

Complaints Handling Code Self-Assessment Report



Definition of a complaint

Do we use the Housing Ombudsman Service prescribed definition?

Yes, this is included in our [policy and procedure](#), and is as follows:

"An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by us, those acting on our behalf, affecting an individual or group of residents."

Does our policy have exclusions where a complaint will not be considered?

Yes, these are detailed in our [Complaints Policy](#) and include:

- Issues where legal proceedings have started, which instead will be passed to our solicitors at the point we become aware
- Service charge enquiries. If you are contacting us about an increase or the amount that you are being charged for services, your case will be dealt with as an enquiry and responded to by an appropriate person within the Group
- Personal injury or third-party liability claims. These claims will be dealt with by our insurers
- Behaviour of our residents. We have a separate policy for how we manage complaints of Anti- Social Behaviour

Are these exclusions reasonable and fair to residents and what evidence are we relying on?

We commit to signposting our customers to the most appropriate service or complaints channel. Our policy has also been reviewed by our Resident Scrutiny Group to ensure that we are acting with our customer's best interests at heart.



Accessibility

Are multiple accessibility routes available to residents to make a complaint?

There are multiple routes for a resident to make a complaint and these include: in person, telephone, email, letter, or via our website.

Is the complaints policy and procedure online?

Yes, you can view our policy and procedure [here](#).

What is your reasonable adjustments policy?

We are committed to providing accessible services to all our customers. Landlords are required to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and that means we may need to adapt our normal policies,

procedures, or processes for customers with a disability. You can [view the policy here](#).

How do you advise residents about our complaints service?

We promote the service through our resident magazine '[Open Door](#)', [dedicated space on our website](#) and through regular customer communications across multiple channels.



Structure

Is there a Complaints Officer or equivalent in post?

We have a dedicated Customer Relations Team, who are responsible for managing cases along with a newly formed Customer Relations Improvement Team who ensure that we use feedback to actively improve our service.

Are the Customer Relations Team able to resolve complaints?

The Customer Relations Team have access to the resources that allow them to resolve complaints in line with our policy.

Does the Customer Relations Team have the authority to compel engagement from other departments to resolve disputes?

The Customer Relations Team have the responsibility for ensuring that appropriate actions are taken by the operational teams responsible for resolving the complaint. On the rare occasion that this does not happen, they are empowered to escalate as and when required to a more senior person, up to and including the Chief Executive Officer.

Are residents involved in decision making?

The complainant is involved at every stage of the procedure and we have residents involved in looking at our processes and procedures as a whole.

Does the final stage response set out rights to refer the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service?

Yes, it is standard information provided in our response letters.

Do we keep a record of complaint correspondence including correspondence from the resident?

Yes, all correspondence is stored within our case management system and in line with UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), tailored by the Data Protection Act 2018.



Communication

Are residents kept informed and updated during the complaints process?

Engaging residents is a key part of the process along with using their preferred method of communication. We have also introduced a quality assurance framework that enables us to monitor the quality and frequency of our communication.

Are residents given a chance to respond and challenge any area of dispute before the final decision?

Throughout the process residents can discuss their complaint with their dedicated case handler and discuss resolutions, providing an opportunity to challenge or ask more questions.

Are residents advised of how to escalate at the end of each stage?

Yes, as a standard, part of the information we provide in all our response letters.



Current Performance – August 2021

Are all complaints acknowledged and logged within five days?

From 1 August 2021, 100% of all new cases (248) have been acknowledged within one working day

What percentage of complaints are resolved at stage one?

In August 2021, 314 Complaints were resolved and 296 of these were closed at stage one (94% of the August 2021 closure total).

What percentage of complaints are resolved at stage two?

In August 2021, 314 Complaints were resolved and 18 of those were closed at stage two (6% of the August 2021 closure total).

What percentage of complaint responses are sent within the code timescales at stage one?

In August 2021, 99.59% of new cases have met the timescales set out by the Housing Ombudsman. This means that these cases have been responded to within 10 working or with an extension which has been communicated to the customer.

What percentage of complaint responses are sent within the code timescales at stage one with extension?

In August 2021, 231 stage one responses were due, 112 (48%) of which required an extension in order to support a full investigation and response.

What percentage of complaint responses are sent within the code timescales at stage 2?

From 1 August 2021, there were 21 stage two reviews completed, 18 of which were Senior Manager Reviews. 100% of cases met the timescales as set out by the Housing Ombudsman. This includes a response within 20 working days or with an extension that has been communicated to the customer.

What percentage of complaint responses are sent within the code timescales at stage two with extension?

In August 2021, there were eight cases (42%) that required an extension due to the complexities of the case. On each occasion, the customer was notified and the reasons for the extension were explained.

Where timescales have been extended, did we have good reason?

Yes, extensions can be used when cases are complex or require specific or expert knowledge. In these instances, the cases that receive an extension are monitored and shared on a weekly basis with all relevant service owners.

Where timescales have been extended did, we keep the resident informed?

Yes, keeping residents updated and informed is a key part of our process.

What percentage of our complaints do we resolve to resident's satisfaction?

From 1 April 2021 we introduced customer feedback surveys.

For the month of August, 11 surveys were completed by customers. The overall year to date satisfaction rating for the handling of the complaint was 10% ($\pm 7\%$) and the overall satisfaction for the outcome of the complaint was 10% ($\pm 7\%$).

We are currently looking at ways to increase the number of surveys completed and to ensure that we are identifying ways to increase the overall satisfaction for our customers.



Cooperation with Housing Ombudsman Service

Were all request responded to within 15 days?

Yes

Where the timescale was extended did, we keep the Ombudsman informed?

Yes



Fairness in complaint handling

Are residents able to complain via a representative throughout?

Our policy, procedure, and website clearly state that we will accept complaints made by advocates of residents.

If advice was given, was this accurate and easy to understand?

Our quality assurance framework enables us to monitor the quality and frequency of communication when complaint handling. We also use customer feedback and survey information to ensure we continue to learn ways in which to make things simple and easy for our customers.

How many cases did we refuse to escalate?

For August 2021, six cases were denied escalation to a stage two.

What were the reasons for refusal?

All 6 refusals are based on Group policy. In these instances, we may refuse to accept a complaint however we wished to review the case as a stage one complaint to ensure that feedback was being fully considered. Although cases were not escalated further an alternative remedy was offered where possible.

Did we explain the decision to the resident?

Yes, we will always inform residents our reason for refusing an escalation.



Outcomes and Remedies

Where something has gone wrong what steps do you take to put it right?

We always strive to put things right as quickly as possible and use the feedback to change and improve the way we deliver our services. We have a dedicated team focused on learning from complaints and ensuring that action is taken to prevent the same issues happening again.



Continuous learning and improvement

What improvements have we made because of learning from complaints?

We now have a dedicated page on our website that details the most up to date information on learning from complaints. You can [view it here](#).

How do we share these lessons with residents?

Lessons, findings, and actions taken will be detailed on our website. We also host a quarterly learning from complaints steering group which is made up of leaders from across the Group as well as members of our Resident Scrutiny Group. Minutes from the meeting and any agreed actions will also be published on our website.

How do we share these lessons with the Board/governing body?

The Board and our Executive Management Team are involved in all aspects of complaints and learning. It is a regular feature of their meetings.

Has the code made a difference to how we respond to complaints?

The new code has helped us change our internal procedures, systems, and reporting. We have new policies in place and a new team who are dedicated to learning from complaints. Service owners across the Group are aware of their roles and responsibilities and we host several complaint forums to ensure that we continue to work together to respond to complaints and drive improved services.