

## **Reporting and Complaining to the landlord City South Manchester Housing (CSM)**

A step-by-step guide, by Bentley House estate Tenants And Residents Association (TARA) based on procedures by CSM's and the Housing Ombudsman office [0], to help residents on the estate report problems to the landlord CSM, and to efficiently and effectively complain to CSM -and beyond- should they feel their problems have not been resolved in a satisfactory manner.

TARA encourages residents to complain by themselves and to initially use TARA in a monitoring fashion only. This way we are not over-loaded at TARA with reporting issues but can still effectively help should problems arise later.

### **Beware**

*It is important to follow the correct and recommended procedures when reporting a problem and when complaining, as set out by the landlord CSM.*

CSM have in the past been *extremely uncooperative*, including "losing" phone, web and email reports, and simply not responding at all for months, so don't expect them to jump when you report a problem. Expect a fight.

By following procedure you potentially cut the time to get results. It gives CSM one less excuse to 'blank' your report. Much more importantly, however, later the Housing Ombudsman can help only when prescribed procedure has been followed.

So really important: create =hard= evidence in form of a "paper trail"! Why?

Phoning has rarely been enough to persuade CSM to action, and often, you ring again and they have never heard of the same problem you reported last week, and the weeks before. Writing won't make it more likely for CSM to do the work, but it makes it harder for them to deny that they have received any reports from you.

If you do phone, follow it up with a written report and they might take you more serious, especially if you can get independent help from your block neighbours. TARA can try and help too.

In any case, you can refer to this letter or email later, and, if nothing else, can proof to anybody how long CSM have been dragging their heels. What do you have after a series of calls? Nothing, apart from a bigger phone bill. [1]

### **In Brief**

***Step 1 Report the problem to landlord normally***

***Step 2 "Tenant makes a formal complaint to the landlord"***

***Step 3 "Tenant contacts a designated person"***

***Step 4 "Contacting the Housing Ombudsman"***

Email CSM: [info@citysouthmanchester.co.uk](mailto:info@citysouthmanchester.co.uk).

Phone CSM's switchboard: 0800 840 1444 [1].

### **In Detail**

**Step 1 Report the problem to landlord normally** [ESSENTIAL BEFORE A COMPLAINT !]

response time: up to 10 days to reply in writing [3]  
within 7 working days for urgent repairs [2]  
within 2-6 weeks for routine repairs [2]

Email: [info@citysouthmanchester.co.uk](mailto:info@citysouthmanchester.co.uk) [4].

Online form: <https://www.citysouthmanchester.co.uk/report-a-problem> ... BUT NOTE it does not currently auto-reply, i.e. no paper trail is started unless/until CSM *confirm* your problem *in writing!*

Phone switchboard: 0800 840 1444 (8am to 5.30pm weekdays) ... write down details: name of who you are talking with, date, time, any responses, what will happen next, who will this be send to, ask for a reference number, ask to be contacted for progress reports [1].

Note: I find it really helpful to have any questions *written out in front of me when phoning* – that way I can see clearly what has been answered and what I still need to persue in the call.

## **Step 2 "Tenant makes a formal complaint to the landlord"**

After

more than 10 days for a written reply [3], or  
more than 7 days for urgent repairs [2], or  
more than 6 weeks for routine repairs [2],

if not satisfied (e.g., the work has not been done, is left unfinished, is done badly, no written response / explanation has been provided), then in writing, complain using and following the landlords complaints procedure.

BIG NOTE: "You can only make a FORMAL COMPLAINT if you have REPORTED the original problem!" [5]

CSM's procedure is outlined at <http://www.citysouthmanchester.co.uk/complaints-procedure> and there are two stages,

stage 1: ~~2 days to acknowledgement~~ (no longer in 2016)  
10 days to response;

if still not satisfied, progress to

stage 2: ~~2 days to acknowledgement~~ (no longer in 2016)  
20 days to reply.

The removal of the acknowledgement period is significant: there have been cases where complaints have simply been ignored – *always request* an immediate acknowledgement receipt!

Email CSM: [info@citysouthmanchester.co.uk](mailto:info@citysouthmanchester.co.uk) – but you must follow the format of the official complaints form! *This is very important!* [4]

Online form: <https://www.citysouthmanchester.co.uk/complaints-form> ... BUT it does not currently auto-reply, i.e. no paper trail started unless / until CSM confirm your problem in writing!

We believe you can phone the switchboard on 0800 840 1444 and request a standard CSM complaint form be send to you which you can then mail back ... but we cannot find reference on CSM's website to this any longer.

## **Step 3 "Tenant contacts a designated person"**

If still not satisfied, "contact an MP, a local councillor or a tenant panel recognised by the landlord - these are the three types of *designated person*."

*Designated person*: to help try resolve dispute locally, or can refer case straight to ombudsman.

Ombudsman encourages designated person involvement, provides support for them to facilitate "local resolution"; but has no influence on designated person or their methods, will only advise.

[Another option: "Complaints to the Ombudsman do not have to be referred by a designated person, but if they are not there must be at least 8 weeks from the end of the landlord's complaint process before the Ombudsman can consider the case."]

From ombudsman website <http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/#step2> and <http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/learning-faqs/factsheets/designated-persons/#.V5t4qu0oDxs>

See also "The Designated Tenant Panel" below.

#### **Step 4 "Contacting the Housing Ombudsman"**

*Must* have tried local resolution first ... i.e. above steps.

Further reading on ombudsman website: <http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/#step3>.

Full details: <http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/media/13142/hos-final-scheme.pdf>,  
ombudsman help with making a complaint to the landlord:  
[http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/media/12369/hos\\_lft2\\_making\\_v2.pdf](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/media/12369/hos_lft2_making_v2.pdf),  
ombudsman complaints form at  
<http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/media/13139/complaint-form.pdf>.

#### Commentary

[0] [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk), [www.redbricks.org/tara/](http://www.redbricks.org/tara/), [www.citysouthmanchester.co.uk/](http://www.citysouthmanchester.co.uk/)

[1] Given the lack of resolutions to problems we have seen since CSM's take-over from Manchester City Council in 2008, we (since 2014) must recommend that you confirm phone reports in writing. You should definitely write if you have not had a reply after the "days to reply" period as set out above and on CSM's website.

When phoning, write down immediately as much info as possible: name of the person you spoke to, date, time, what you told them (the problem, additional info), their responses, anything.

When confirming in writing, state that you have phoned about the issue already, and record any information which *you* think is relevant (in addition to what you may have been asked to record), as well as responses you may have had on the phone. Request an acknowledgement *in writing*.

*We strongly recommend you contact TARA at the same time as CSM.*

[2] "Days to repair" depends on the repair; CSM's guidelines are in their "repairs guide" at [http://www.citysouthmanchester.co.uk/files/CSM-REPAIRS\\_web2.pdf](http://www.citysouthmanchester.co.uk/files/CSM-REPAIRS_web2.pdf) (page 3 for deadlines) and at <http://www.citysouthmanchester.co.uk/repairs-and-maintenance>.

[3] From [http://www.citysouthmanchester.co.uk/files/CSM\\_Leaseholder\\_Handbook.pdf](http://www.citysouthmanchester.co.uk/files/CSM_Leaseholder_Handbook.pdf) page 7:  
"<CSM will> Acknowledge emails and letters within 10 working days at the latest. Our response will include the name and contact details of the member of staff who has dealt with your enquiry, and

who will be pursuing it if a full answer cannot be given within the 10 day timescale.”

However, we feel an *immediate response to acknowledge the receipt of correspondence* should be implemented by CSM; please ask for it!

[4] It may help to copy emails to specific CSM staff too. We also recommend: send a copy to TARA.

Remember to *ask for an immediate reply email to confirm CSM have received your report*. This is not standard but we insist it should be.

[5] This cannot be overemphasized: if you have REPORTED the original problem! We strongly advise that this be a written report (how else can you *show* that you have reported it?).

Going straight into a complaint might even work with CSM – but, at a later stage, the ombudsman may not consider your case *if you have not followed the prescribed procedure!*

### The Designated Tenant Panel - now the Recognised Tenant Panel

The idea of a Designated Tenant Panel was introduced in April 2013. Between December 2014 and August 2016, the term has changed to Recognised Tenant Panel.

Initially, we think the Designated Tenant Panel was required to be recognised by the Housing Ombudsman and the landlord; now 'recognised' is defined as follows: “To be effective the tenant panel must be ‘recognised’ by the landlord” (source: <http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/learning-faqs/factsheets/designated-persons/#.V5t84u0oDxt>).

These panels have been introduced as an additional step to find a “local solution” after things have gone wrong rather than to involve a national organisation (the ombudsman) which will not be as aware of regional and local variations and issues as might be the case with a local MP, local councillor or a locally trained group of tenants (the recognised panel).

Details: above source, <http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/#step2>, <http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/media/13142/hos-final-scheme.pdf>

Please do comment at a meeting, at [tara@redbricks.org](mailto:tara@redbricks.org), or by posting a sealed, addressed (“tara”) message through the mail slot in the tenants office door.

Details believed to be correct in August 2016 (updated from December 2014). Please report changes and errors,

thank you and good luck,

your Bentley House estate Tenants And Residents Association.