



SOLIHULL COMMUNITY HOUSING

Reasonable Adjustment Policy for Customer Complaints

This document should be read in conjunction with the Customer Complaints Policy.

Policy Statement

Solihull Community Housing is committed to ensuring that disabled people are not disadvantaged in accessing its services. We are committed to making reasonable adjustments for disabled people to ensure that they can easily access our complaints process. This policy does not seek to explain how we will approach every situation, it is intended as a general statement of our policy. This document confirms our commitment to improving accessibility for everyone we deal with and sets out some basic principles of our commitment to provide reasonable adjustments for disabled people. It will also detail what we will take into account when dealing with requests for reasonable adjustments.

Alongside the commitment we offer to disabled customers, we understand the need for our services to be accessible to all and many of the arrangements we make for disabled people can be used for those with different but important needs for example, the provision of documents in larger font or language interpretation services.

This policy applies to all Solihull Community Housing customers. It does not apply to internal complaints about other employees.

Scope of Policy

A New Deal for social housing sets out some of the requirements of how complaints should be handled. As a result of that the Housing Ombudsman has revised its Code of Guidance for complaint handling which includes the need for housing providers to have a reasonable adjustment policy which is separate or forms part of their Complaints Policy. The basis for that is the requirement of The Equality Act 2010 to improve equality of opportunity.

The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) provides a legislative framework to protect the rights of individuals and to advance equality of opportunity for all. As a public body who

provides services to the public we are legally required to comply with the provisions of the Equality Act.

Under the Act the legal duty to make reasonable adjustments arises in three circumstances:

- Where there is a provision, criterion or practice which puts a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage in relation to a relevant matter in comparison with persons who are not disabled
- Where a physical feature puts a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with persons who are not disabled
- Where a disabled person would, but for the provision of an auxiliary aid, be put at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with persons who are not disabled.

Substantial disadvantage is defined in the Equality Act 2010 s.212 (1) as 'more than minor or trivial'

What is a reasonable adjustment?

To make an adjustment means to make a physical change to premises or to change work practices to avoid or correct the disadvantage to a person with a disability.

Examples of this include:

- Ensuring complainants have the right method of contact to be able to make their complaint by not insisting complaints are made in writing. We will be sympathetic to the way in which the customer wishes their complaint investigation information to be given to them i.e. face to face, via email or to a third party or advocate.
- We will consider giving disabled applicants additional time to request a review of their complaint findings.

Requesting reasonable adjustments

We will let people know that we will consider the provision of a reasonable adjustment, for example in the following ways:

- By including a paragraph in written communications (e.g. acknowledgement letters)
- By asking whether a reasonable adjustment might be required over the telephone
- By including a note on our published documents indicating that we can provide the document in an alternative format on request
- By publishing our policy on our website

Types of reasonable adjustment we can make

We will discuss the requirements with the person concerned and seek to reach agreement on what may be reasonable in the circumstances. There is no prescribed list of reasonable adjustment; the adjustment will depend on the individuals' needs. We will not make assumptions about whether a disabled person requires any

reasonable adjustments or about what those adjustments should be. Some examples of the adjustments that staff can make include:

- provision of auxiliary aids
- provision of information in appropriate alternative formats (e.g. large print, Braille, coloured paper etc.)
- use of email or telephone in preference to hard copy letters
- use of plain English or Easy Read service
- communication through a representative or intermediary

Our response to requests for reasonable adjustments

In the majority of cases we will be able to agree and deliver the required reasonable adjustment with a minimum of delay. In some cases, we may need to consider in more detail how best to overcome the difficulty a disabled person is experiencing or seek advice from expert disability organisations that can assist with signposting and other forms of support.

How do we decide what is reasonable?

The Equality Act does not define what is 'reasonable' but guidance from the Equality and Human Rights Commission suggest that the most relevant factors are:

- The effectiveness of the adjustment(s) in preventing or reducing the disadvantage for the disabled person
- The practicality of us making the adjustments
- The availability of our resources including external assistance and finance
- Any disruption to the Service that making the adjustment may cause.

Effectiveness

The adjustment should be designed to fully address the disadvantage it is meant to overcome. Our staff will take full consideration of the declared disability and listen to how we might overcome that and agree a way forward with the customer. We will not assume that we know what is best for the customer based on the declared disability. For an example a visually impaired person may not have English as their first language and therefore by sending out information in audio format but in English may not meet the need of the individual.

Practicality

For example it may not always be practical for us to visit complainants within specific timescales laid down in our overall complaints policy but we will try to meet those milestones if we can. If we can't we will explain the reasons why to the complainant and agree a timescale that suits both parties.

Resources

In practice many reasonable adjustments will involve little or no additional cost or additional resources and can be implemented relatively easily. However, the reasonableness of an adjustment will be evaluated against the resource available to our Service. For example it may not be reasonable for our staff

to devote all of their time dealing with one complaint at the detriment to the rest of the customers for whom they provide a service. The amount of extra time must therefore be reasonable.

Monitoring

We have a culture of continuous improvement within SCH and want to learn from our customers and the service we provide. As a result where reasonable adjustments are requested or made we will record and monitor those. This will help us to identify the effectiveness of those adjustments and whether the customer suffered any detriment as a result of poor considerations. This will in turn help us to review our services.

Dealing with complaints about our service

It is inevitable that we won't always get everything right for every customer but we are committed to provide a high standard of service, dealing with everyone in a way that is fair and free from discrimination. If someone is dissatisfied with the arrangements we have made for providing reasonable adjustments as part of the complaints process, we will respond in accordance with our complaints policy. We will seek advice from disability groups when required to do so.