



## **Housing Services**

# **Complaints Handling Policy**

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**Service**

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## **1.0 PURPOSE**

- 1.1 Housing Services is committed to delivering the best possible service we can and want to ensure all of our customers are treated fairly and with respect.
- 1.2 Unfortunately, we know we get things wrong sometimes. This policy set out our approach to handling complaints and what we will do to put things right.

## **2.0 LEGAL REQUIREMENTS.**

- 2.1 This policy complies with the Localism Act (2011), Housing Act (1996), General Data Protection Act (2018) and Equality Act (2010).
- 2.2 All complaints will be treated in the utmost confidence, complying with all aspects of the General Data Protection Act (2018).
- 2.3 This policy is compliant with the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code 2024 and the Regulator of Social Housing's Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard.

## **3.0 OUR COMMITMENTS**

- 3.1 We will:
  - Treat our customers fairly, with respect and empathy by listening and acting on the information we receive.
  - Always be professional, courteous and keep our customer updated, including letting them know what we are going to do to fix the problem and by when.
  - Ensure our complaints process is accessible and easy to use.
  - Seek to resolve issues quickly, learn from our mistakes and take action to prevent problems occurring again.
  - Ensure we are open, honest, and transparent in our decision-making.
  - Offer an apology and suitable redress when we get things wrong.
  - Promoting the Housing Ombudsman Service to customers to ensure that they are aware of the support that is available to them.

## 4.0 DEFINITIONS

- 4.1 We have adopted the Housing Ombudsman's definition of a complaint. For us, a complaint is:

A complaint is response to a service requested and provided by Housing Services or its contractors that a tenant or group of tenants or leaseholder are dissatisfied with the service. This could be about an unacceptable delay, the quality of the service provided or about a member of staff. This must have happened within the last 12 months.

- 4.2 Complaints should not be confused with everyday enquiries such as neighbour nuisance or requesting a repair. These are called service requests and we have separate procedures in place for dealing with such issues.

## 5.0 EXCLUSIONS

- 5.1 Complaints should generally be received within **twelve months** of the event concerned to ensure that we are able to conduct a thorough investigation. We will accept complaints beyond this where there is a good reason to do so, for example, if the complaint was not recorded when it should have been or because it relates to ongoing issues. Where the problem is a recurring issue, we will consider older reports as background to the complaint if this helps to resolve the issue for the customer.
- 5.2 This procedure does not apply to any concerns or issues you may have involving legal action. We will however take steps to ensure that customers are not left without a response for a lengthy period, for example, where a letter before action has been received or issued but no court proceedings are started, or settlement agreement reached.
- 5.3 Where a customer's complaint relates to an active insurance claim, this may also need to be addressed outside of our Complaints Handling Procedure, as in that instance the issue may be managed by our insurers.
- 5.4 A complaint will not be accepted if it has already been dealt with in line with our complaints procedure and an outcome has been provided.
- 5.5 Complaints pursued in an unreasonable manner will be dealt with in line with our zero-tolerance procedure.

- 5.6 Petitions will be recorded and acknowledged but will not be dealt with under our Complaints Policy. Details of petitions will be shared with the Chief Executive Officer
- 5.7 In all cases where an Investigating Officer decides not to accept a complaint, a detailed explanation will be provided to the customer setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and advising the customer that they have the right to challenge this decision to the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOUSING OMBUDSMAN SERVICE). The HOUSING OMBUDSMAN SERVICE will then, if appropriate, instruct a landlord to take on the complaint.

## **6.0 WHO CAN MAKE A COMPLAINT**

- 6.1 Any customer of Housing Services including tenants, ex-tenants and leaseholders.
- 6.2 Customers can also ask their MP's, other elected representatives, or someone else to act on your behalf, we may check with the customer that they are happy for us to discuss their case with their representative.

## **7.0 OUR APPROACH**

- 7.1 HOUSING SERVICES will ensure customers to make a complaint quickly and easily.
- 7.2 Where possible we aim to resolve a complaint there and then. In order to do this, we will triage enquiries to ensure we fully understand the issue, diagnose the cause and identify a suitable resolution.
- 7.3 We will not stop a customer from making a complaint should they so wish to do so.
- 7.4 A range of channels will be made available for customers who wish to make a complaint. This includes by telephone, in writing (email or letter), through our social media channels or by telling a member of staff.
- 7.5 Complaints received through our social media channels will be dealt with in the same way as any other complaint, but we carry out some additional checks to

make sure we're speaking to the right person. To ensure confidentiality we will only discuss personal information via private messages.

## 7.6 HOUSING SERVICES complaint process has two stages.

### Stage 1

Customer complaints will be acknowledged **within 5 working day** and passed to a member of staff who is trained to handle complaints. They will work with the customer to identify the key issues and try and find a suitable solution. A full written response will be sent to the customer within 10 working days. If they are unable to conclude their investigations within this timeframe, they will explain this to the customer and tell them how long it will take.

If the customer remains unhappy, they can ask for their complaint to be reviewed. They must do this within 1 calendar month of the stage 1 complaint being completed.

### Stage 2 – review.

The complaint will be acknowledged within 5 working days and passed to a Business Manger to investigate and ensure the complaint has been handled in a fair and appropriate manner. A written response will be provided to the customer within 20 working days. If they are unable to conclude their investigations within this timeframe, they will explain this to the customer and agree an extension.

## 7.7 Stage 3 - Housing Ombudsman Service

The Housing Ombudsman resolves disputes involving the tenants and leaseholders of social landlords (housing associations and local authorities). Customers can contact the Ombudsman at any time for support in helping to resolve a dispute. They can do this:

- Online complaint form: [www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint/](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint/) This need re-formatting
- By phone: 0300 111 3000
- By Email: [info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk)
- In writing: Housing Ombudsman Service, Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston, PR2 0ET.

- 7.8 HOUSING SERVICES's Reasonable Adjustment Policy describes how we are committed to ensuring that disabled residents are not disadvantaged in accessing our services.

## **8.0 REMEDIES**

- 8.1 There are a number of things HOUSING SERVICES can do to try and resolve a complaint. These include, but are not limited to:
- Offering you an apology for any mistakes we make
  - Putting things right
  - Changing the way we do things, to ensure the problem doesn't happen again.
  - Offer recompense, where appropriate.
- 8.2 Full details on our approach can be found in HOUSING SERVICES's Compensation Policy.

## **9.0 MONITORING AND REVIEW**

- 9.1 We treat complaints as an opportunity to learn from our mistakes and improve our service. Complaint numbers, outcomes and satisfaction inform policy reviews and the way we deliver our services.
- 9.2 We send a survey to each complainant to gather feedback on their complaint experience. Senior managers across the business meet monthly to review the level and nature of complaints. This enables trends and root causes to be identified so we don't repeat our mistakes.
- 9.3 Complaints findings and key performance information are shared with the Tenant Voice Forum and Housing Advisory Board, with key outcomes published in our Annual Report to Tenants. We also complete an annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code with the outcome published on our website.
- 9.4 HOUSING SERVICES complaints handling policy will be reviewed on an annual basis, following completion of a self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code.

