

Interim National Community Housing Accreditation Council

Complaints and Appeals Policy

1. *Purpose*

To provide a framework for dealing with complaints relating to the National Accreditation Council's practices and policies.

2. *Definition*

A **complaint** is an expression of dissatisfaction with the standard or practices of the Interim National Community Housing Accreditation Council. A complaint may lead to an appeal.

An **appeal** is an expression of dissatisfaction with a decision made and can only be sought by the organisation or individual for which the original decision was made. An appeal is a request that the decision be reviewed.

3. *Principles in dealing with complaints and appeals*

The Interim National Community Housing Accreditation Council supports and upholds the following principles:

- A commitment to ensure organisations and individuals are able to achieve a satisfactory outcome from a complaint without any fear of repercussions or reprisals.
- Complaints and appeal processes should be fair, transparent, accountable and accessible to relevant organisations and individuals.
- A commitment to effective and timely resolution of complaints and appeals
- That confidentiality for individuals and organisations must be protected.
- Complaints will be used as an opportunity to improve processes and policies.

4. *Complaints Procedure*

Stakeholders have a right to express their dissatisfaction with the practices and policies of the National Community Housing Accreditation Council. In the event of a complaint, the steps outlined below should be followed.

Step 1 Informal Process

The Council member to whom the complaint is made has the authority to discuss and resolve the matter directly with the organisation or individual as quickly as possible. The

organisation or individual making the complaint should explain the problem and what action they would like taken.

A record of the complaint, actions taken and decision should be documented by the Council member dealing with the complaint and held in the Council's complaints file.

If the complaint is not resolved, the Council member will provide information about the next level of action for dealing with the complaint.

Step 2 Formal Process

A Complaints Panel of 3 council members will be responsible for investigating, recording and seeking resolution of complaints. The Secretariat will appoint the Complaints Panel on a six-month rotation basis. In the event of a conflict of interest another council member will be co-opted to replace the existing panel member for the duration of the complaint process. The panel will meet by teleconference.

A formal complaint must be lodged in writing. This can be written by the individual/organisation making the complaint, or by the council member receiving the complaint. In the case of the latter, the written complaint must be agreed to and signed by the individual/organisation making the complaint.

When the written complaint is received the Complaints Panel will investigate the complaint as quickly and efficiently as possible.

If a complaint is directed against a council member, the member has a right to respond. The member will be notified of the complaint on its receipt, and must respond within 14 days, unless agreed to otherwise by the Complaints Panel and the individual/organisation making the complaint. The response must be lodged in writing.

The Complaints Panel will advise of its decision in writing. This may involve an apology, an explanation, and an assurance about future actions or immediate changes to how things are done.

In the event that the Panel believes no breach has occurred, the reasons supporting this decision will be made clear in the written response.

The Complaints Panel will be delegated full responsibility for dealing with the complaint, however it is required to report its process and recommendation to the Interim National Community Housing Accreditation Council.

Time Limits

Written complaints will be acknowledged in writing within 14 days. The process will take no longer than 28 days, unless the organisation or individual complaining agrees.

Keeping an organisation/individual informed

All decisions will be in writing (although they may be discussed / reported verbally first). There will be a written response to a complaint even if it is decided that no action is to be taken. The response will explain the reasons for any decision.

Complaints File and Register

Records kept in relation to responding to complaints will not be used for any purpose other than as a record of how the complaint was handled. All reports and documents relating to the complaint will be confidential, and will only be given to persons involved in resolving the matter.

The National Accreditation Council will also establish a complaints register which will be used to record in a non-identifying way, information about all complaints received. This will enable the council to monitor progress in resolving complaints.

5. *Appeals Procedure*

An organisation or individual has the right to seek review of a decision it disagrees with or believes is unfair.

When an individual or organisation makes an appeal, the steps outlined below should be followed.

Stage 1 Review by Complaints Panel

The appeal must be lodged in writing with supporting reasons.

The first step is for the Complaints Panel to reconsider their decision, based on the reasons given by the Organisation or individual. Their response to the organisation/individual will be in writing.

Stage 2 Review by Appeals Panel

If the organisation/individual is not happy with the decision, it can request a second review by the *Appeals Panel*.

The Appeals Panel will be comprised of three Council members, independent of Council members on the Complaints Panel. The Appeals Panel will be selected by the Secretariat. It will meet by teleconference.

The Appeals Panel will reconsider the decision by listening to both the organisation or individual appealing and the Complaints panel. Their response will be given to the organisation/individual in writing.

The Appeals Panel is responsible for making recommendations in relation to the appeal. It does not, however, have authority to overturn Council policy decisions. In the event of a challenge to Council policy an appeal will be put to the full Council for consideration. The Appeals Panel is required to report its process and recommendation to the Interim National Community Housing Accreditation Council.

Time Limits

An organisation/individual must lodge an appeal in writing, within 28 days of receiving the decision of the Complaints Panel. An appeal must be endorsed by an officer bearer of an organisation.

The organisation will be regularly updated on the progress of the appeal and notified in writing of the final outcome. Appeals will be dealt with promptly and efficiently and every effort will be made to achieve settlement within 28 days after lodgment. In the event that an appeal must go before the full Council, settlement will occur within the 21-day period following the next quarterly Council meeting.

Keeping an Organisation Informed

All decisions will be in writing. There will be a written response to an appeal explaining the reason for any decision.

Maintenance of Records

A thorough and accurate documentation of all appeals lodged will be kept. Records will not be used for any purpose other than as a record of how the appeal was handled. All reports and documents relating to the appeal will be confidential, and will only be given to persons involved in resolving the matter.

Approved - 8 December 2000