The Cabinet Office, 1999).



Michael Biles and Norman Perry
agreeing an information sharing protocol between the IHOS and the Housing Corporation

2 WHAT IS A COMPLAINT?

There is no single definition of a complaint – different organisations have different approaches. The Housing Corporation does not seek to take a single view – being prescriptive would not recognise the diversity of housing associations and their customers.

Generally, modern complaint systems and good practice organisations do not distinguish between formal and informal complaints, and do not require a complaint to be submitted in a particular format. The distinction between formal and informal complaints is rarely found outside the public sector – private companies generally want to receive any feedback and use it in the quality assurance process.

Modern complaints management systems and good practice organisations use simple, streamlined feedback processes that deal with **any** dissatisfaction, leaving behind the idea of formal and informal complaint processes.

One suggestion about defining a complaint is that an ‘informal’ complaint might be one that is immediately resolved, while a ‘formal’ complaint might be one that goes through a longer complaints procedure.

However, the Department of Health has reviewed social services complaint procedures and recognised that ‘informal’ suggests the complaint is not serious. It has proposed that the word ‘informal’ is not used.

Arena Housing Association has taken a policy decision to:

- *“Move away from a concern with only recording “formal complaints” to a position of recording all feedback.*
- *Allow easy computerised recording of such feed back and also produce an easy method to monitor and track actions.”*

Ashton Pioneer Homes defines complaints as *“...an expression of dissatisfaction by either a tenant, applicant or member of the public where an initial response to their problem has not proven satisfactory”.*

The Walsall Mediation Service distinguishes between a complaint and a dispute:

*“A **complaint** is a situation that involves a person who believes that they have been aggrieved and it requires a response which will provide some kind of redress. This type of situation normally lends itself to successful resolution following a traditional complaint procedure.*

*A **dispute** has no clear definition. Allegations are often met by counter-allegations. Facts are often subjective, proof difficult to substantiate and there is no conclusive evidence about who is right or wrong. Following a traditional complaint procedure is not appropriate for disputes.”*

The Local Government Ombudsman suggests a complaint is *“an expression of dissatisfaction... about... action or lack of action or about the standard of a service”.*

The British Standard for complaint management defines a complaint as *“any dissatisfaction (with an organisation) whether justified or not” (BSI, 1999)*.

Northamptonshire County Council has a complaint policy that gives customers the right to decide whether the matter is a complaint.

The London Borough of Wandsworth also follows this principle and has been recording 25,000 complaints each year. This is the highest number of complaints recorded by a local authority, yet Wandsworth also has more Charter Mark Awards than any other public service.

The Housing Corporation has published a guide, *Responding to Allegations*, which is useful in defining what constitutes an allegation – particularly about staff, discrimination and criminal activities. Allegations may need to be investigated differently from complaints, depending on the nature of the allegation. If a complaint is about a criminal matter, or if that is suspected, then it is best to consult the police before taking any action.

Some organisations distinguish complaints about service from complaints about policy. If a customer wishes to comment on or complain about policy, then it may be more appropriate to offer them different ways to make their views heard. The Local Government Ombudsman suggests that they might make known their views on policies via deputations, residents' panels, formal consultation processes and so on. This reflects the need for effective resident participation, openness and accountability in the work of housing associations.

An effective complaints procedure identifies complaints that it cannot deal with and directs the customer to the right organisation. For example, there are certain complaints that a housing association and the IHO cannot deal with:

- Housing benefit is the responsibility of the local authority and complaints should be made to them and ultimately the Local Government Ombudsman.
- Some housing associations arrange bulk-purchase home contents insurance for their residents, but do not administer the scheme. Problems with the way the scheme is run should go to the insurers and ultimately to the Financial Ombudsman Service.
- Complaints about the level of service charges (rather than the process for setting them should be referred to the Residential Property Tribunal Service (formerly the Leasehold Valuation Tribunal).

Good complaints handling means efficient redirection of customers without 'passing the buck'.

3 WHY COMPLAINTS ARE GOOD FOR RESIDENTS AND HOUSING

It is important not to ignore complaints:

- Customers of public services, generally, have limited choice, but if they are dissatisfied they may lose confidence and 'shop the system', contacting several services and agencies for the right answer.
- Dissatisfied customers of social housing providers may delay or withhold payment of rent or service charges, imposing extra collection expense on their landlord.
- Poor complaints handling can lead to a poor image for the organisation – dissatisfied customers may spread 'bad news'. Image is particularly important for housing associations wishing to participate in stock transfer programmes. Housing associations are businesses, many operating in areas of low demand or where customers have increasing choice in applying for particular landlords, and all businesses should pay attention to customer complaints.
- Unresponsive systems that are difficult to access can create 'difficult' customers who become costly and time consuming, with low expectations and little understanding of the processes they have to go through.
- An organisation that ignores complaints, or does not value them, is unable to learn from them and improve future services.

Notes

4 BENEFITS OF EFFECTIVE COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT

An effective complaints scheme will be an important component of a culture of continuous improvement and will help to challenge an organisation.

“An effective complaint scheme can be more effective than a best value regime.”

(Ben Page, Director of Government Research, MORI, 2000)

An effective scheme improves:

- customer confidence and satisfaction;
- credibility and image;
- employee morale;
- understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service at Board and management levels.

Other benefits of effective complaints management are:

- early warning of service breakdown;
- prevention of repeat problems;
- free consultancy – ‘difficult’ customers can be turned into very effective exposers of flaws in the organisation’s services and policies;
- reducing the likelihood and cost of legal action;
- better targeting of resources and lower costs of service delivery;
- increased customer loyalty – loyal customers will spread ‘good news’ stories and may help to attract investment.

West Yorkshire Housing Association was awarded a Charter Mark in 2001. Complaints handling was one of the Charter Mark Assessor’s criteria and, as a result, the association:

- began a system of recording oral complaints;
- publishes details in the tenants’ newsletter of the number of complaints received annually;
- includes a ‘digest’ of complaints in the newsletter;
- actively encourages complaints so as to improve services.

What helps to make a good complaints handling system?

“Complaints systems should:

- *be easily **accessible** and well publicised;*
- *be **simple** to understand and use;*
- *allow **speedy** handling, with established time limits for action, and keep people informed of progress;*
- *ensure a full and **fair** investigation;*
- *respect people’s desire for **confidentiality**;*
- *address all the points at issue, and provide an **effective** response and appropriate redress;*
- *provide **information** to management so that services can be improved.”*

(Citizens Charter Complaints Taskforce, 1995)

There is a British Standard for complaint management (BS8600). In essence, it requires:

- adequate resources to deal with the complaints received;
- employee training to make sure those who deal with customers understand the procedures and operate them properly;
- delegation and responsibility to enable employees to deal quickly and efficiently with routine complaints;
- escalation procedures to ensure that in the event of a serious complaint, key employees are alerted and the problem is dealt with by whoever has the appropriate expertise;
- external review mechanisms where internal procedures are deadlocked;
- follow-up action to ensure that the company learns from any mistakes, and improves products, services and the complaint system where necessary.

(British Standards Institute, 1999)

5 HOW TO COMPLAIN

Customers have individual preferences about how to make their complaint, including letters, telephone, in person, or using the Internet.

Requiring complaints to be put in writing can be a deterrent. In particular it has equal opportunities implications – customers with poor literacy skills, visual impairment, or whose first language is not English, may be unable to express their complaint in writing, or lack the confidence to try.

If housing associations use call centres as their telephone point of contact with customers, they should be aware that customers may be unable to speak to the same person twice, and that the call centre operative is unlikely to be the person who will investigate the complaint. This makes it even more important that the person who is investigating the complaint should call the customer back.

Avis, the car hire company, advises employees to log all contact whether written or on the telephone. The company's complaint codes include personal service delivery issues, such as telephone problems (engaged, no answer, or too many transfers) and process issues such as reservations, check-in and checkout, and insurance. The company uses the information it collects to monitor trends and identify root causes of problems in service.

Inevitably, complaints about individual issues will be raised during open meetings. To avoid such disruption, it is advisable to set up a help desk, or complaints desk, where individual issues can be dealt with before or after the meeting.

South West Trains has ad hoc 'Meet the Managers' days at their main stations. These are advertised in advance and managers are available to take customer feedback and direct complaints. This enables customers to raise issues with senior staff and gives managers a 'feel' for issues on the front line.

In 2002 the London Borough of Camden was awarded a Charter Mark for the second time for their complaints service. They have on their website a guide to complaining that advises local residents how to complain about a housing association and allows them to complain online about several local housing associations with which they have a partnership arrangement.

Customers put complaints in writing for various reasons:

- They are very upset – it takes effort to write a letter.
- They are dissatisfied with the outcome of an oral complaint.
- They are building a paper trail in preparation for legal action.
- There was no facility to complain in person or they were uncomfortable with this.
- They felt unable to complain at the time.
- They have been told to complain in writing.

(Adapted from Barber & Møller, 1996)

It might be tempting to ignore or disregard anonymous complaints, but a pattern of anonymous complaints may highlight a problem with the way customers perceive a service, or raise a 'whistle-blowing' issue that needs to be followed up.

Northamptonshire Social Care and Health Services advises its employees to investigate an anonymous complaint in a similar way to any other complaint.

The Housing Corporation published a leaflet for residents of housing associations in 2001, called *Complaining about a housing association*. It explains the need to follow internal procedures, but also directs residents to the IHO.

The Office of Fair Trading advises that a company should do its best to pursue even anonymous complaints, but recognises there may be practical difficulties if full information is not available and the company cannot seek clarification from the complainant.

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors has a Residential Management Code. Section 21 of the Code states what should be done in the event of complaints and says: "Where the Manager is not the Landlord, the procedure should allow for the Leaseholder/Tenant to complain to the Landlord."

Not all services are run by the landlord; some may be contracted out, e.g. to a care agency or a private repairs service, or to a Tenant Management Organisation. In this case the customer may choose to complain to the service provider, or to the landlord. Both the Local Government Ombudsman and the IHO have complaint forms that can be downloaded from the Internet - see www.lgo.org.uk and www.ihos.org.uk

6 SPEED

The longer a complaint runs on, the more dissatisfied customers get, so speed is important.

“Complaints resolved in less than 3 weeks have a net balance of satisfied customers, but dissatisfaction grows steadily when more than 3 weeks pass by before resolution.”

(Office of Fair Trading, 1999)

“Customers want an acknowledgement of their complaint as soon as possible – by return of post – unless the complaint can be resolved immediately.”

(The National Complaints Culture Survey, Institute of Customer Service, 2001)

Good practice systems aim to take no more than eight weeks to resolve complaints.

Ashton Pioneer Homes has a policy that sets out what complaints front-line staff are responsible for resolving, and states that the member of staff should attempt to deal with the complaint on the day they receive it.

If that is impossible, they should acknowledge the complaint and should then resolve it within five working days. If a staff member cannot do this, they should pass the complaint to their manager to respond.

Notes

7 FAIRNESS

“Those who operate the system must be seen to be as impartial and objective as possible.”

(National Consumer Council, 1991)

Generally, complainants want the opportunity to discuss their complaint in person, at the start of the process, not the end.

The Local Government Ombudsman’s booklet *Running a Complaints System* recommends that someone investigating a complaint should contact the customer to:

- clarify the complaint;
- clarify the outcome sought;
- check whether he or she needs support of any kind (e.g. for poor sight or hearing or a language need);
- check what he or she needs to understand the discussion properly;
- explain the investigation procedure;
- discuss what the customer wants.

The London Borough of Camden’s housing department has guidelines that require an employee to visit any customer who complains about quality of repairs or delay in carrying them out.

Another aspect to fairness is that in good practice organisations, the individual or group against whom the complaint is made never investigates the complaint; another member of staff who was not involved in the issue deals with it. Small associations could have reciprocal arrangements with other associations if they do not have enough staff to work this way.

Good complaints procedures will have literature explaining where else the customer can go if they are dissatisfied with the internal investigation – for example, in housing associations, the external body is the IHO (not the Housing Corporation).

Fairness also extends to staff – they should be told immediately about a complaint against them, given the opportunity to tell their side of things and be kept informed of progress and the result.

8 CONFIDENTIALITY

Customers should be given the opportunity to complain in confidence – it is helpful to reassure them that a complaint will have no adverse consequence such as taking a service away from them.

“A good complaints system will make it clear that complaints will be dealt with impartially, objectively and professionally; and that citizens need have no fear that there might be adverse treatment of themselves or their families because they have made a complaint.”

(Local Government Ombudsman)

To ensure that there are no adverse consequences, the association could make random or specific customer satisfaction checks. Sample checks could ask questions such as:

- Did our response answer your complaint?
- Did we understand your complaint?
- Were you kept informed?
- Are you receiving good service now?

“A good complaints system will make it clear that complaints will be dealt with impartially, objectively and professionally; and that citizens need have no fear that there might be adverse treatment of themselves or their families because they have made a complaint.”

(Local Government Ombudsman)

9 THE RESULT

Customers generally accept that things do go wrong, but expect that something will be done to put them right, and prevent a recurrence.

The Association of British Insurers suggests:

"If a mistake has had an adverse affect on the customer, then compensation or some other benefit should be considered in order to put them into the position they would have been in had the mistake not occurred."

(Association of British Insurers, 1998)

However, compensation is not necessarily what the customer wants. Even if the complaint is due to a misunderstanding rather than a mistake, a proper apology is important. Customers generally wish to be put into the position they would have been in if the mistake had not occurred, or for the problem to be rectified.

If compensation is appropriate, immediate payout can save on administrative costs:

"Front line staff should be delegated as much discretion as is appropriate, to help them resolve complaints... this may include a power to provide 'ex-gratia payments.'"

(National Consumer Council)

The British Standards Institute recommends that if procedures are changed because of the complaint, the complainant should be told about what has been done – and be thanked for helping the organisation to improve.

Local Government Ombudsman guidance offers suggestions for remedies, including advice on offering appropriate compensation and assessing a payment for inconvenience, time and trouble.

It suggests financial compensation may be appropriate where:

- specific financial losses have been incurred;
- devaluation of property is alleged – an independent valuation could suggest the difference in value;
- a tenant has to live in poor conditions for longer than reasonable – court-awarded damages in similar cases are a suggested guide;
- the complainant has spent an unreasonable and significant amount of time pursuing the matter – payment could be for 'time and trouble';
- exceptional worry, distress or inconvenience have been caused by the events.

Bromford Corinthians Housing Group has a leaflet explaining their compensation policy in terms of complaints. Their key criteria for paying compensation are where:

- services normally provided are absent;
- residents suffer loss due to the failure to deal satisfactorily with repairs;
- residents suffer loss due to other failures of the service;
- failure of service causes distress;
- residents have to spend excessive time and trouble achieving a solution to a complaint.

10 TRAINING

"Handling complaints about the service is as much part of the job as providing the service."

Service First Unit, Cabinet Office

The quality of complaints management will depend on the skills of the employees who implement it. Skills in complaints handling may be included in general customer care training, but it may also be useful to have specialist training in, for example, investigation skills.

A blame culture, where staff are criticised for being the subject of complaints, can lead to fear, negativity or hostility. A learning culture can overcome this.

All employees should have **some** knowledge of complaints policy and procedures and where to direct customers or how to deal with complaints.

First Community Health NHS Trust calls its complaints system 'Are you satisfied?', so customers do not see it as intimidating or negative. They train their staff to be skilled and confident in responding quickly, fully and fairly to complaints.

TXU Energi has a training programme called *Living the Service Excellence Culture*. This programme includes a complaints workshop.

TXU Energi also has general complaint-handling training and a monthly clinic session where employees can get advice on resolving complaints.

Large organisations may choose to run in-house training: smaller organisations might be able to pool resources with others, or attend external training.

Training in complaints handling would usefully include the following topic areas:

- Why people complain and how to obtain constructive feedback.
- When employees adversely react to complaints, identify ways to change this.
- Examining barriers to developing and implementing effective complaints procedures.
- Involving employees, residents and board members in the development of a policy.
- Dealing with complaints within the context of best value.

HM Customs & Excise include a self-assessment exercise at the end of their 'Handling Complaints' training booklet. Each question is cross-referenced to the relevant section of the main text containing the answer. This allows the reader to assess their learning quickly by comparing their replies.

Contacting the customer following a complaint can achieve two things – an acknowledgement of the complaint, giving the staff member an opportunity to apologise immediately, and the opportunity to clarify the details of the complaint.

Virgin Mobile records all to telephone calls to its service centre. Team leaders spend half an hour a day reviewing them.

The advantage of this is that standards of service can be maintained, trends in customer dissatisfaction can be picked up early, and issues can be used in training.

The National Complaints Culture Survey 2000 found that the level of effective complaint-handling training contributes significantly to employees' overall level of satisfaction with a complaints process.

(Institute of Customer Service, 2000)

This can start the investigation off on the right foot, save time in the long run, and defuse the situation. In addition to this, it is advisable to contact the customer again once the complaint has been resolved, to ensure that they are satisfied with the outcome.

Ideas for training may be noted below:

11 MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

For a complaints procedure to be effective, the organisation must have management information telling it how well it is performing and if it is using complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve.

Management information can be used to discover patterns and trends among groups of customers who access a complaints scheme and groups who do not. A complaint procedure integrated into the overall business can ensure that information from dissatisfied customers can be used to guide future decision-making.

If customers are monitored by gender, age, ethnicity and disability, the association can check to make sure that the scheme is widely accessible and to identify groups of customers who do not complain, in case this suggests they have difficulty using the procedure.

Reports to board members on complaints can give general information, as well as giving specific details on complaints which are not immediately resolved, or which are taken to the IHO.

Reports might include information on:

- performance in meeting response targets;
- the percentage of complaints resolved on the spot;
- customer satisfaction with complaint handling, both generally and by ethnic origin (see below);
- customer compliments and suggestions;
- complaints data by key service areas;
- complaints investigated by the IHO;
- results of mystery shopping exercises.

A study by MORI for the Housing Corporation in 2000 found that black and minority ethnic tenants were more likely than white tenants to be dissatisfied with their landlord and their home. Monitoring information including ethnicity could help associations to address this imbalance when reviewing services.

12 GOOD PRACTICE IN COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES – A SUMMARY

The checklist below summarises what makes good practice in complaints handling:

- Value complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve. Train staff to welcome complaints as a positive way for the organisation to learn and continually improve.
- Speed – try to resolve the complaint immediately, or have an overall time frame of no more than eight weeks for all stages of the complaint.
- Customers want complaints resolved on the spot; staff who are empowered to do this feel a greater sense of satisfaction.
- Good procedures have no more than three stages, and make no distinction between ‘informal’ and ‘formal’ complaints.
- Give customers the confidence and ability to complain in ways that suit them.
- Good publicity for a complaints procedure is crucial. Publicise how customers can complain and what procedures will be followed to resolve them – in appropriate languages, formats and media.
- Apologies are important – resident complainants are more likely to want something put right, or receive an apology, than compensation.
- Good practice procedures allow complainants an opportunity to complain in person to a panel at the final stage of the complaint procedure.

APPENDIX 1

LEGAL AND REGULATORY OBLIGATIONS

Housing associations must comply with legislation and the Housing Corporation Regulatory Code:

- **Housing Act 1996, Section 51 and Schedule 2**

All registered social landlords have a duty to become members of any Ombudsman schemes approved by the Secretary of State; there is currently only one approved scheme, the IHO. If a housing association fails to join the Scheme, it will be considered to be in breach of the law.

Housing associations should familiarise themselves with the details of the legislation.

- **Housing Corporation Regulatory Code**

Section 2 of the Code requires housing associations to comply with all statutory requirements. It also requires them to maintain the good reputation of the sector, foster positive relations with stakeholders and conduct business accessibly and transparently – all of which are relevant in terms of managing and handling complaints.

- **The Independent Housing Ombudsman Scheme**

Housing associations registering with the Housing Corporation must certify that they are members of an Ombudsman Scheme and must remain members, even if they become deregistered from the Housing Corporation. Unregistered subsidiaries are encouraged to join.

Normally, the IHO investigates a complaint after an association's internal complaints procedure is exhausted. However, he (the IHO) has the discretion to take on a complaint if there is reason to believe the association is causing unnecessary delay in handling it. According to the exercise of his discretion within the terms of his Scheme, the Ombudsman's powers permit him to:

- reject a complaint;
- recommend an apology;
- order the housing association to pay compensation;
- order the association or the complainant not to enforce obligations or rights;
- recommend that the association does or does not do something so as to rectify the complaint.

If the Ombudsman finds maladministration (upholds a complaint), the housing association is expected to comply with his orders or recommendations. If it does not, it will be reported to the Housing Corporation and regulatory action may be taken.

If a housing association does not comply with the Ombudsman's decision within a reasonable period of time, it can be ordered to publish that fact. If it does not, the Ombudsman can publish and recharge the cost from the association.

Housing associations are expected to publish in their annual reports details of the Ombudsman's formal decisions (called 'determinations') in which the association is found to be responsible for maladministration. Additionally, associations are expected to outline the type of complaint that led to the Ombudsman's intervention and the outcome following his final determination.

APPENDIX 2

USEFUL WEB SITES

The Housing Corporation library
www.housingcorp.gov.uk

Independent Housing Ombudsman
www.ihos.org.uk

The Commission for Local Administration in England (Local Government Ombudsman)
www.lgo.org.uk

Tenant Participation Advisory Service website, complaints procedures reading list
www.tpas.org.uk

Cabinet Office, how to deal with complaints
www.servicefirst.gov.uk

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors
www.rics.org.uk

London Borough of Camden, complaints web site
www.camden.gov.uk/complaints

List other sites here:

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