

# **Housing Authority of the City of South Bend**

## **Complaints Policy for Non-HASB Personnel**

The Housing Authority of the City of South Bend (HASB) views complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future, as well as a chance to make things right for the person or organization that has made the complaint.

### **Our Policy is:**

- To provide a fair complaints procedure, which is clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint;
- To publicize the existence of our complaints procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint;
- To make sure everyone at the HASB knows what to do if a complaint is received;
- To make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way;
- To make sure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired; and
- To gather information which helps us to improve what we do.

### **Definition of a Complaint**

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of the HASB.

### **Where Complaints Come From**

Complaints may come from any person or organization that has a legitimate interest in the HASB such as tenants and applicants for tenancy, contractors and subcontractors. HASB staff members with complaints should use the complaints procedure set forth in the HASB's Personnel Policy Manual.

A complaint can be received verbally, by phone, by email or in writing.

### **Confidentiality**

All complaint information will be handled sensitively, telling only those who need to know and following any relevant data protection requirements.

### **Responsibility**

Overall responsibility for this Policy and its implementation lies with the Executive Director and Management Team.

## **Review**

This Policy is reviewed regularly and updated as required.

Adopted on: September 1, 2015

Last reviewed: September 1, 2017

## **Complaints Procedure of the Housing Authority of the City of South Bend**

### **Publicized Contact Details for Complaints:**

Written complaints may be sent to the Executive Director at 501 Alonzo Watson Drive or by e-mail at [execsec@sbhaonline.com](mailto:execsec@sbhaonline.com).

Verbal complaints may be made by phone to 574-235-9146 or in person to designated HASB staff .

### **Receiving Complaints**

Complaints may arrive through formal channels publicized for that purpose or informally when a person complains to any HASB staff member. HASB staff not responsible for receiving complaints should direct the complainant to a designated staff member who is so responsible. .

Those persons designated to receive complaints who receive a phone or in person complaint should:

- Write down the facts of the complaint;
- Take the complainant's name, address and telephone number;
- Note down the relationship of the complainant to the HASB (for example: client, member);
- Tell the complainant that we have a complaints procedure;
- Tell the complainant what will happen next and how long it will take; and
- Where appropriate, ask the complainant to send a written account by mail or email so that the complaint is recorded in the complainant's own words.

For further guidelines about handling verbal complaints, see Appendix 1 Resolving Complaints

### **Stage One**

In many cases, a complaint is best resolved by the person responsible for the issue being complained about. If the complaint has been received by that person, they may be able to resolve it swiftly and should do so if possible and appropriate.

Whether or not the complaint has been resolved, the complaint information should be passed to the Administrative Services Supervisor within one week.

After receiving the complaint, the Administrative Services Supervisor records it in the Complaints Log. If the complaint has not been resolved, it will be delegated to the appropriate person to investigate it and to take appropriate action.

If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a fair opportunity to respond.

Complaints should be acknowledged by the person handling the complaint within one week. The acknowledgement should say who is dealing with the complaint and when the person complaining can expect a reply. A copy of this Complaints Procedure should be attached.

Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within five business days. If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent to the Administrative Services Supervisor with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

Whether the complaint is justified or not, the reply to the complainant should state that the complaint was investigated, identify whether it was founded or unfounded, and, if founded, state that appropriate action was taken as a result of the complaint.

### **Stage Two**

If the complainant feels that the problem has not been satisfactorily resolved at Stage One, they can request that the complaint be reviewed by the Executive Director. At this stage, the complaint will be passed to the Executive Director.

The request for Executive Director level review should be acknowledged within one week of receiving it. The acknowledgement should say who will deal with the case and when the complainant can expect a reply.

The Executive Director may investigate the facts of the case him or herself or delegate a suitably senior person to do so. This may involve reviewing the paperwork of the case and speaking with the person who dealt with the complaint at Stage One.

If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a further opportunity to respond.

The person who dealt with the original complaint at Stage One should be kept informed of what is happening.

Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within 10 days. If this is not possible because, for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent to the complainant with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

Whether the complaint is upheld or not, the reply to the complainant should describe that the complaint was reviewed and investigated by the Executive Director or his or her designee, identify whether the Stage One determination is being upheld, and where the complaint is founded, state the appropriate action has been taken to address the complaint.

The decision taken at this stage is final, unless the Executive Director, at his or her discretion, decides it is appropriate to seek assistance from the Board of Commissioners .

### **Monitoring and Learning from Complaints**

Complaints are reviewed annually to identify any trends which may indicate a need to take further action.

## **Appendix 1 - Practical Guidance for Handling Verbal Complaints**

- Remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation.
- Listen - allow the person to talk about the complaint in their own words. Sometimes a person just wants to "let off steam."
- Don't debate the facts in the first instance, especially if the person is angry.
- Show an interest in what is being said.
- Obtain details about the complaint before any personal details.
- Ask for clarification wherever necessary.
- Show that you have understood the complaint by reflecting back what you have noted down.
- Acknowledge the person's feelings (even if you feel that they are being unreasonable) - you can do this without making a comment on the complaint itself or making any admission of fault on behalf of the organization e.g "I understand that this situation is frustrating for you."
- If you feel that an apology is deserved for something that was the responsibility of your organization, then apologize.
- Ask the person what they would like done to resolve the issue.
- Be clear about what you can do, how long it will take and what it will involve.
- Don't promise things you can't deliver.
- Give clear and valid reasons why requests cannot be met.
- Make sure that the person understands what they have been told.
- Wherever appropriate, inform the person about the available avenues of review or appeal.