




HackneyHomes

In partnership with  Hackney Council

HACKNEY HOMES PROCEDURE FOR BOARD MEMBERS ENQUIRIES

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Responsible Officers: Complaints Team / Governance Manager

1. BACKGROUND

This procedure covers the management and monitoring of enquiries or complaints received by board members in the following areas:-

- Enquiries / complaints on behalf of constituents
- Enquiries in respect of policy and procedure
- Complaints in respect of board members own personal housing circumstances.
- Enquiries emanating from issues raised through other public / community forums in which board members are involved (in addition to their role as board members).

This procedure does not affect the role / responsibilities of council members who are board members when in their capacity as council members. This is governed by the council's current procedure for member enquiries.

2. GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR BOARD MEMBERS

a. Composition of board

The composition of the board as set out in the Articles of Association provides for thirteen board members. Five of these are residents, elected on a rotational basis across the borough. Four members are independent board members and are appointed through an open recruitment and selection process. The remaining four board members are nominated by the London Borough of Hackney. Those nominated by the council are all elected members whose conduct is regulated both by Hackney Homes and the London Borough of Hackney.

b) Service Improvement

Board members have an important role to play with regards continuous improvement through raising issues with officers where service delivery appears to be falling short of acceptable standards. This role may be carried out in respect of complaints from constituents or through raising critical policy development issues, suggesting new ways of working and reviewing performance. Critical to this role however is that board members enquiries do comply with general good practice and code of conduct requirements which underpin the relationships between officers and board members. Additionally, it is critical that Hackney Homes has robust systems in place to safeguard the organisation from claims of conflicts of interest.

c) Instructions to Officers

The core principles are as follows:-

Policies and procedures are either approved by Hackney Homes Board or by the council. Whilst board members may on occasions wish to challenge existing policies, these must be progressed through appropriate corporate channels and not through direct instructions to individual officers.

d) Conflicts of Interest

Board members are required to declare any conflicts of interest. These may be matters of commercial interest, but any other personal or specific community interest should also be declared in any dealings with officers or during the course of any enquiries.

e) Code of Conduct

Board members must observe the Hackney Homes' Code of Conduct whenever they:

- Conduct the business of the organisation
- Conduct the business of the office to which he or she has been nominated elected or appointed; or
- Act as a representative of the organisation

Board members

- Must not in their official capacity, or any other circumstance, use their position as a board member improperly to confer on or secure for himself/herself or any other person, an advantage or disadvantage;
- Must not in their official capacity, or any other circumstance, conduct himself / herself in a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing his / her office or the organisation into disrepute.

3. TYPES OF ENQUIRIES

All enquiries / complaints must be submitted via the Housing Complaints Team which will liaise with the Governance Team to progress the enquiry / complaint according to this procedure. Board members should not write to individual service heads or other officers.

a) Enquiries / Complaints on behalf of constituents

These enquiries will be generally instigated through residents making contact with board members concerning services which have been delivered to them. This may typically be delays with repairs, transfers and re-housing, rent arrears or tenancy management issues. For these enquiries, the process will be that the constituent will receive a response acknowledging the involvement of the board member though the board member will not receive a copy of the response but will receive confirmation that the response has been sent. This recognises that board members do not have the same representational role as elected councillors. For elected councillors who are board members, they are of course free to progress enquiries from constituents in their role as elected councillors.

b) Enquiries in respect of policy and procedure

These enquiries are typically where board members wish to express a view or request information in respect of particular policies or procedure. This might include for example clarification on the rent arrears policy or on the Decent Homes programme and in these cases the board member will receive a full response directly. Board members must not seek to use the Hackney Homes complaints procedure for these types of matters. Guidelines on where the complaints procedure is appropriate are set out under section c).

c) Complaints in respect of board members' own personal housing circumstances

The use of the Hackney Homes' complaints procedure is limited only to circumstances where there is a complaint from a board member about their own specific circumstances. This will be in respect of services delivered by Hackney Homes directly to that board member. This might for example include delays in repairs to the property occupied by the board member or complaints about Hackney Homes' management of an ASB issue directly affecting the board member. The limitations on the use of the complaints procedure recognise that board members are integral to the management of Hackney Homes.

- d) Enquiries emanating from issues raised through other public community forums in which board members are involved (in addition to their role as board members).

Board members will from time to time occupy positions in other public or community forums. This might include neighbourhood panels, tenants & residents' associations, youth projects etc. There will be occasions when such groups may wish to progress complaints regarding services delivered by Hackney Homes. In these circumstances it is not appropriate for the complaints system to be used by the board member and such enquiries will be progressed through the board members' enquiry procedure. This process recognises that board members cannot simultaneously play an advocacy and management role in respect of services delivered by Hackney Homes.

4. TARGETS AND MONITORING OF BOARD MEMBERS' ENQUIRIES

- a) Targets

The response time for board members' enquiries is 15 working days from the date of receipt although board members' enquiries will be acknowledged within 3 working days. In circumstances where a full reply cannot be completed within the proscribed timeframe the board member will be contacted and updated as to progress. Performance against these targets will be regularly reported in the monthly performance report.

- b) Management of board member enquiries

Board members' enquires will be managed through the designated complaints handling database which also will include the management of council members' enquiries and complaints. Board members' enquiries will be registered on the database (currently RESPOND). Whilst board members should not be discouraged from informal discussions with officers it is important that there is a clear record of activity generated by board members.