



COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS POLICY AND PROCEDURES (VHR)

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Purpose

This policy establishes the approach of SouthEast to complaints and appeals in respect of housing, social housing applications and related services.

Scope

This policy applies to complaints and appeals made to SouthEast by:

- tenants and prospective tenants of SouthEast in respect of rental housing; and
- people whom SouthEast has assisted to make an application for social housing under the Victorian Housing Register (VHR).

This policy does not apply to complaints or feedback received from people who are not tenants, prospective tenants, or applicants for social housing. This includes:

- complaints or grievances by employees of SouthEast;
- complaints by contractors of SouthEast; and
- complaints or registration of concern by other member of the community (for example, neighbours).

Policy statement

Guiding principles

All tenants and prospective tenants of SouthEast and applicants (tenants, prospective tenants and social housing tenants) have the right to:

- complain about the way that SouthEast has gone about delivering housing or related services; and
- appeal a decision made by SouthEast in relation to their housing, application, or services.

SouthEast welcomes complaints from tenants, prospective tenants, and social housing tenants as a key way by which SouthEast receives feedback, responds to the needs of tenants, prospective tenants and social housing tenants, and improves its service delivery.

Accordingly, SouthEast will:

- provide tenants, prospective tenants, and social housing tenants with clear information about how they can make a complaint or lodge an appeal with SouthEast and about any external complaint-handling bodies that are relevant (such as DHHS or the Housing Registrar);
- support people to make a complaint or appeal in a way that is accessible to them;
- respond to complaints and appeals promptly, fairly, and transparently;
- respect the privacy and confidentiality of those who make a complaint or lodge an appeal;
- not take any adverse action in respect of anyone simply because they have made a complaint or lodged an appeal; and

- keep records of complaints made and appeals lodged; and
- use the outcome of complaints and appeals to improve SouthEast’s service delivery and minimise future complaints and appeals.

Complaints by tenants or prospective tenants about rental housing

Tenants or prospective tenants of SouthEast who are affected by decisions of SouthEast on matters relating to rental housing may ask for their complaint to be dealt with under the complaints and appeals procedure.

Under this procedure, SouthEast must take all reasonable steps to resolve such complaints within 21 days after the complaint is made to SouthEast.

An individual who is a tenant or prospective tenant of SouthEast and who has made a complaint to SouthEast may refer the complaint to the Housing Registrar for investigation, or to the DHHS Housing Appeals Office, if the complaint is not resolved within 30 days after it is made.

Complaints or appeals about applications for social housing under the Victorian Housing Register

SouthEast participates in the VHR by:

- providing applicants with information about applying for social housing under the VHR;
- submitting applications to DHHS with a recommended outcome based on the VHR’s eligibility criteria.

Where an applicant wishes to:

- make a complaint about the way in which SouthEast has provided service to them in making an application for social housing; or
- appeal a decision made by SouthEast in relation to the person’s application for social housing to:
 - recommend or not recommend an application for approval;
 - approve or not approve an application;
 - remove an application from the register; and
 - determine if an offer of social housing is a reasonable offer,

then such applicants should first should ask that the complaint be reviewed, or decision be reconsidered by SouthEast under the complaints and appeals procedure.

Applicants for social housing who are unhappy with the resolution of a complaint under the complaints and appeals procedure may refer the complaint to the DHHS Housing Appeals Office.

SouthEast will regularly monitor the effectiveness of this complaints and appeals procedure.

Procedures

Complaints coordination

SouthEast will appoint a person to coordinate complaints, which will include to:

- act as the point of contact with the Housing Registrar and DHHS Housing Appeals Office;
- monitor compliance with the policy and this procedure (for example, the requirement to resolve complaints within 30 days); and
- maintain the register of complaints and appeals.

Currently this role is the responsibility of the CEO, Steven Morrissey.

Informal resolution

All staff are empowered to handle complaints in the first instance and it is preferred they are dealt with promptly at the initial point of contact. SouthEast encourages all tenants, prospective tenants and social housing tenants who are unhappy about the way that they have been treated by SouthEast or decisions made by SouthEast to take up the issue with the person who delivered the service or made the decision. This can be a way of getting the matter resolved quickly.

However, if a client does not wish to do this then it is their right to have the matter dealt with under the complaints and appeals policy and this procedure.

How to complain or appeal

You may complain or appeal:

- in person;
- via a representative or advocate;
- in writing (hard copy or electronic);
- by telephone.

A complainant may register a complaint verbally or in writing. Upon receipt of the written complaint the formal process may begin. SouthEast encourages tenants, prospective tenants, and social housing tenants to make complaints in writing as a way by which the issues can be most effectively identified and then resolved. However, SouthEast recognises that some people may face barriers to doing so and will therefore:

- accept complaints and appeals in a variety of means; and
- take reasonable actions to assist that client to clarify the issues in their complaint or appeal.

Acknowledgement of complaint

SouthEast will acknowledge receipt of all complaints and appeals within 5 working days. This acknowledgement should advise the complainant of the process that SouthEast will follow.

Investigation of complaint or consideration of the appeal

The procedure should assign a manager responsible for ensuring that SouthEast responds appropriately to the complaint or appeal by investigating the matter and/or reconsidering any decision made.

This person should not be directly involved in the complaint or appeal – i.e. be the original decision-maker or the person whose conduct has given rise to the complaint.

Outcome of complaint or appeal

Responses to complaints and appeals must:

- be in writing;
- explain the outcome of the complaint or appeal and the reasons for SouthEast’s decision; and
- advise the complainant of their right to refer the matter to the Housing Registrar or DHHS Housing Appeals Office (as appropriate).

Investigation by the Housing Registrar

SouthEast staff must co-operate with any such investigation by the Housing Registrar.

Privacy and confidentiality

SouthEast must comply with the Privacy and Confidentiality Policy when undertaking this process.

Register of complaints

SouthEast will maintain a register of complaints made and appeals lodged which complies with the requirements of the Housing Registrar.

Review

SouthEast will use the outcome of complaints and appeals to improve SouthEast’s service delivery and minimise future complaints and appeals by the following:

- Consideration of outcomes of complaints at team meetings (on a de-identified and non-judgmental basis);
- Quarterly reporting of complaints data to the [Board/ Executive];
- Regular consideration of complaints data by Tenant Reference Group (or similar).

Definitions

In this policy:

Appeal	When a person asks for a review of a decision of SouthEast to which this policy applies
Applicant	A person who SouthEast assists to apply for social housing
Complaint	A complaint is a client’s registered expression of dissatisfaction with any service delivered or action taken by SouthEast to which this policy applies.
DHHS	The Victorian Department of Health and Human Services
Social housing	Both public housing (housing owned and managed by DHHS) and housing owned, controlled or managed by participating registered

agencies (that is, registered housing agencies that participate in the VHR)

VHR

The Victorian Housing Register, the Statewide common application for people seeking social housing, which can be accessed via SouthEast, DHHS, the mygov portal or designated support providers

Related policies

VHR

- Allocations
- Allocations Eligibility
- Rent Setting
- Privacy

SouthEast

- Privacy and Data Protection
- Complaints

Legislation and standards

This policy implements SouthEast's obligations under:

- Housing Act 1983 (Vic) Part VIII Division 5 Subdivision 2 (Dispute Resolution)
- Performance Standards for Registered Housing Agencies
- DHHS Victorian Housing Register Operational Guidelines

Transparency and accessibility

This policy will be available on the SouthEast website www.sehc.org.au