

Complaints Policy

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1. Introduction

For the purposes of this policy, we have adopted the Housing Ombudsman's Code definition of a complaint as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff or those acting on its behalf effecting an individual resident or group of residents'.

This Policy sets out how we enable customers to make a complaint. It describes an open and transparent approach to complaint management. We are committed to delivering a good outcome and to improve and learn from our customers' experiences.

2. Aims and Objectives

We are committed to working with complainants to understand and manage their concern in a fair, impartial and timely manner. We look for and record learning from complaints, making changes to the way we work, improving service.

We will remove barriers to customers raising their concerns, giving feedback and making a complaint. We will ensure every customer knows how to make and escalate a complaint. We will work with customers where a need to put things right and we will act on it without undue delay.

We will make customers aware of independent representation and support when pursuing their complaint. This will include voluntary agencies and statutory bodies like the Housing Ombudsman Scheme and designated persons.

Many complaints can be resolved within the first contact. We will record this as 'feedback' from the customer and look for the organisational learning.

3. Housing Ombudsman Complaint Code

The Housing Ombudsman has introduced the new code which sets out "good practice that will allow landlords to respond to complaints effectively and fairly." The code is part of the Ombudsman's new powers in the revised Housing Ombudsman Scheme. We have adopted the principles of the new code and have aligned our practises to reflect this.

The Housing Ombudsman highlights the key areas of the code as follows:

- Universal definition of a complaint.
- Customers will have easy access to the complaints procedure and ensuring customers are aware of it, including their right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service at every stage of their complaint.
- Simple two stage complaints procedure with clear timeframes set out for responses.
- Resident focussed complaint handling process.
- Taking measures to put things right.
- Creating a positive complaint handling culture between landlord and customer.

4. Feedback, complaints and escalation

Feedback cases are managed and completed at the first customer contact and report. These cases are logged and are visible to the service manager. If not satisfied the customer may escalate. Customer notified of access to Housing Ombudsman Service.

Feedback with Investigation are cases that are a little more complicated and need investigation that is not possible within the first customer contact. A response is made within 2 working days of the first report. If not satisfied the customer may escalate to Stage 1. Customer notified of access to Housing Ombudsman Service.

Stage 1 Complaint, the complaint, earlier findings and any additional feedback from the complainant receives a full review. A response is made within 8 working days. If not satisfied the complainant can, within 10 days, escalate to Stage 2. Customer notified of access to Housing Ombudsman Service.

Stage 2 Complaint, the complaint and any further feedback from earlier responses receives a further review from a service manager. The complaint will be responded to within 5 working days of the escalation. The outcome of Stage 2 ends our complaints process. Customer notified of access to Housing Ombudsman Service.

If dissatisfied, the complainant may take up the matter through the Housing Ombudsman Scheme. We will make the customer aware of their right to access this scheme at all stages of the issue being raised. This scheme also makes provision for a designated person to consider the matter before filing. A 'designated person' may be a local MP or councillor.

5. Enabling Complaints

Staff will be trained to recognise when a complaint is being made. Each will take a personal responsibility for seeking to resolve the matter at the first point of contact.

Where a complaint is received on behalf of a customer, from a third-party or designated person, it must always be reported to the Customer Service Team. We will make reporting a complaint easy, providing customers with accessible information about how to make a complaint.

We will do this via all communication channels and will periodically publish learning from complaints and actions taken toward improvement.

6. Managing, monitoring and reporting complaints

We will manage and monitor complaints against published service standards. We will periodically review these, with customers, to ensure they meet their expectations and publish performance.

We will make sure we have staff trained to handle complaints effectively and within service standards.

We will organise learning from complaints and feedback cases and make recommendations to drive service improvement. We will publish improvements made as a result.

We will ask customers how satisfied they are with how we handled their complaint and use this feedback to improve the complaints service.

We will compare our complaints service and performance with other housing associations.

We will provide complaints performance to our Board on a quarterly basis.

We will review the quality of responses to the formal complaint stages, as well as reviewing trends and themes with designated Board members.

We will share performance through the Customer Insight Group to analyse data and improve our service delivery to our customers.

We will publish our benchmark performance in our annual report.

7. Publication

We will publish our Complaints policy on our Website to ensure our customers understand how to make a complaint.

We will undertake a yearly review of our complaint handling process against the Code or sooner should the need arise, to gauge how we are performing and to identify learning and trends. Publication of the review shall be made available to our Customers via the Website.

Policy changes:

July 2019	All third-party and designated person complaints on behalf of a customer must be reported to Customer Service Team. Staff will be trained to recognise a complaint.
December 2020	Adoption of Housing Ombudsman Complaint Code definition. Introduction of new step informing customers of access to the Housing Ombudsman service at all stages. Publication of self-assessment against the Code.