



## **COMPLAINTS POLICY**

### **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 Arc aims to provide landlord services which consistently meet clients' needs. As part of this commitment, Arc has adopted policy and procedures which aim to resolve any complaints effectively, within set targets and to the satisfaction of the person bringing the complaint.
- 1.2 Arc will make a distinction between a complaint and reporting of incidents e.g., anti-social behaviour, rubbish dumping. If we don't then try to resolve or contain these incidents, then these may become complaints, but it is important to distinguish between a complaint where Arc is at fault and incidents which are outside our immediate control.
- 1.3 Clients are actively encouraged to make suggestions and comments and unless these are made in the context of a service breakdown they will not be treated as complaints.
- 1.4 Staff complaints will be dealt with under Arc's Grievance Policy which is set out in the Employee Handbook.
- 1.5 If a complaint is made about a staff member, it will be dealt with under the Disciplinary and Grievance Policy.
- 1.6 Arc will investigate all complaints made about its service to clients and other outside agencies. Arc will ensure that the Complaints Policy & Procedure is available on the website and in the office. The Policy will include the timeframes for dealing with complaints and the different stages for investigation when a complainant is not satisfied with responses.
- 1.7 If a client is not satisfied with the investigation or outcome, they have a right to complain to Citizens Advice or the Independent Housing Ombudsman.

### **2.0 Definition of a complaint**

- 2.1 A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made and whether justified or not, concerning the quality of service provided by, or the actions of, the Organisation, its contractors or its staff.

### **3.0 Policy**

- 3.1 Arc's complaints policy is based on the following principles:
  - Complaints will be dealt with promptly, courteously, systematically, and fairly.

- Complaints will be dealt with in confidence.
- Complainants will be kept informed of progress and the outcome of any investigation.
- Complaints will be recorded, monitored, and acknowledged where appropriate.
- Complainants will have the right, to have a representative present at any interview.
- Complainants with additional needs, language difficulties or any other issue which affects their ability to make a complaint and have it addressed will be provided with assistance where necessary.
- Arc will use the complaints system to learn from any mistakes and to seek to improve its service to clients.
- Where any complaint is upheld Arc will offer an appropriate apology and will seek to put the complainant in the position they enjoyed before the mistake was made.
- Arc will record information about its performance against standards and targets in handling complaints.
- Arc staff likely to be involved in handling complaints will receive appropriate training.

3.2 A Complaints form is available from any of the Organisation's offices.

#### **4.0 Who can make a complaint?**

- 4.1 The Complaint Policy and Procedure are available to anyone who receives or requests a service from Arc, and those acting on their behalf. This will include all clients, prospective clients, and former clients [subject to time limits on bringing complaints under the procedures], contractors, consultants, partners, local authority staff, Citizen's Advice Bureau and other similar advisory agencies.
- 4.2 Complaints can be made in person at the office, by telephone, in writing, by e-mail or text.
- 4.3 Where serious allegations are made then Arc will normally ask for written confirmation of the allegation in order to be very clear about the details under investigation.
- 4.4 Staff complaints will be dealt with under Arc Grievance Policy which is set out in the Employee Handbook.

#### **5.0 What types of complaints are covered?**

- 5.1 A complaint will normally relate to the service provided by Arc. Complaints may include:
- Dissatisfaction with any service provided by Arc.
  - Dissatisfaction with the way Arc has reached a decision or with the actions taken in implementing that decision.
  - Complaints about the conduct of the Organisation's staff or its contractors.
  - Complaints about the way requests for information have been handled.
  - Complaints about the Organisation's administrative processes and delays in these processes.

5.2 Anonymous complaints will be considered but our ability to respond will be impaired and we strongly encourage clients to feel able to make complaints in strict confidence.

## **6.0 Complaints not covered by this policy.**

- 6.1 It is not normally possible to take complaints through this policy where:
- They are submitted anonymously (although we may still investigate).
  - The matter is directly linked to legal action already started or has already been considered via the complaints process, the courts or another tribunal.
  - Complaints are received more than 3 months after the event complained of.

## **7.0 The Complaints Procedure**

### **7.1 Informal Resolution**

7.1.1 Clients who are dissatisfied with the service they receive should raise the matter with a Service Delivery Manager, as appropriate.

7.1.2 All complaints received from external parties will be immediately passed to the appropriate Manager.

7.1.3 Arc will make every effort to resolve the complaint at this stage by finding an immediate solution agreed with the complainant. Informal complaints will be logged and recorded.

7.1.4 Where the complainant is happy to have their concerns dealt with informally the relevant staff member will acknowledge this within 2 working days and respond fully within 5 working days. If the problem cannot be resolved through this initial contact, it can be pursued as a formal complaint.

### **7.2 Stage 1 – Formal Complaint – Head of Operations or Property Services and Development Manager**

7.2.1 A complainant wishing to make a formal complaint can either make a complaint in writing or over the telephone. Standard forms can be provided to ensure that complaints are properly recorded and monitored. If a complaint is made over the telephone, the member of staff taking the complaint will note the issues and read back the note to the complainant to ensure that we have properly understood and recorded the issue.

7.2.2 The Formal Stage 1 complaint will be acknowledged within 2 working days and a full response will be made within 5 working days. Where this is not possible the Head of Operations or Property Services and Development Manager will set out a timetable for response within the 5 days and explain why there are delays in providing a full response.

7.2.3 If the complainant is not satisfied with the Stage 1 formal response, they have a right to appeal, in writing, within 7 days. The appeal will be heard by the Chief Executive.

### **7.3 Stage 2 – Formal Complaint to Chief Executive**

7.3.1 The Formal Stage 2 complaint will be acknowledged within 2 working days.

7.3.2 The Chief Executive will investigate the complaint, the action taken to date and the outcome sought by the person bringing the complaint.

- 7.3.3 The Chief Executive will make a recommendation for resolving the complaint and will write to the complainant within 10 working days of the complaint being referred, advising them of the recommendation.
- 7.3.4 If the complainant is not satisfied with the suggested outcome, they have a right to appeal, in writing, within 7 days. The appeal will be heard by members of The Board.
- 7.4 Stage 3 – Appeal to the Board of Management
- 7.4.1 The Chief Executive, within 2 working days of receipt, will notify the Board of the appeal.
- 7.4.2 Complainants are given the opportunity to present their case in person or to have a representative accompany them and speak on their behalf. Two members of the Board will be present.
- 7.4.3 Within 5 working days the Board will write to the complainant advising him or her of the outcome.
- 8.0 Mediation**
- 8.1 It might become clear during investigations that it will be difficult to resolve a complaint.
- 8.2 This can arise when there is no “right and wrong” but a difference of opinion about the best way to go about things.
- 8.3 In these situations, Arc will offer professional mediation using an independent mediator agreed with the complainant.
- 9.0 Compensation/Apologies**
- 9.1 If a complaint is upheld and the complainant has endured long or particularly difficult periods of inconvenience, distress or monetary loss then Arc will negotiate a settlement with the complainant.
- 9.2 No compensation will be payable to a third party.
- 9.3 Where financial claims are made against Arc which will involve us in notifying our insurers, then we will not be able to enter into discussion and correspondence in respect of that complaint until the claim has been dealt with by the insurers.
- 10.0 Recording, monitoring, and evaluating complaints.**
- 10.1 All complaints received will be monitored and recorded beginning with the date received, the nature of the complaint, the date action was taken, and the nature of the action taken.
- 10.2 A written record will be kept of action at all stages of the Complaint Procedure.
- 10.3 The Chief Executive will report to the Board of Management on a regular basis on complaints received and their outcomes.

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