

Compliments, Complaints and Appeals

Purpose

The aim of this policy is to ensure that Bridge Housing has a consistent, systematic approach to managing and monitoring feedback on its services and its decisions.

This policy outlines the way that Bridge Housing manages complaints about its service delivery, appeals about the decisions it has made and manages compliments about service delivery.

Scope

This policy relates to the process that Bridge Housing uses to handle compliments, complaints and appeals about its services and how they are delivered. This policy applies to all Bridge Housing customers including tenants, applicants, support agencies and the communities in which Bridge Housing provides a service.

Disputes between neighbours and within communities are not covered by this policy and are handled in accordance with Bridge Housing's Good Neighbour Policy.

Policy overview

Bridge Housing respects and values the views of all customers. Compliments, complaints and appeals are welcome as they provide valuable feedback about Bridge Housing's services and the way they are delivered.

Bridge Housing will take a consistent, systematic approach to managing, monitoring and analysing all feedback on its services. It will ensure that its complaints and appeals process is clear and accessible and is managed consistently, fairly and promptly.

Policy

Bridge Housing acknowledges that errors, misunderstandings, client dissatisfaction and unexpected problems occur in all systems and services.

Effective complaint and appeal handling enables organisations to intervene before a problem becomes worse, provide a review process for complaints and appeals by customers who have been disadvantaged by a Bridge Housing action or decision and nurture relationships between Bridge Housing and our customers. Similarly Bridge Housing welcomes positive feedback that compliments its staff on the way they deliver a service as it can be used to promote excellence within the organisation.

Any Bridge Housing customer or someone acting on their behalf has the right to lodge a complaint or appeal about services or how they are delivered. Bridge Housing is committed to managing complaints and appeals fairly, consistently and efficiently. It will also monitor specific areas of its service delivery by providing opportunities for service users to provide feedback.

What is a compliment?

Bridge Housing defines a compliment as **an expression of satisfaction with one of its services or with the way the service has been delivered by one or more staff.**

Examples of compliments include:

- Sensitivity in dealing with a change in circumstances
- Prompt handling of correspondence and phone calls
- Efficient processes for responsive repairs
- Approachable and responsive services

What is a complaint?

Bridge Housing defines a complaint as **an expression of dissatisfaction with a specific aspect of its services where the complainant is unhappy with the standard or type of service and requests a changed outcome.**

Examples of complaints include:

- Failing to provide a service or an aspect of a service such as not completing a repair, not conducting tenant visits or not providing rent statements
- Rude or inappropriate staff behaviour such as not returning call
- Poor administration of a service such as not recording changes in circumstances or sending out appropriate forms
- Providing an inconsistent or inaccurate service such as responding differently in different circumstances or providing incorrect advice on Bridge Housing policy

Complaints about service delivery are handled internally by Bridge Housing. All complaints must be reviewed and agreed by the General Manager at a minimum. If the complaint relates to the service delivery overseen by a General Manager, it will be reviewed by the Chief Executive Officer.

What is an appeal?

Bridge Housing defines an appeal as **an expression of dissatisfaction with a decision it has made.** The appeal process provides the opportunity to review the decision and to reflect on whether a decision has been made based on full and accurate information and in accordance with legislation and/or policies and procedures. Appealable decisions are defined by the Housing Appeals Committee - www.hac.nsw.gov.au.

For social housing applicants and Bridge Housing tenants, appealable decisions include:

- Eligibility for social housing including priority housing
- Dwelling entitlements – number of bedrooms or property type
- Locational entitlement and entitlement to 'high demand' locations
- Offers of properties and the suitability of each offer
- Eligibility for a transfer including management transfers

- Removal from the NSW Housing Register
- Changes to a tenancy including mutual exchange or succession of a tenancy
- Need for modifications for disability/medical reasons only
- Former tenant charges
- Calculation of water charges
- Calculation, change or cancellation of a rent subsidy
- Permission to be absent and rent calculation during absence
- Relocating tenants to other social housing at the expiry of a leasehold

Further detail on appeals can be found on the Housing Appeals Committee website www.hac.nsw.gov.au.

There is a two-step process to manage an appeal:

1. The tenant or applicant must seek a review of the decision by Bridge Housing. This appeal must be investigated and the complainant must be advised in writing of the outcome. Please be assured that the person you are complaining about will not be the one handling your complaint and in the case of an appeal, the person who made the original decision will not manage the appeal.
2. If a tenant or applicant is unhappy with the outcome of an appeal to Bridge Housing, they can lodge a second level appeal with the Housing Appeals Committee. The Housing Appeals Committee is an independent agency that reviews certain decisions made by staff of community housing organisations and Housing NSW. For information on the Housing Appeals Committee call 1800 629 794 or go to www.hac.nsw.gov.au.

How to make a complaint or appeal

Bridge Housing aims to make the process for making a complaint or appeal fair and accessible. Any person involved in the complaint or appeal process can expect to be treated with respect and dignity at all times. Making a complaint or appeal will not result in any form of retaliation or discrimination, including any change in attitude or quality of service received from Bridge Housing staff.

A complainant or appellant has the right to:

- Have their concern dealt with confidentially and professionally
- Ask for help in raising their concern including the assistance of an advocate
- Invite a support person such as friend or relative to accompany them in any meetings
- Choose a location that is comfortable and convenient
- Use interpreting and translating services
- Be given information on tenant advice and advocacy services
- Take their appeal further if they are not satisfied with the outcome

Compliments, complaints and appeals can be made verbally or in writing:

- By email to customerservice@bridgehousing.org.au
- By completing a feedback form from Bridge Housing's office or downloading a form from our website - www.bridgehousing.org.au and mail to PO BOX 20217 World Square NSW 2002
- By making an appointment for a face to face appointment at a Bridge Housing office or outreach location
- By calling Bridge Housing on 02 8234 0800

Any Bridge Housing staff member can receive a compliment, complaint or appeal and is responsible for recording and registering this internally.

The person taking details of the compliment, complaint or appeal will be responsible for acknowledging it in writing within two business days.

For complaints and appeals, the acknowledgement letter will provide details of the person or 'Complaint Manager' responsible for managing the complaint or appeal and will explain the next steps in the process.

Bridge Housing will assign a Complaint Manager that will be responsible throughout the process for:

Communicating with the complainant or appellant

- Keeping accurate notes
- Investigating thoroughly and impartially
- Keeping details of the complaint or appeal confidential for internal reporting and Board reporting purposes
- Providing information about external agencies who can investigate in any situation where the complaint or appeal remains unresolved or the person is dissatisfied with the outcome

To maintain impartiality and fairness, Bridge Housing will ensure that the Complaint Manager appointed to investigate a complaint or appeal is not the subject of the complaint or the appeal. In these instances, responsibility for managing the complaint will be assigned to a Complaint Manager from a different team. An example of when this will occur is where the complaint is about staff behaviour.

Bridge Housing will aim to resolve complaints and appeals promptly, and wherever possible within 21 business days of receipt. In situations where resolution or an outcome will exceed 21 days, the Complaint Manager will advise the complainant or appellant of progress to date the anticipated date of resolution and any reasons for the delay.

The Complaint Manager will contact the complainant or appellant at the end of the investigation to advise on the outcome. The relevant member of the Executive Team will then send a letter outlining the outcome of the complaint or appeal.

What happens if I disagree with the outcome of my complaint or appeal?

- If you are unhappy with the outcome of your complaint you can take the matter to Bridge Housing Board. The Housing Board will discuss the complaint at their next meeting. You will be advised of the Housing Board decision within 14 days of their meeting. The Housing Board's decision is final.
- If you are unhappy with the outcome of your appeal, you have the right to appeal to the independent Housing Appeals Committee (HAC www.hac.org.au). The Housing Appeals Committee can be contacted on 1800 629 794.

Assistance for tenants or applicants making a complaint or appeal

Bridge Housing will assist clients to complete the relevant forms to make a complaint or appeal as required. This includes arranging an appropriate service provider or interpreter if needed.

External bodies that can provide assistance with service users completing complaints include:

- Local Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Services listed on www.tenants.org.au
- Community Legal Centres contactable through www.clcnsw.org.au
- The NSW Fair Trading Information Centre who can be contacted on 133 220 and at www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au

Complaints about Specialist Disability Accommodation

Tenants who are NDIS participants living in specialist disability accommodation can make a complaint to Bridge Housing about accommodation services provided by Bridge Housing or about services and supports provided by their Supported Independent Living (SIL) provider.

Tenants who are not satisfied with Bridge Housing's response, or who do not feel comfortable raising the issue, can make a complaint to the NDIS Commission by calling 1800 035 544 or visiting <https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/about/complaints> to complete an online complaints form

How Bridge Housing uses information from compliments, complaints and appeals

Bridge Housing will regularly review information from complaints and appeals to identify ways in which its services and their delivery can be improved. It will regularly report to its Board on the numbers and types of complaints and appeals and on their outcomes.

It will also provide information on its complaints and appeals to comply with the reporting requirements of the National Regulatory System for Community Housing (NRSCH) and Community and Private Market Housing Directorate (CAPMH).

Bridge Housing staff will always use information from complaints and appeals in a way that does not identify the complainant or appellant.

Issues outside this policy

- The NSW Civil and Appeals Tribunal (NCAT) deals with tenancy issues arising from Bridge Housing's obligations under the *Residential Tenancies Act 2010* and can be contacted on 1300 135 399 or at NCAT.
- Concerns about fraud, misconduct or illegal activity by Bridge Housing staff or its Board are handled by the Bridge Housing Fraud Officer and through the Bridge Housing whistle-blower hotline on 1300 798 101. Please see the Fraud Policy and the Whistle-blower Policy for more information.
- The National Regulatory System for Community Housing investigates complaints that raise concerns about a registered community housing providers' compliance with the Regulatory Code including the way it is governed or how it manages its assets. A complaint can be made using the online form found at www.nrsch.gov.au/complaint_form. A complaint can also be made by contacting the Office of the Registrar in NSW on 1800 330 940.
- The Community and Private Market Housing Directorate of Department of Family and Community Services has also released a guide as to management of complaints and appeals available at <http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au/Community+Housing+Division/>

Related documents

Legislation

- *Residential Tenancies Act 2010*
- *Residential Tenancies Regulation 2010*

Documents supporting this policy

- Compliments, Complaints and Appeals Procedure
- Good Neighbour Policy
- Good Neighbour Procedure