



SouthEast
Housing Co-operative

Housing Futures

Complaints Handling Policy & Procedure

Contents

Purpose	3
Policy Principles:	3
Voluntary and Open Membership.....	3
Privacy and FOI.....	3
Referrals.....	3
Investigation.....	4
Who is affected by this policy?.....	4
Reasons for policy:	4
Scope.....	4
Definition	4
Procedures.....	5
Identifying a Complaint	5
Managing initial receipt of complaints	6
Complaints involving officers and other service providers who represent SouthEast:	6
SouthEast - Complaints Handling Procedures	7
• ACNC (Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission).....	8
Closing and Learning from a complaint	9
Document and external links:	9
Related Legislation	10
Related Policies:	10
Compliance	11
References.....	11
APPENDIX A - COMPLAINTS FILE SUMMARY	12
APPENDIX B — COMPLAINTS HANDLING EVALUATION	14
APPENDIX C: STANDARD SOUTHEAST COMPLAINTS RESPONSE	16
APPENDIX D -	17
SouthEast: Complainant Rights and Responsibilities.....	17
APPENDIX E - Complaint Register – INSTRUCTIONS	19
Tracking Chart	20
APPENDIX F Neighborhood Complaint Protocol – Authority for use of Information (Form).....	21
Document Control.....	24

Purpose

South East Housing Cooperative is committed to the provision of a high level of complainant service. As such we strive to achieve complainant service excellence and to deliver services in a professional, coordinated, and timely manner.

Policy Principles:

Voluntary and Open Membership

Co-operatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

Privacy and FOI

Personal information collected in relation to a complaint and personal information provided to complainants must comply with relevant Privacy and Freedom of Information Acts.

Referrals

A complainant at any time may refer to an external service for advocacy, interpreters and translations services. SouthEast will enable the provision of assistance to these services onsite and offsite as required. All assistance will be recorded in the Complaints Register.

Investigation

All complainants will be advised of how a complaint will be referred, investigated and reviewed.
(Please refer to Rights and Responsibilities and the standard Complaints Response in the appendices)

Who is affected by this policy?

All Board members, advisors, staff, volunteers and complainants are affected by this policy.

Reasons for policy:

SouthEast recognises the importance of complaints to the organisation and regards them as opportunities to put things right or to improve our services.

Complaints also provide the organisation with an opportunity to gather information on different aspects of service, methods, complainants' needs and expectations. This information helps us work towards improving complainant service.

Scope

SouthEast has a responsibility and obligation to all of its stakeholders to ensure systems, procedures and management practices are in place to meet the needs and expectations of SouthEast complainants.

Definition

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a product or service delivered by SouthEast or its representatives that have failed to reach the standard stated, implied or expected. This includes

complaints about responsiveness to requests for service, the anticipated and/or actual response time in providing the service and services that has been or should have been delivered. Services could include property maintenance tenancy matters, capacity building and support and member training.

Procedures

Housing Registrar Procedures

SouthEast will advise the Housing Registrar at the time of occurrence of any complaint referred to an external authority by the complainant including:

- Privacy Commissioner
- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
- Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission
- Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC)
- Registrar of Co-operatives
- Victorian Civic and Administrative Appeals Tribunal (VCAT)
- ACNC
- DHHS

Identifying a Complaint

Complaints can originate from members of the public, members of the organisation, contractors or staff. [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.](#)

Managing initial receipt of complaints

In some cases, complaints may not be made personally but instead be made on behalf of tenants or prospective tenants by a:

- formal housing advocate authorised to act on behalf of a tenant or prospective tenant from a Homelessness Assistance Service (HAS) or a Social Housing Advocacy and Support Program (SHASP) service or similar.
- community advocate authorised to act on behalf of a tenant or prospective tenant — family member, friend, neighbour, other acquaintance
- a professional advocate authorised to act on behalf of a tenant or prospective tenant — a staff member of another service provider, a solicitor, a member of Parliament, the Minister. The complaint will be acknowledged in writing.

Complaints involving officers and other service providers who represent SouthEast:

There are a number of representatives of SouthEast. Complaints will be handled according to the category of representative.

- Staff member - this may relate to how a staff member has behaved or undertaken their responsibilities. All complaints regarding a staff member are referred to the Manager.
- Director - this may relate to how a Director has conducted themselves or undertaken responsibilities.
- All complaints regarding a Director will be handled by the Board Chair using the Code of Conduct Policy and Rules of the Organization as the guiding documents.
- Complaints about the chairperson will be handled by the Board.
- Contractor and Volunteers - this may relate to how a contractor or volunteer has conducted themselves or undertaken responsibilities.

- All complaints will be directed to the Chief Executive Officer.

SouthEast - Complaints Handling Procedures

A complainant may register a complaint verbally or in writing. Upon receipt of the written complaint the formal process may begin. The Complaints Register must be completed preferably at the initial contact or as soon as possible thereafter and the delegated Complaints Officer notified. Approval of a file closure of a registered complaint is to be signed by the Complaints Officer.

Complaints are to be recorded electronically. If the complaint requires an internal review or is against a staff member, the complaint must be submitted in writing and an audit trail documented.

Tenants and prospective tenants will be advised of their rights in relation to complaints handling policy and procedures. Complaints handling material will be made available in languages other than English. Assistance will be made available in preparing a written application, including:

- the use of an interpreter
- assistance for persons with a disability
- referring applicants to an advocate or SHASP provider

Every effort will be made to resolve a complaint at the first point of contact. Where this is not possible SouthEast will respond to the complainant within 5 working days of the complaint being made, acknowledge the complaint and, that the matter is under investigation (please refer to the Standard Complaints Response letter in the appendices).

SouthEast will take all reasonable steps to resolve a complaint within 21 days.

For complaints not satisfactorily resolved within 30 days, the complainant may refer the complaint to the Housing Registrar for investigation.

The complainant will be advised the Registrar can be contacted directly by telephone

Housing Registrar: Complaints

General phone line – (03) 9651 1402

General email inbox – housingregistrar@dtf.vic.gov.au

Complaints email inbox – housingregistrarcomplaints@dtf.vic.gov.au

SouthEast will co-operate fully with appointees of the Housing Registrar in the conduct of review and investigation of unresolved complaints.

The principles of natural justice will be observed. This means processes will be fair, equitable and reasonable. All parties will have access to relevant information and are able to respond where relevant.

Staff should assess the impact or risk to SouthEast, the community or the individual when dealing with a complaint and should notify the Complaints Officer of any concerns as soon as possible. The registered Complaints Officer is the Chief Executive Officer of the agency.

Complainants always retain the right to contact a range of constituted bodies where they may take their concerns for further investigation e.g.

- Privacy Commissioner,
- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
- Registrar of Housing Agencies
- Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission
- Australian Competition and Consumer Commission,
- Registrar of Cooperatives
- Victorian Civil and Administrative Appeals Tribunal
- Social Housing Advocacy and Support Program
- Tenants Union of Victoria
- DHHS Office of Housing Regional Managers (in cooperation with the Housing Registrar)
- ACNC (Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission)

Closing and Learning from a complaint

As a final part of the complaint resolution process all complainants will be given a timely opportunity to feedback to SouthEast their feelings and satisfaction levels and any other comments either verbally or preferably in writing in relation to the complaints handling process and resultant outcomes.

(Please refer to the Complainants Complaint Handling Evaluation form at Appendix B).

SouthEast Board, Management and staff will reflect on complaints at appropriate forums and identify quality improvement strategies for implementation as required.

Document and external links:

Annual Member Survey

Quality Journal

Victorian Housing Register Complaints Policy

Staff Position Descriptions

Office Manual, Member Manual, Board Manual

Complaints Brochure

Complainants Complaint Handling Evaluation

SouthEast Complaints Response

Complaints Officer

Complaints Register

Registrar of Housing - <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/housing/orha>

- Complaints by tenants or prospective tenants
- [Complaints by tenants and prospective tenants \(pdf 112KB\)](#)
- Complaints by members of co-operatives about other members, their co-operative committee, or the relationship of their co-operative with another registered housing agency

- [Complaints by members of co-operatives \(pdf 115KB\)](#)

This information sheet provides further information on complaints by members of co-operatives about other members, their co-operative committee, or the relationship of their co-operative with another registered housing agency

- Complaints by neighbours of properties managed by a registered housing agency

- [Complaints by neighbours \(pdf 95KB\)](#)

The Housing Registrar has no direct role in investigating complaints by neighbours of properties managed by registered housing agencies.

- Complaints by Neighbours Internal Protocol

Related Legislation

- EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY (COMMONWEALTH AUTHORITIES) ACT 1987 EQUAL OPPORTUNITY ACT 1995
- PRIVACY ACT 1988
- PRIVACY AMENDMENT ACT 2004
- FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 1982
- HOUSING ACT 1983
- CHARTER OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES ACT 2006

Related Policies:

SouthEast Code of Conduct and Rules of the Organization

Compliance

This policy and procedure complies with:

- AS ISO 10002 - 2006, Complainant Satisfaction—Guidelines for complaints handling in organizations.
- Housing Registrars' Complaints Management Guide
- ASINZS – ISO 9001:2000 (especially 7.2.3 - Complainant Communication)

References

- Registrar of Housing: Complaints Management

Review: This policy will be reviewed on 15 12 2018.

APPENDIX A - COMPLAINTS FILE SUMMARY

Complaint Register				
Complaint Number		Date received		
Time received Received by Medium (phone/letter/fax/e-mail/in-person) Acknowledgement				
Date Referred to Complaints Officer:				
Date received by Complaints Officer:				
Date Complainant was advised in writing that complaint had been registered:				
COMPLAINANT INFORMATION				
Complainant's Name (Member/NonMember) Address City, Postal Code Phone Documents/photos attached?				
E-Mail Address				
COMPLAINT DETAILS				
Date problem occurred				
Complaint concerns which:	Rents	Maintenance	Other	

Advocacy Details	
Nature of complaint	
What complainant wants done:	
Dates and all actions re all contacts since original complaint lodged	
Actions since lodging of complaint: (Please attach extra pages if not enough space)	
Outcome (e.g., agreement reached, partial agreement, no agreement, referred, declined, withdrawn)	
Date of final position letter to client	Approved by/signature
Internal standard (within 21 days) Date sent =	
Housing Registrar (within 30 days) Date	
Has SouthEast's 21 day time limit been met? Yes/No	
Has Housing Registrar's 30 day time limit been met? Yes/No	

APPENDIX B — COMPLAINTS HANDLING EVALUATION

SouthEast Complaints Handling Evaluation

As an ongoing commitment to improve service delivery SouthEast would like to evaluate the complaints handling procedure.

Please complete the survey below and return it in the post paid and addressed envelope provided.

Complaint number (if known)

Date complaint first made

Name of the SouthEast initial contact Officer

Brief summary of the complaint

How would you rate how your comment was dealt with — please circle a score

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

where 1 = Very Unsatisfied, 2 = Unsatisfied, 3 = Not Sure, 4 = Satisfied, 5 = Very

Please comment on the way your complaint was handled in relation to the process and outcome. (If insufficient space please use the rear of the form or attach other pages).

Process:

Outcome:

Would you be confident to lodge a new complaint in the future - Yes / No

Do you think the handling of complaints could be improved?

If your answer was yes then please state how.

APPENDIX C: STANDARD SOUTHEAST COMPLAINTS RESPONSE

Name

Address

Date

Dear Ms. /Mr.

I write in relation to your complaint number (xxxx) made to SouthEast on the (day) (month) (20xx). SouthEast understands you wish to complain that

We wish to advise the matter is under investigation and you will be advised of the outcome.

A rights and responsibilities statement is enclosed and you should read this information as it details the way the matter may be resolved to your satisfaction.

If you have any further concerns please contact the undersigned on 9706 8005. Yours

Sincerely,

SouthEast Complaints Officer.

APPENDIX D -

SouthEast: Complainant Rights and Responsibilities

Complaint Referrals

SouthEast welcomes information and feedback from members and residents and others as it enables the quality of our services to be improved. You have the right to complain about any aspect of the service you are receiving without fear of retribution and can expect complaints to be dealt with properly. But we would prefer you to allow SouthEast to attempt to resolve the complaint first. A complainant may register a complaint verbally or in writing. Assistance to make a complaint in writing may be provided if required. Assistance with interpreter and translation services may also be provided if required.

Complaint Steps

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. You may at any time refer your complaint to an external authority or advocacy service. If you do not feel satisfied with the outcome of this discussion you may contact the SouthEast Chief Executive Officer (the registered Complaints Officer) or use an advocate to negotiate on your behalf.

If you are still not satisfied with the outcome you may raise the issue with the SouthEast Board. The Board does not generally deal with complaints handling as this is considered an operational process but may consider the matter if there has been a serious compromise to the complaints handling process.

Upon receipt of your [written](#) complaint, you will receive a written response from SouthEast within five days indicating the way your complaint may be dealt with.

In accordance with the Housing Act 1983, if a complaint referred to SouthEast by a tenant

or applicant is not resolved within 30 days, or you are unsatisfied with the outcome of your complaint, you may refer the complaint to the Housing Registrar for investigation.

The Registrar may issue directions to SouthEast to take specific actions to resolve the issue, or to minimise the chance of the complaint occurring again.

It is your right to be notified of the outcome of your complaint and to be asked by SouthEast Housing Co-operative for feedback on the complaints procedures.

<p>Contacts</p> <p>SouthEast Housing Co-operative - 9706 8005</p> <p>Social Housing</p> <p>Advocacy and Support Program</p> <p>Frankston and Dandenong: Homeground Services, 9537 7888</p> <p>Ringwood: Wesley Housing and Support Service, 9879 5344</p> <p>Other contacts / further information</p> <p>Housing Registrar: Complaints</p> <p>General phone line – (03) 9651 1402</p> <p>General email inbox – housingregistrar@dtf.vic.gov.au</p> <p>Complaints email inbox – housingregistrarcomplaints@dtf.vic.gov.au</p> <p>Department of Health and Human Services</p>	<p>Regions</p> <p>Department of Human Services</p> <p>Regional Managers responsible for community housing</p> <p>Eastern Metropolitan - 1300 360 452</p> <p>Southern Metropolitan - 1300 555 526</p> <p>Further information on recommended practice within community managed housing and homelessness services can be found in the Complaints Resource Kit launched by OOH in late 2006.</p> <p>Other relevant information can be found on the following websites:</p> <p>www.dhs.vic.gov.au/housing/orha and in the Publications section of: www.dhs.vic.gov.au/housing</p>
--	---

<p>Housing Appeals and Complaints Management Office - 1300 884 706 or via email complaints.reception@dhs.vic.gov.au.</p>	
---	--

APPENDIX E - Complaint Register – INSTRUCTIONS

A soon as possible alert the compliance officer and or the Chief Executive Officer to any complaints likely to take more than 21(SouthEast Standard) days or 30 days (Housing Registrar Standard) to resolve and/or that may have serious negative consequences.

Write the complaint number and date on every complaint received USING THE COMPLAINTS REGISTER TEMPLATE (File Summary) in this register.

Keep everything in the file in date order with the most recent on top.
For each complaint keep paper trails – place copies of all written communications including emails with the complaint.

Make and keep with each complaint, in descending date order (that is, most recent note on top) factually based notes, written in the third person.
Complete the Tracking Chart by adding data as the complaint is processed.

Tracking Chart

Key events:

Receive complaint (record date)

Respond within 5 days by mail to acknowledge the receipt of the complaint

Resolve within 21 days (SouthEast standard) (record date resolved and outcome)

Resolve within 30 days (Housing Registrar standard)

If > 30 days complaint unresolved the Housing Registrar may be involved

Record outcomes and dates post HR involvement such as the date of final letter to complainant

Board to be advised at all stages as per the monthly report template

Complaint Number	Date Made	Complaint Focus	Advocate or other involved (Y/N)	Outcome	Date Resolved	SouthEast 21 day standard met? (Y/N)	Registrar 30 day standard met? (Y/N)
------------------	-----------	-----------------	----------------------------------	---------	---------------	--------------------------------------	--------------------------------------

APPENDIX F Neighborhood Complaint Protocol – Authority for use of Information (Form)

ABOUT THIS FORM

This form explains how SouthEast Housing Cooperative Ltd. (SouthEast) will use the information of the complaint you provide against a SouthEast tenant. Please read the form. If you have any questions at all, please call SouthEast (9706 8005) to discuss further. If you agree and understand how SouthEast may use your information, please complete and sign this form and return to our office with your attached complaint.

NB: Please note that for SouthEast to resolve the issues you are facing with our tenant, we require your authority to use the evidence you will provide. If you do not agree to the below conditions, SouthEast will not be able to work towards a formal resolution.

Your Name	
Your Contact Number	
Your Address	

This information is in relation to property address:

--

Please tick the box which best describes the format of the information you are providing:

Written Audio Recording Video Recording Other – please specify:

Details of your complaint may be used for the following purposes:

- Serving a ‘Breach of Duty Notice’ to the tenant for not complying with tenancy agreement
- As evidence at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT)* if required
- SouthEast tenants can request to see complaints made against them. SouthEast will take all reasonable steps to ensure that your anonymity is protected and will endeavour not to disclose your identity while providing this information. Please note that if the matter ends up at VCAT, your identity will be disclosed to the VCAT member who will be hearing the case. In doing so, your identity will become known to the tenant that you are lodging the complaint against.

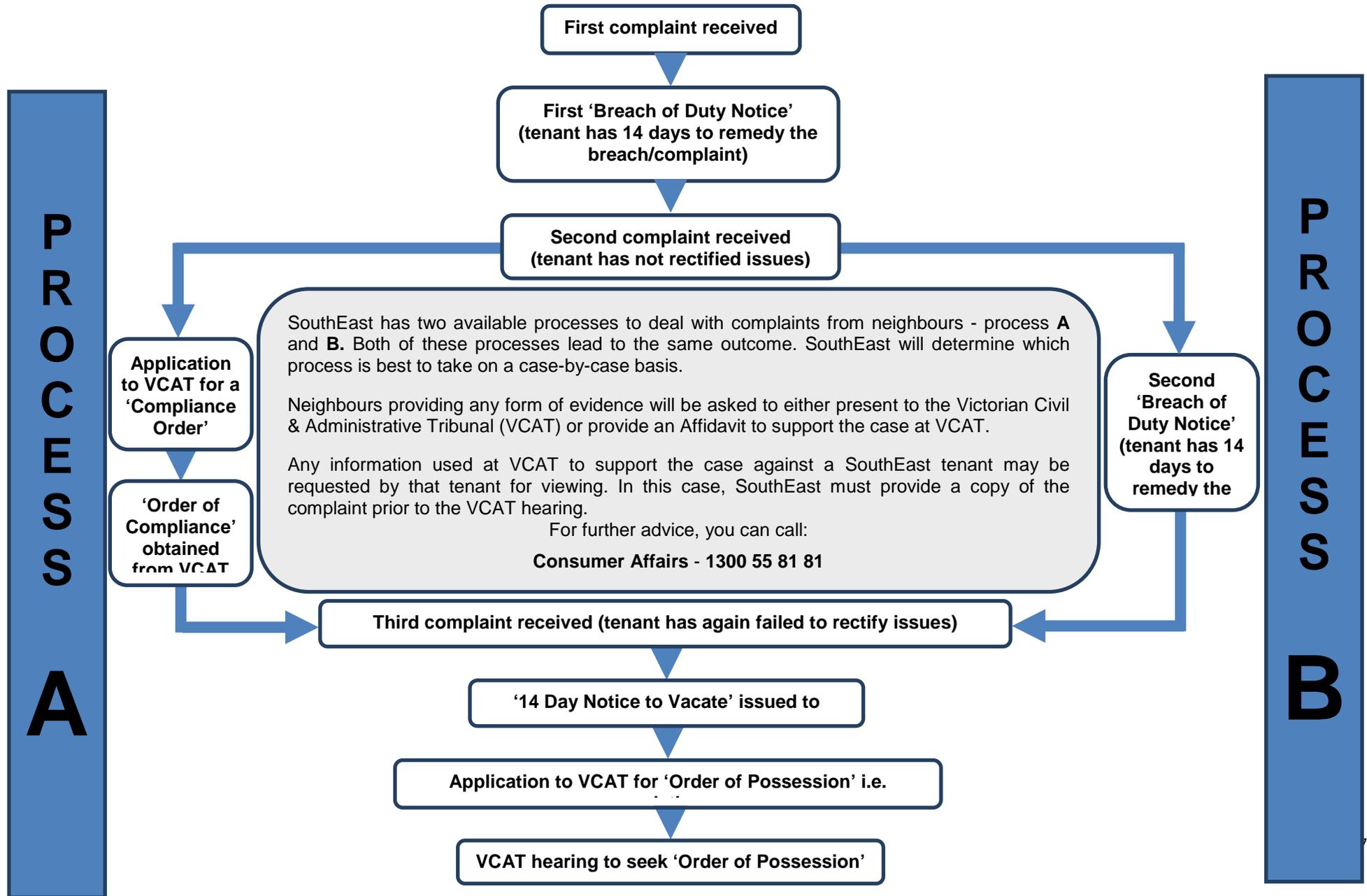
AUTHORISATION:

I agree with the above conditions and understand that the evidence I provide may be disclosed to the tenant, and that this information may also be used as evidence at a hearing should the matter end up at VCAT. I also understand that if the matter does end up at VCAT, my identity may become known to the tenant I am lodging the complaint against.

Signed: _____ / /

** The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) is an independent tribunal who hear various cases between disputing parties, including tenancy issues and disputes between neighbours. VCAT make decisions within the law as set out in the Residential Tenancy Act 1997. All decisions made are legally binding. Complainants can be subpoenaed to appear at VCAT.*

Information Sheet for Residents Making Complaints about SouthEast Tenants – Breach & ‘VCAT’ Process



SouthEast COMPLAINTS LOG

Details of person lodging complaint:

Name: _____ Contact Number: _____

Date Incident Occurred	Time Incident Started	Time Incident Ended	Were the police called?	Did the police attend?	What Occurred?
			Yes / No	Yes / No	
			Yes / No	Yes / No	

Document Control

Version History

Version	Issue date	Author	Reason for Change	Current location
1		unknown		
V1 - Redraft	28 01 2009	Dale Carroll	Ensure compliance with Housing Act 1983 act and AS ISO 10002 - 2006	Z:\CCBS Officer\P&P\P & P New or Under Review\COMPLAINTS\SEHC Complaints P & P
V2	29 06 10	Dale Carroll	Improved brochure and as revised by GovPol on the 4/6/10	Z:\Administration\Co-op\COMPLAINTS\SEHC Complaints P & P\Doc 8 V1 29 06 2010 - Complaints P & P
V3	15 12 2017	Dale Carroll	Review document for currency and cross reference to new Victorian Housing Register Complaints Policy. Include Board amendments	

			requested 24 11 2017.	
V4	09 06 2018	Dale Carroll	Add Appendix F Neighbour Complaint Protocol	

Policy Category: Administration

Authorisation: Chief Executive Officer (YES - Approved) Board - agreed to send to members on 24 June 2011)

Date members adopted:

Review period: Annual from member adoption date (25 July 2011)

Date Reviewed: 05 10 2017 – 15 12 2017

Next Review: 15 12 2018