



## Complaints, Comments & Suggestions Policy

Senior Management Team approval date:	May 2009
Board approval date:	June 2009
Date policy came into force:	July 2009
Accompanying documents to be read with policy:	Complaints (Resolutions) User Guide Complaints Procedures Complaints Leaflet Comments & Suggestions Guidance Suggest-a-way card Compensation Policy and Procedure
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Policy prepared by:	Diane Evans
Equality Impact Assessment date:	6 <sup>th</sup> March 2009

If other organisations use the content of this document for their own purposes we ask that Liverpool Housing Trust be acknowledged.

# Complaints, Comments & Suggestions

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## Introduction

The provision of high quality services is one of LHT's five key business priorities. Complaints, comments, and suggestions are seen as an opportunity to capture valuable feedback on our services. We aim to improve our services by building on our successes and learning from our mistakes.

## Policy aims

Our complaints, comments and suggestions policy enables customers to make a complaint, give feedback about any aspect of our service and make a suggestion about how our services can be improved. Maximising opportunities to gain feedback from our customers and giving customers access to a clear and efficient complaints process should they be unhappy with any aspect of our service ensures we are listening and actively responding to customer needs and demands. This feedback provides vital learning opportunities in our drive for continuous improvement and service excellence.

The policy aims to ensure we:

- Deal with complaints within published timescales
- Operate an accessible, fair and consistent approach to dealing with complaints, comments and suggestions regardless of a complainant's age, gender, disability, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation
- Put things right when things go wrong
- Learn from mistakes and use feedback to learn and improve our services
- Learn from services that are performing well in order to spread good practice
- Give our customers an opportunity to make suggestions about how our services can be improved
- Highlight positive feedback

## **Policy Standards**

- We will aim to resolve 97% of complaints within our target times
- Performance will be monitored on a monthly basis
- The target will be reviewed on an annual basis

## **Detail of policy**

### **Who can make a Complaint, Comment or Suggestion**

Any person who either receives, or is affected by a service delivered by LHT can express a view of satisfaction/dissatisfaction, as a complaint, comment, or suggestion. Either directly or indirectly through their nominated representative (this can be a family member or partner, friend or other nominated representative such as a carer or support worker). This includes current tenants, members of households, former tenants, owner occupiers, applicants, leaseholders, care workers and other stakeholders.

If a complaint is linked to an LHT service area that has its own appeals process, (example applications, reporting anti-social behaviour), it will only enter LHT's complaints process if there is dissatisfaction with the way it was handled, rather than with the decision itself. In this case, the complaint will enter at Stage 1 of the complaints process.

There may be occasions where comments or complaints received are outside the control and areas of responsibility of LHT, for example: A disagreement about a Housing Benefit entitlement. In these circumstances LHT may need to redirect customers to third parties, in such cases customers will be informed of the appropriate organisation to contact where possible. This would not then be covered under this policy.

A complaint can also be made under this policy if a customer feels we have treated them in a discriminatory way e.g. being racist or homophobic.

### **Ways to make a Complaint, Comment, or Suggestion**

LHT have developed a comprehensive leaflet explaining the complaints, comments, and suggestions procedures, this includes a form which may be used to report a complaint. There is also a suggest-a-way card which can be used to make a comment or suggestion.

To ensure our policies and procedures are accessible to all our customers there are a number of different ways customers can make a complaint:

- Completing a complaint form (found in the complaints leaflet)
- In writing
- By telephone
- In person, to any LHT member of staff

- By email
- By internet
- Visiting our local offices

A complaint can be reported within 6 months of the service being delivered.

Customers can make a comment or suggestion by:

- Completing a suggest-a-way card available from your local office or by asking any member of staff

Customers can ask a nominated representative to complete a card on their behalf or ask for help from a member of staff.

We will aim to develop additional opportunities for customers to make comments and suggestions.

### **Complaint Stages**

Our complaints policy has a three stage approach. To ensure that each issue is dealt with promptly and effectively and to the customer's satisfaction at each stage a member of staff is appointed as the 'Designated Officer'. The name and contact details of the Officer are given to the customer.

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Staff member</b>	<b>Target</b>
Complaint – Stage 1	LHT staff member	Acknowledgement – 3 working days from receipt of complaint
	LHT designated Officer	Resolution offered – 10 working days from receipt of complaint
Complaint – Stage 2	Manager responsible for service area	Review & Resolution offered - 10 working days from complainant request to go to stage 2
Complaint – Stage 3	Appeals Panel (comprising a Senior LHT Officer and two tenants)	Full review and panel hearing, decision offered – 20 working days from the complainant request to go to stage 3

### **Complaint: Stage 1**

The aim of stage 1 is to satisfactorily resolve complaints wherever possible. The Designated Officer will investigate the complaint thoroughly and offer a resolution to the complainant within 10 working days of receiving the complaint. The decision will be put in writing to the complainant. A courtesy call will be made to the complainant following receipt of the letter to ensure the complainant clearly understands the decision taken and check any support requirements. On occasions we may choose to carry out a home visit.

## **Complaint: Stage 2 - Review**

If the customer is not satisfied with the response provided at stage 1, they can request the complaint move to stage 2.

At stage 2, a Manager responsible for the service area will review the previous response or decision and either uphold the decision or propose an alternative solution within 10 working days of receiving the complainant's request. The decision will be put in writing to the complainant.

## **Complaint: Stage 3 - Appeal**

If the complainant is still dissatisfied with the response, they can request the complaint move to stage 3. If this is the case an Appeals Hearing will be arranged. The panel will consist of a Senior LHT Officer and two tenants. The tenant's invited to attend the panel hearing will not be from the same neighbourhood or district as the complainant. The Panel Hearing may take place in any one of LHT's Neighbourhood offices to suit the individual needs of the complainant and will be agreed in advance. We will ensure out of pocket expenses (travel, dependant/childcare costs) incurred as a result of the complainant attending a hearing will be reimbursed. The panel members will receive details of the complaint at least 5 working days before the hearing.

The Appeals Panel will consider all circumstances and decide if the complaint has been dealt with fairly and reasonably.

The Panel's decision is final and will be confirmed in writing within 20 days to the Complainant. We will aim to respond to any individual needs identified through the process (example if a customer's preference is to receive their communication in another format or has requested the letter supported by a telephone call). A copy of the outcome and summary of complaint will be forwarded to LHT's Managing Director for information.

At all the above stages, complainants will be informed of any reasonable delay that may affect the target dates for resolution.

## **Right of Response**

At each stage in the process, the complainant has 10 working days to respond to the resolution offered, to confirm they are satisfied with the resolution offered or request a review of the complaint decision prior to the case being closed by LHT.

## **Housing Ombudsman**

The complainant has the right to appeal to the Housing Ombudsman if they are not satisfied with the decision of the Appeal Hearing. The Ombudsman will investigate any disputes between the customer and a landlord and try to resolve them independently. They will investigate complaints **only when all internal procedures have been exhausted** and this should be made clear to the complainant.

The Complainant must appeal to the Ombudsman within 12 months of exhausting the landlord's internal procedures and only in exceptional circumstances will they consider cases after this period.

### **Compensation**

In some circumstances the customer may be entitled to a goodwill gesture or compensation. The circumstances in which LHT may make a goodwill gesture or compensation payment and the amounts payable are set out in LHT's Compensation Policy.

### **Satisfaction**

Following closure of a complaint all customers will be contacted to ask for feedback regarding their experience, this will be carried out by means of a satisfaction survey. This information will help inform further improvements to policies, procedures, and service delivery.

### **Complainant Support**

We welcome customers using support and advocacy services if they are uncomfortable at any stage of the complaint process. This may be through the Citizen's Advice Bureau, local advice agencies, or a support worker or carer.

We will aim to identify and give support where a complainant requires specific needs to enable them to have full access to our procedures e.g. translation or interpreting required, large font correspondence or British Sign Language interpreter.

### **Exceptions to Timescales**

Where complaints involve third parties, for example maintenance contractors, managing agents, we aim to meet the timescales set out in the policy. This is not always within our control and customers will be kept informed if this is the case, however wherever possible we will aim to meet our published timescales.

If a complainant requests information under the Data Protection Act, due to the timeframes published within this policy, this may also affect our ability to meet the timescales set out in the complaints policy. Customers will be advised in these circumstances. (For full details refer to the Data Protection Policy).

### **Unreasonable complainants**

LHT defines a complaint as unreasonable if:

- The complainant has previously made the same complaint that was investigated but not upheld and there is no further information in support of a new complaint
- The complainant is deemed to be vexatious due to the excessive number of complaints submitted and not upheld
- The complainant is aggressive or abusive to staff

Each complaint will be considered separately; it will not be assumed that someone who has been unreasonable in the past will do so with the next complaint.

The complainant will be reminded of our policy and procedure and their right following this procedure being exhausted to take their complaint to the Housing Ombudsman.

If LHT receives an unreasonable complaint they may consider the following courses of action, however this must be approved by a Senior Manager:

- Terminating a complaint early
- Restricting all communication to writing
- Declining further communication about a specific issue
- Dealing with the complaint in a different way to that outlined in the policy and guidelines

LHT's position will be confirmed to the complainant in writing.

### **Anonymous complaints**

We are unable to investigate anonymous complaints through our formal complaints procedure. Where complaints are made anonymously, these will be logged as informal complaints, staff will aim to investigate the issue and resolve the matter where possible. In the event of the complaint being made verbally the customer should be advised that it will not be possible to provide feedback about anonymous complaints and it would therefore be helpful to have their name and contact details. Anonymous complaints will not be ignored. We will monitor anonymous complaints reporting to identify any trends developing in one geographical area or amongst a certain community.

### **Comments**

Comment and suggestion cards are available in a variety of LHT locations and from all staff. Customers can complete and return a Suggest-a-way card confidentially to LHT. Positive comments will be recorded and feedback forwarded to relevant Officers; negative comments will be dealt with in accordance with procedures either as an informal complaint or in line with our complaints policy.

### **Informal Complaints**

A customer may wish to express an 'initial expression of dissatisfaction', for example, when a contractor has not arrived on time, without wishing to register a complaint. These expressions will be handled by staff at the Customer Service Centre. The issues will be recorded using the telephone system and will be carefully monitored to identify any trends. Resolving the matter at an early stage may include offering an apology to the customer, arranging an alternative convenient appointment, offering an alternative solution. At any stage the customer can make this expression of dissatisfaction a complaint. A customer may also wish to complete a suggest-a-way card and forward their feedback.

## **Suggestions**

Comment and suggestion cards are available in a variety of LHT locations and from all staff. Customers can complete and return a Suggest-a-way card confidentially to LHT. Service Managers will consider the feasibility of all suggestions. A regular report will be presented to Senior Management team who will consider and approve suggestions as appropriate. Customers will receive individual feedback regarding their suggestion and may receive a reward for any suggestion implemented.

## **Performance monitoring**

We will monitor implementation of this policy in a range of ways, this includes:

### Monthly

- Individual cases monitored by Complaints Co-ordinator to ensure cases meet deadlines
- Performance data captured within KPIs and cases broken down by diversity strands wherever possible
- Detailed performance reports by Division and circulated to Neighbourhood Managers
- Satisfaction surveys on all closed cases

### Quarterly

- Suggestions reports to Senior Management Team for approval

### Six Monthly

- Following closure of complaint all customers will be contacted and asked to complete a satisfaction survey, this information will be collated by the Policy and Research team, with six monthly reports issued to the Customer Service Centre Manager, breaking the results down by diversity strand.
- Six monthly performance report to Senior Management Team outlining current position, any early trends, progress against actions, satisfaction levels

### Annual

- Annual complaints performance report to Senior Management Team and LHT's Board outlining annual position against targets, trends, progress against actions, satisfaction levels, breaking the complaints down by diversity strand.
- Annual performance report to Senior Management Team and LHT's Board outlining comments and suggestions received during the year and any action, improvements in services as a result

## **Links to other LHT policies**

- Allocations Policy & Appeals Procedure
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Disrepair Policy
- Vicinity Data Protection Policy
- Alternative Communications Policy

- Equality & Diversity Policy
- Vicinity Code of Conduct – Whistle blowing
- Compensation Policy
- Vicinity Group Disciplinary and Grievance Policy
- Starter Tenancy Policy
- Suspension Policy

## **Definitions**

### **A complaint:**

‘An expression of dissatisfaction with any aspect of service provision, delivery, LHT policy, or member of staff’

### **A comment:**

‘A positive comment (compliment) a customers expression of satisfaction with any aspect of service provision, delivery, LHT policy or member of staff’

‘A negative comment (informal complaint) is a customer’s expression that they are making us aware of a concern’. The customer does not wish to make a complaint, but wants to raise the matter to our attention. An initial response to the comment by Officers has resolved the concern. The customer will make the decision if they wish to report this comment as a complaint’,

### **A suggestion:**

‘An idea expressed by a customer which may improve an aspect of our service’.

### **An informal complaint:**

‘An initial expression of dissatisfaction, the customer wants to let us know about a service failure, but does not want to make a formal complaint’

## **Legal and Regulatory requirements**

- Awaiting TSA Guidelines to be developed.
- TSA Regulatory Code 2005

## **Equality impact assessment**

An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on this policy, and the major findings were that

- The new policy will ensure support is provided for all complainants who may have additional needs to carry their complaint forward with us. LHT will ensure that all customers have access to our complaints, comments, and suggestions policy. Support will be provided in line with our Alternative Communications policy i.e. translation material, facilities of an interpreter or signer and our Equality and Diversity policy.

- We will endeavour to use Plain English in all our correspondence to the complainant
- The new policy will ensure we can monitor complainants by the 6 diversity strands and identify any trends and agree action
- The new policy will ensure that we do not always rely on the use of letters alone to ensure the tenant is informed about the progress of their complaint, but should keep in regular contact with them by phone or by visiting them, to ensure that they understand the process, know where the complaint is up to and understand when it is closed/resolved. Tenants may have low literacy skills or may be visually impaired and so not be able to read the letter.

An action plan has been developed following the Equality Impact Assessment, and will be closely monitored to ensure the actions agreed are implemented.

## **Resource implications**

Complaints, comments, and suggestions may lead to service improvements which may save/make better use of resources.

Potential cost implications in the following areas:

- Increased level of complaints, resulting in an increase in staff time to deal effectively and quickly with complaints
- Increased level of comments and suggestions, resulting in an increase in staff time to investigate and respond to this feedback.
- Increased expenditure in relation to any suggestions approved by SMT for implementation
- Increased compensation payments as a result of a more comprehensive policy and procedure (refer to compensation policy)

## **Benchmark Partners**

- Harvest Housing Group
- Cobalt Housing
- Places for People
- Leeds Federated
- Wirral Partnership Homes
- Housing Corporation
- Housing Ombudsman

# **Appendix 1**

## **Roles & Responsibilities**

### **Complaints Champion**

The Champion will be responsible for reports and analysis, system improvements, maintaining progress against annual action plan and publishing information to customers and staff.

### **Complaints Coordinator**

The Coordinator will administer the system, monitor targets against achievements, liaise with Officers to ensure deadlines achieved, standard templates used, and support the champion in data analysis and publishing information to customers and staff. The Coordinator will also support and deliver training to Officers, and provide support and guidance to Officers where necessary. It is not however the role of the Coordinator to update the system on behalf of Officers.

### **Designated Officers**

Designated Officers will be appointed at each stage of the complaint process. It is their responsibility to carry out a comprehensive investigation and provide a detailed response to the complainant within the agreed timescales.

### **Super Users**

Super Users will be appointed in all teams. They will have detailed training on our Complaints system and will act as a point of contact for on site support, training, and guidance for staff.

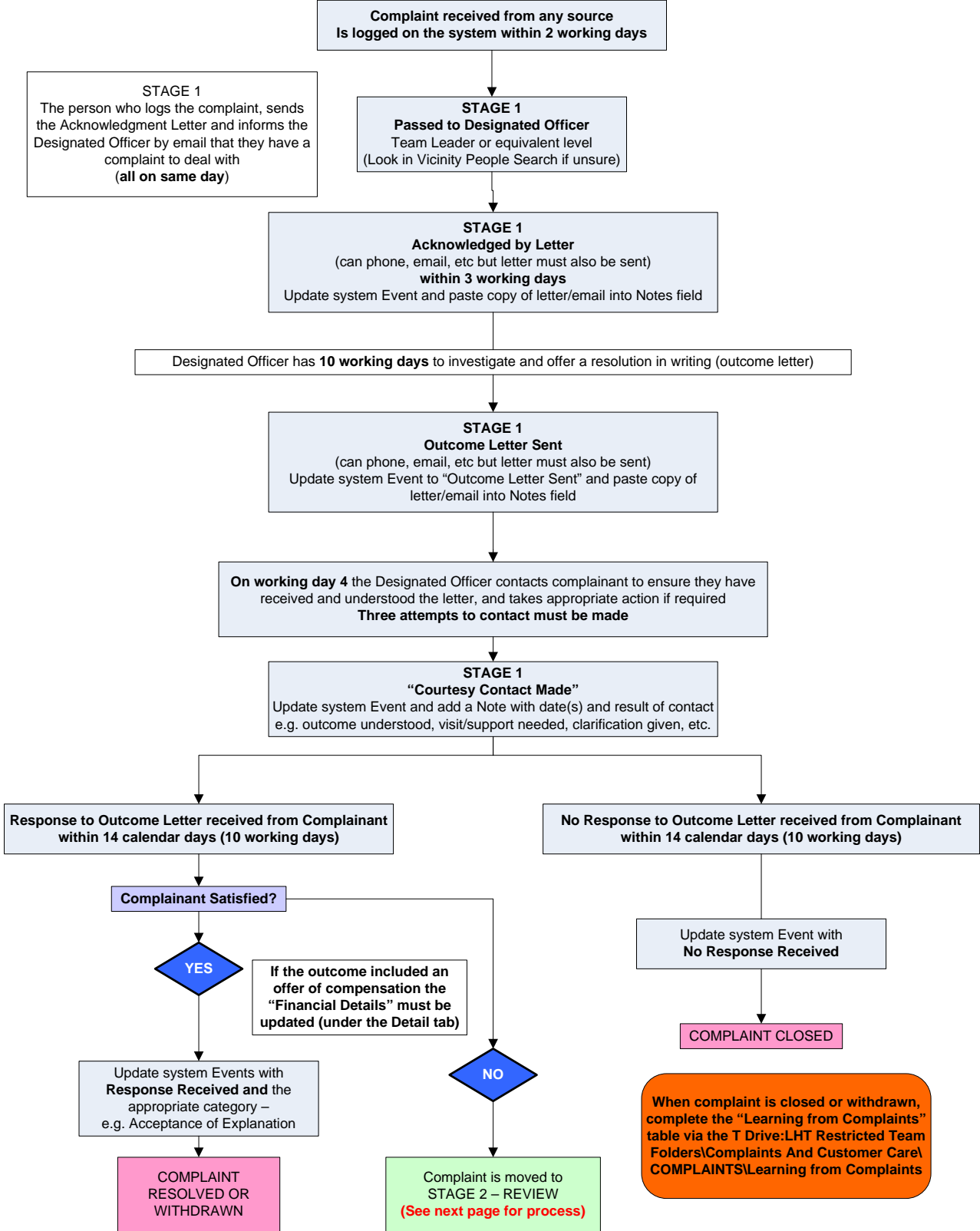
In our Divisional Offices the role of the Super User will also include:

- Ensuring complaints registered within their neighbourhood are dealt with within target times, including regularly monitoring of the system and liaising with staff within teams.
- The co-ordination and production of the monthly exception report for their neighbourhood, detailing performance. The reports will be forwarded to the Complaints Coordinator who will coordinate and distribute all reports to Senior Managers.

30<sup>th</sup> April 2009  
D Evans

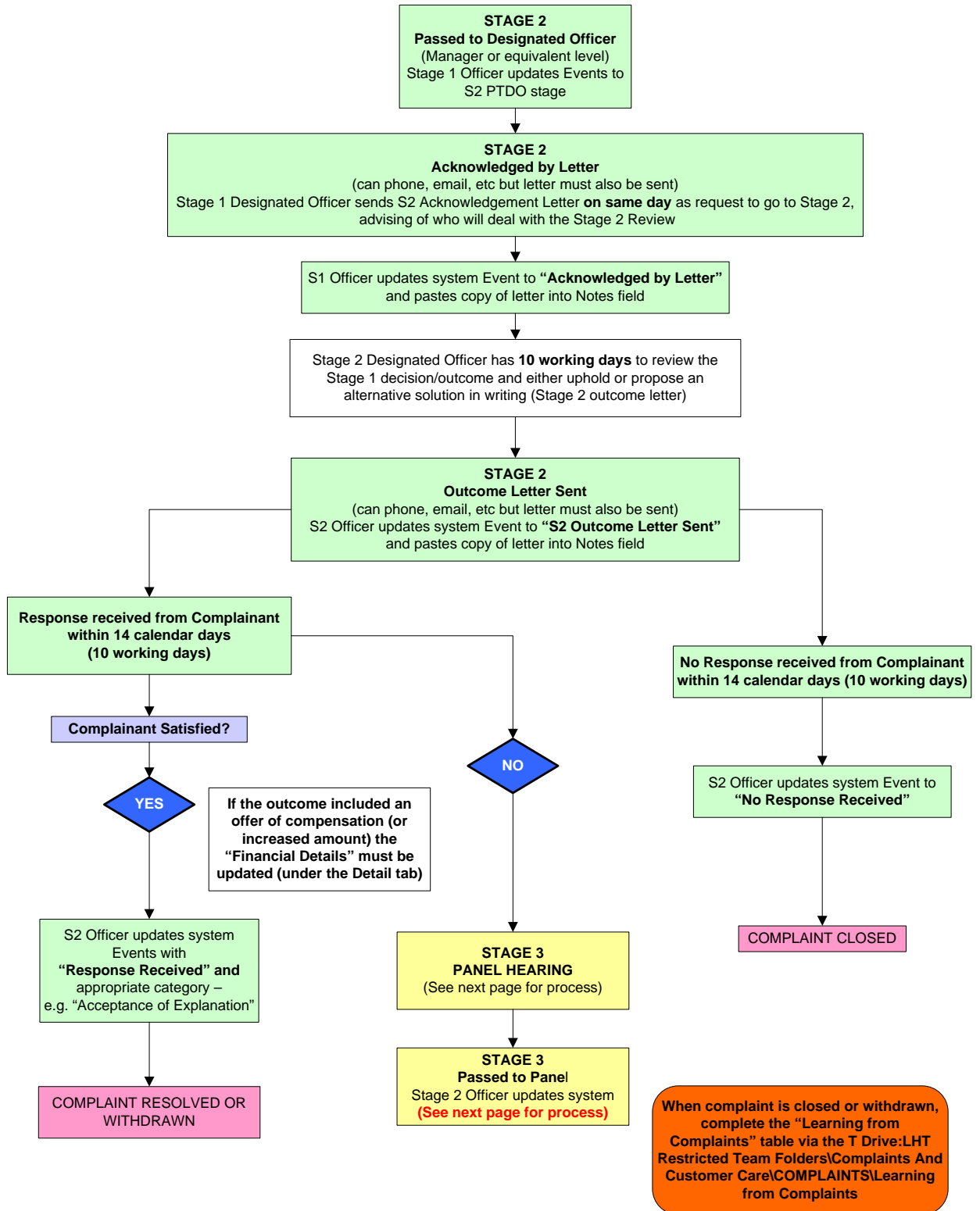
# COMPLAINTS PROCESS STAGE 1

AT EVERY STAGE IN THE PROCESS, COPIES OF ALL CORRESPONDENCE MUST BE PUT ON THE HOUSE FILE IF COMPLAINT IS FROM A TENANT



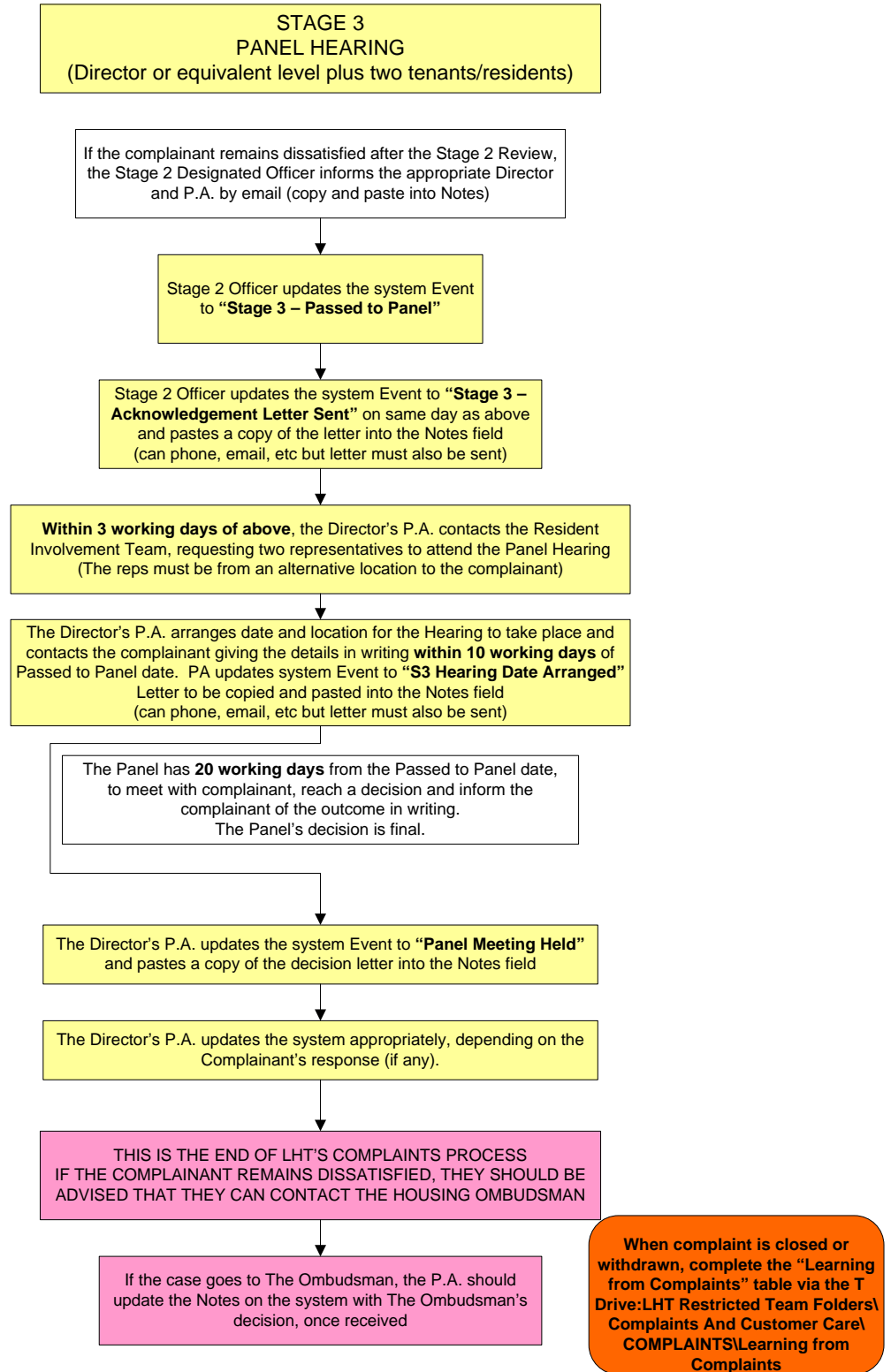
# COMPLAINTS PROCESS STAGE 2 - REVIEW

AT EVERY STAGE IN THE PROCESS, COPIES OF ALL CORRESPONDENCE MUST BE PUT ON THE HOUSE FILE IF COMPLAINT IS FROM A TENANT



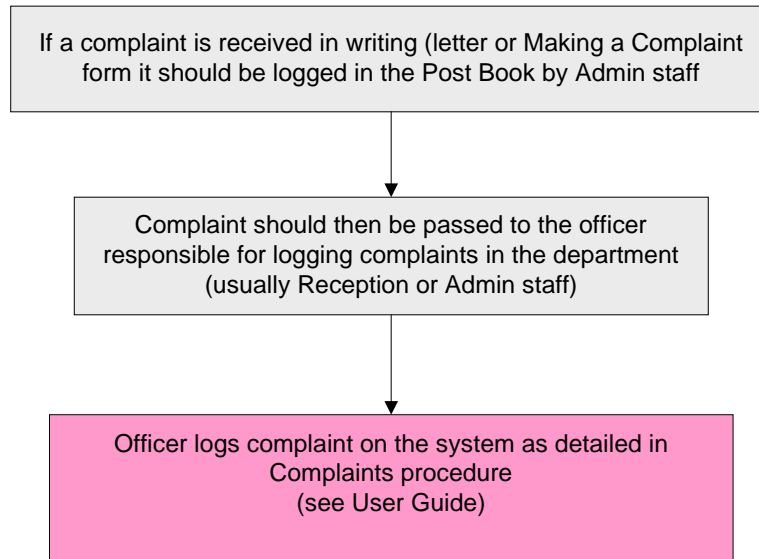
## COMPLAINTS PROCESS STAGE 3 – PANEL HEARING (APPEAL)

AT EVERY STAGE IN THE PROCESS, COPIES OF ALL CORRESPONDENCE MUST BE PUT ON THE HOUSE FILE IF COMPLAINT IS FROM A TENANT

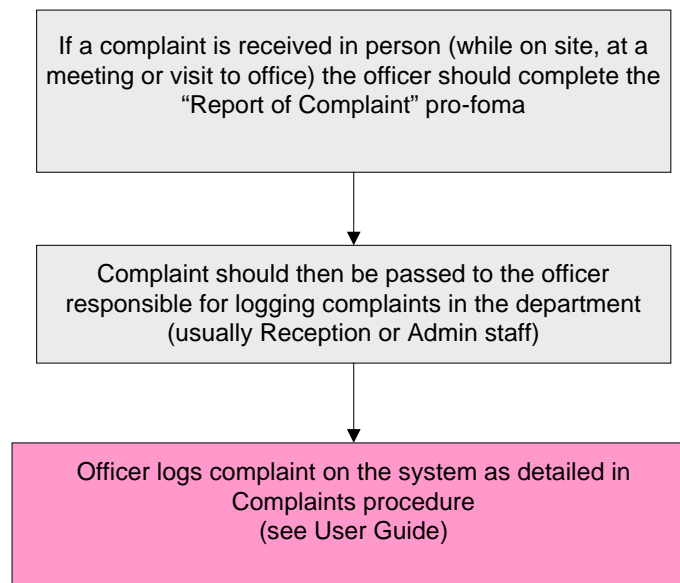


## LOGGING COMPLAINTS

### IN WRITING

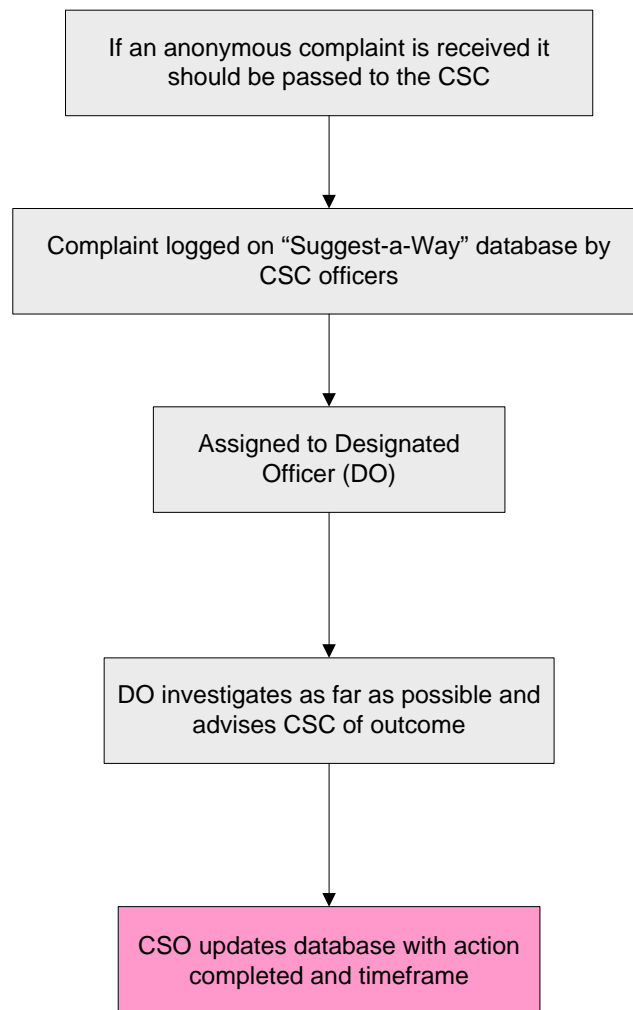


### IN PERSON



## ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

**Anonymous Complaints cannot be logged via our formal process, as we will not have any contact details. All will therefore be logged via the process for Informal Complaints**



## UNREASONABLE COMPLAINTS

