



The Ultimate Guide to Handling Complaints and Boosting TSMs in Social Housing

**From Complaints to Compliments:
Transforming Your Tenant Experience**



Summary

Introduction

Chapter 1: Complaints are feedback in disguise

Chapter 2: Speed is Everything — Why Fast Responses Matter

Chapter 3: Stay Ahead of Property Condition Complaints

Chapter 4: Communication is Key — Keep Tenants in the Loop

Chapter 5: Empathy — It's Not Just About Fixing the Problem

Chapter 6: Solve the Root of the Problem, Not Just the Symptom

Chapter 7: Following Up — The Step That Makes All the Difference

Conclusion

Appendix

Introduction

Managing tenant complaints is an essential part of providing excellent service in social housing. But instead of seeing complaints as obstacles, they can actually be turned into valuable opportunities for improvement.

When handled properly, complaints offer insights that can help improve processes, services, Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs), and more importantly, **improve the quality of life for tenants.**

This guide is designed to help transform complaints into a tool for continuous improvement.

We'll explore seven practical strategies for complaint management based on real-world examples and best practices from the housing sector. **Let's get started!**

“ The CustomerSure tool is easy to use, highly configurable, and the pre-configured reports, together with filters, are engaging. The tool is feature-packed and highly recommended. ”

- Richard Baggott, Connect Housing



Chapter 01:

Complaints are feedback in disguise

Complaints provide the data you need to improve tenant experience. When someone raises an issue, they're offering a glimpse into where things could be better. In social housing, complaints about property conditions are especially common, making up 37% of all cases last year according to the Housing Ombudsman's 2022-23 review. **Each complaint is an opportunity to refine operations and prevent future issues.**

The key is not to avoid complaints but to treat them as a resource for insight. Addressing problems before they escalate improves TSMs and builds trust.

Pro Tip: Look at complaints as a source of feedback. Responding positively can turn what could have been a negative experience into a sign of your commitment to tenants. For more ideas, see our guide on [dealing with complaints](#).

Checklist for Turning Complaints into Valuable Feedback:

- Acknowledge the complaint immediately.
- Use tenant complaints as data to spot trends and recurring issues.
- Ask tenants for feedback regularly, not just when there's an issue. Surveys, for example, can provide ongoing insights and help prevent problems.



“ Capturing our client's feedback has been a very powerful tool that is key to continuous improvement of our service and winning new customers. ”

- Adam Kuznesof

Chapter 02:

Speed is Everything — Why Fast Responses Matter

Timely responses are crucial. Tenants expect quick action, especially when it comes to their living conditions. Delayed responses can result in frustration and a loss of trust. In fact, 76% of maladministration cases in the Housing Ombudsman's report were related to slow complaint handling.

Even if a resolution takes time, acknowledging the issue quickly reassures tenants that you're on top of it. **Regular communication keeps tenants informed and helps avoid further dissatisfaction.**

Pro Tip: Use automation to acknowledge complaints instantly and provide timelines for resolution, even if you can't solve the problem immediately. Managing expectations is key. For a full guide on responding to tenant feedback quickly and effectively, check out our [blog on handling online customer complaints](#).

How to respond faster:

- Implement a system to prioritise complaints and track responses effectively.
- Send a personalised response straight away, from a named case handler who will handle the complaint from start to finish.
- Assign a team member to follow up regularly until the issue is resolved.

“ Whenever we have a question, we email support and they come back to us within a couple of hours (at the most) with either an answer or a suggestion of a way forward. The system works very well for us as a business and we are really growing because of the results. ”

- Lucy Booth

Chapter 03:

Stay Ahead of Property Condition Complaints

Property maintenance issues — like damp, faulty heating, or leaks — are among the most frequent complaints from tenants. These issues often result in frustration, and 54% of property condition complaints were upheld as maladministration in the last year.

Staying proactive through regular inspections and timely repairs can prevent many complaints before they happen. Keeping tenants informed about the status of repairs and maintenance also helps manage their expectations.

Pro Tip: Proactive maintenance helps prevent issues from becoming full-blown complaints. Scheduled property inspections and early interventions can go a long way.

Checklist for Proactive Maintenance:

- Schedule regular inspections to catch potential issues early.
- Use tenant feedback to identify and address recurring problems.
- Ensure there is a clear process for tenants to report property issues, and follow up with regular updates on the progress of repairs.

“ CustomerSure is something you should get for your business if you're always wondering what your customers REALLY think about you.” ”

- Rosina Michel



Chapter 04:

Communication is Key — Keep Tenants in the Loop

Clear communication is at the core of effective tenant management. Nothing frustrates tenants more than being left in the dark, especially when it comes to repairs or complaints. Even when the solution isn't immediate, keeping tenants informed builds trust and reduces frustration.

Providing regular updates — from the moment a complaint is made to its resolution — demonstrates transparency and accountability. Even if the news is bad or not what the tenant wants to hear, i.e. delays, tell them. Silence or a lack of communication is even worse.

Pro Tip: Use multiple channels to communicate with tenants, whether it's via email, text, or phone. Tailoring communication to tenant preferences helps improve their experience. For more tips on handling tenant reviews and feedback, check out our [guide on responding to negative reviews](#).

Best Practices for Effective Communication:

- Acknowledge complaints immediately, even if you're still working on the solution.
- Keep tenants updated regularly, so they know what's happening.
- After resolving the issue, follow up to ensure they're satisfied with the outcome.

“CustomerSure is a great tool for communicating with our customers both to check we satisfy their needs and also for general enquiries and relationship management.”
- Michael Stainthorpe

Chapter 05:

Empathy — It's Not Just About Fixing the Problem

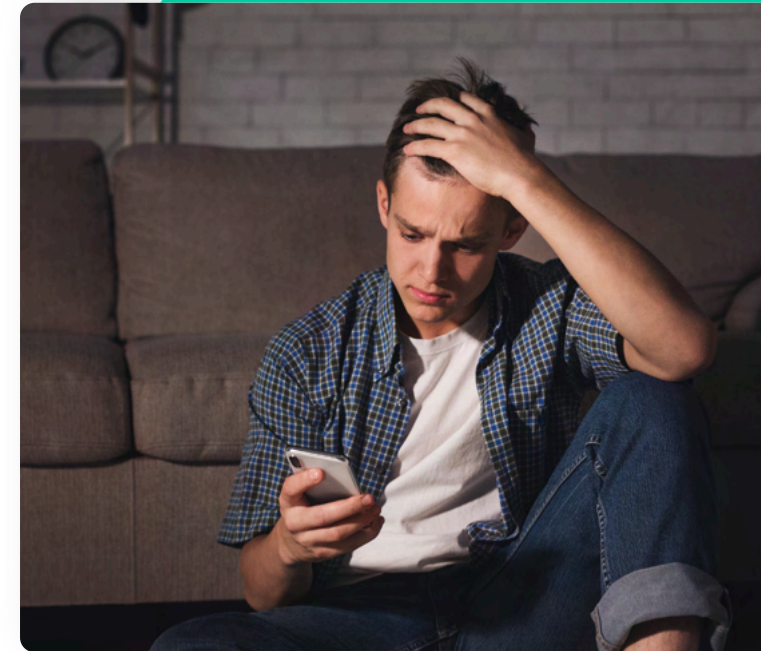
Tenant complaints aren't just about the issue itself — they're also about how tenants feel during the process. A little empathy can go a long way in resolving complaints more effectively. A simple acknowledgment of their frustration helps ease tensions and demonstrates that their concerns are taken seriously.

Research by IFF shows that tenants want to feel valued and understood. When complaints are handled with care and empathy, it creates a more positive experience, even if the issue takes time to resolve.

Pro Tip: Train your team to use empathetic language and active listening. This can turn a complaint-handling process into a relationship-building opportunity.

Ways to Show Empathy:

- Start with an apology, even if the issue isn't your fault.
- Show understanding of the tenant's frustration and commit to finding a solution.
- Ensure staff are trained in delivering empathetic, thoughtful responses.
- Offer support in other ways, so not just solving the problem itself, but going beyond to offer additional support.



“ CustomerSure is truly a customer-first survey platform! They provide a very user-friendly tool with very effective & reachable support! Really great teamwork! ”
- Victoria Francis

Chapter 06:

Solve the Root of the Problem, Not Just the Symptom

Recurring complaints about the same issue point to a deeper, unresolved problem. Fixing the surface-level symptoms without addressing the underlying cause will only lead to frustration. Tackling the root cause is essential for long-term tenant satisfaction.

The Regulator of Social Housing encourages addressing the root issues rather than offering quick fixes. For instance, dealing with damp by repainting walls won't solve the problem—you need to identify and fix the source of moisture.

Can you use this complaint data to identify other tenants who have this issue, before they actually complain? And put things into place for these customers to stop issues escalating.

Pro Tip: Use complaint data to identify patterns and uncover the real causes of problems. Long-term solutions will prevent complaints from resurfacing and build tenant trust.

How to Solve Root Problems:

- Track recurring complaints to spot patterns across properties.
- Focus on long-term solutions rather than temporary fixes.
- Share updates with tenants to show you're addressing the root cause.

“We take insights that we get from the CustomerSure surveys, and we use them to make real change in the business—resulting in happier customers overall.”

- Sam Shaw

Chapter 07:

Following Up — The Step That Makes All the Difference

Resolving a complaint is only part of the job. Following up afterward shows that you care about the tenant's experience and that the solution actually worked. A quick follow-up email or message not only reassures the tenant but also provides an opportunity to gather valuable feedback on your complaint-handling process.

The Housing Ombudsman found that tenants are more likely to remain satisfied when they feel that their social housing association has gone the extra mile to ensure the issue was truly resolved.

Pro Tip: Following up with tenants after an issue is resolved is a simple way to build long-term trust and improve tenant retention.

How to Follow Up Effectively:

- Empower your customer team to own these complaints and be able to solve them.
- Send a short message or make a call to check in after the issue is resolved.
- Ask tenants for feedback on the complaint-handling process.
- Use follow-up data to improve future processes.

“CustomerSure is such a valuable tool. The system offers great flexibility to deliver meaningful insights about your customers and the ability to review and respond to feedback in real-time ensures we can continue to push the satisfaction of our customers higher.”
- Richard Baggott

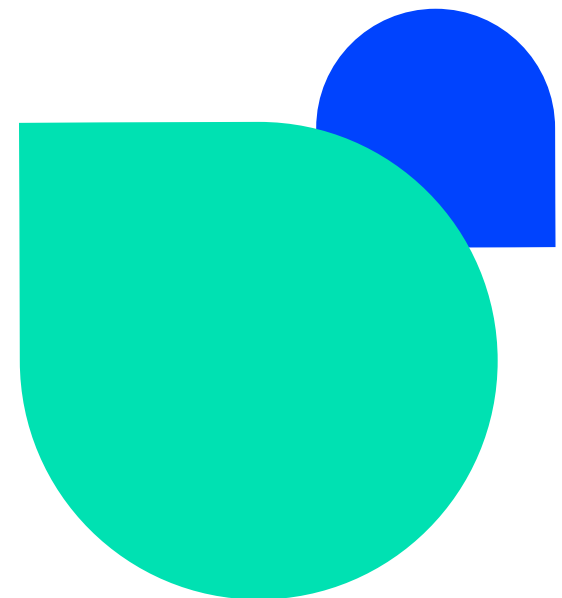


Conclusion

Handling complaints doesn't have to be a challenge. In fact, it's an opportunity to strengthen your relationship with your tenants and improve satisfaction across the board.

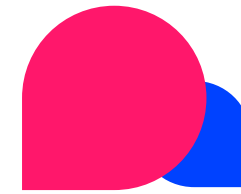
By following these seven simple strategies, you'll not only resolve complaints more effectively, but also build a culture of trust and communication within your housing organisation.

For more information on improving tenant satisfaction and handling complaints, don't forget to check out our additional resources on [dealing with complaints](#) and [handling negative reviews](#).



Ready to elevate your VoC programme with the 3 key foundations?

[Get Your Free Guide](#)



This guide helps turn handling complaints into a boost for your Tenant Satisfaction Measurement (TSMs).

Good tenant experience is great for Social Housing Associations.

If you're keen to learn more and start exploring how to improve your next VoC programme...

[Book a chat with an expert](#)





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