

9. Getting involved in decision making



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE





Getting involved in decision making

Hackney Homes is committed to involving leaseholders and freeholders playing an active part in the decisions which affect where you live. You know better than anyone what you need.

What's in it for you?

You might read this and think "I am not really bothered about being asked or consulted", or even ask the question, "Why should I get involved?"

There are real benefits in getting involved. Some of these include:

- Working with us to get problems resolved
- Being able to influence future services
- Getting the chance to share ideas with new people
- Finding out more about what's happening in your area

You will know what you feel able to do according to your personal circumstances. You may wish to be active on your own estate or you may have time to become involved in the Boroughwide Leaseholders & Freeholders Forum. **Your input is needed to make sure your needs are met.**

What's happening?

Hackney Homes will send you a free newsletter called Hackney Homes News and you will also receive the Leaseholders & Freeholders Newsletter that will keep you up to date with information of interest to you. We also have a range of booklets which we send with notices, invoices or estimates.

We will put an advert in local papers from time to time if necessary to let you know of anything that affects you.

We will write to you directly if necessary.

Watch out for notices on your estate or block, in your Neighbourhood Housing Office for matters of interest to you

Watch out for articles in magazines such as Leaseholders & Freeholders News issued by Hackney Homes.

You can also check our website at:
www.hackneyhomes.org.uk

Hackney Homes also let Leaseholders & Freeholders know of our intention before carrying out major works and you are invited to make observations. There are also regular consultation exercises on estates for major projects.

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Disputes and Complaints

Disputes with your Service Charges and Major Works

As explained, we try hard to provide the services at a reasonable cost to you, but if you feel you have a dispute regarding your service charges, you should first contact us and we will try and resolve the matter.

You should not stop making payments without first discussing the situation with us; we can advise you on what action you should take, if any, until we have resolved the issue.

We want to provide good quality services for everyone, but things can go wrong. If they do, we need to know so we can put them right and learn from them. If you are not happy about something we have done or not done, please let us know.

Both your complaints and compliments are important to us as they help us to improve our services. Please talk to us if you are satisfied or dissatisfied with any of our services. You should first contact the staff, their manager or the office that provides the service.

You can telephone, write or email us with your complaint.

Phone: 020 8356 5022

Email: housing.complaints@hackneyhomes.org.uk

Write: Housing Complaints Team
Hackney Homes
136-142 Lower Clapton Road
London E5 0QD

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Making a complaint

As the first step it is best to contact your Neighbourhood Housing Office. You can talk to any member of staff who will look into the problem. Once the facts are known, the problem can be resolved very quickly.

If you are not satisfied with our first response we have a set of recommended steps you should follow.

What can I expect?

If, after investigation we find that we are in the wrong, we will apologise in writing and will do everything we can to put things right. We will also take the necessary action to ensure that the problem does not occur again. If your complaint was about our policies we may decide to review the policy to see whether changes are necessary.

Hackney Homes complaints procedure

There are three stages in the Hackney Homes complaints procedure:

Stage 1

Hackney Homes recognises that the people who can best deal with most complaints are those who provide the service. At Stage 1 the complaint should, therefore, be handled by the local office or service manager who have the best knowledge of the service and can quickly deal with the complaint at this stage.

Stage 2

If a complainant is dissatisfied with the response at Stage 1 for any reason, they have the right to have their complaint considered at Stage 2. At this stage, all investigations are carried out by our Complaints Team. This is a team of Principal Officers, based in Hackney Homes, set up specifically to deal with complaints and who have not had any previous involvement in the case. This is the final stage at which we will carry out investigations.

Stage 3

If you are still unhappy after the response at Stage 2, you have the right to have your complaint independently reviewed. Stage 3 complaints are co-ordinated and investigated by us within the Standards & Complaints Team in our Customer & Corporate Services Directorate. A member of the team will undertake a thorough review of the complaint and how it has been handled at each stage.

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Dealing with your complaint

We in Hackney Homes endeavour to deal with all complaints as quickly as possible. On receipt of your complaint we will acknowledge it within 3 working days, in writing, advising you who will be dealing with the complaint and when you can expect a full reply.

We aim to resolve all stage one and two complaints within 15 working days and all stage three complaints within 20 working days. We will keep you fully informed and communicate openly with you throughout the complaints process.

Who else can I approach?

You can also approach the Local Government Ombudsman. This service is independent and receives complaints from individuals who feel they have been treated unfairly by a local authority. The Ombudsman may only investigate complaints which have already been through our own complaints procedure.

The Ombudsman does not question a policy decision made by a local authority or provide general advice on local government services.

If you want to make a complaint to the Ombudsman (which must be in writing), you can obtain a copy of their leaflet by contacting the Ombudsman directly:

The Local Government Ombudsman
Millbank Tower
Milbank
London SW1P 4QP

Tel: 020 7217 4620
Fax: 020 7217 4621
Email: rec@lgo.org.uk

You can also contact the Ombudsman Adviceline, which is open between 9.00am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday, on 0845 6021983.

Access to personal property file

You have the right to see details recorded about you on your property file. Please contact our Customer Services Team on 020 8356 2100 who will give you further details on how to view your property file.

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Taking things further

If you have made your complaint to the appropriate department, and to the Central Complaints team and are still not satisfied with our response you may consider it appropriate to obtain legal advice on your position.

You should note that Hackney Homes is not in a position to provide you with independent legal advice, and would therefore recommend that you consult a solicitor or independent advice body. Leaseholders should be aware that they will be responsible for the payment of any solicitors or other representatives who act on their behalf.

Leasehold Valuation Tribunal

Ultimately, you may consider it appropriate to apply to the Leasehold Valuation Tribunal (LVT) for a hearing regarding your dispute. The Leasehold Valuation Tribunal has been given special powers to resolve disputes over service charges and major works.

The LVT is part of the Residential Property Tribunal Service. Each Tribunal usually consists of three members: a lawyer who is often the chairperson, a valuer and a lay person. It is entirely independent and impartial in its approach.

The tribunal is able to decide on disputes relating to service charges that may arise between Leaseholders and their Landlords.

The LVT hears both sides of the argument and then determines the issue on the basis of the evidence and the judgement and experience of the LVT members. Their decision is issued in writing as soon as possible after the hearing.

The Tribunal will be able to confirm its fees and the areas of its jurisdiction, together with giving an idea of the timescales involved.

Contact Details: Leasehold Valuation Tribunal
2nd Floor
10 Alfred Place
London
WC1E 7LR

Telephone: 020 7446 7700

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Independent Advice

Further information may be obtained by contacting any one of the following Independent organisations.

Leasehold Advisory Service (LEASE)

31 Worship Street
London EC2A 2DX
Phone: 0207 374 5380

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

236 Mare Street
E8 1HE
Phone: 0208 525 6350

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Contact Us

Leasehold & Right To Buy Services

Below are the Sections that make up the Leasehold & Right to Buy Services. You can contact us between 9am - 5pm Monday to Friday. We also open from 9.00am - 7.30pm on the second and last Wednesday of every month.

All our teams are located at:

Leasehold & Right to Buy Services
1st Floor, 298 Mare Street
London
E8 1HE

Customer Services (General enquiries)

- Sellers Pack
- Subletting

Phone: 020 8356 2100

Email: leaseholders@hackneyhomes.org.uk or freeholders@hackneyhomes.org.uk

Right to Buy

- Applications
- Offers

Phone: 020 8356 2010/2232

Email: RTB@hackneyhomes.org.uk

Service Charge Accounts

- Preparation/Billing of Estimates
- Preparation/Billing of Actuals

Phone: 020 8356 2099

Email: Service.charges@hackneyhomes.org.uk

Service Charge & Major Works Recovery

- Payments and Arrears

Phone: 020 8356 2299

Email: major.works@hackneyhomes.org.uk and Service.charges@hackneyhomes.org.uk

Major Works

- Estimates and Invoicing

Phone: 020 8356 2400

Email: major.works@hackneyhomes.org.uk

The contents of this Handbook are believed to be accurate at the date of publication (November 2006).





