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Complaints Policy

This policy outlines our approach to handling complaints and discretionary payments.

Department	Housing
Policy Owner	Managing Directors
Approved Date	July 2023
Date for Review	July 2025
Approving Body	Local Housing Boards
Associated Legislation/Regulation	Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code
Equality Impact Assessment Date	2 June 2023
Version Number	1.2

Introduction

We aim to provide you with outstanding customer service; however, we understand that things can occasionally go wrong. If this happens, we want to make things right as soon as possible, learn from what has happened, and do what we can to stop it from happening again – we are committed to a positive complaint-handling culture.

As part of the complaint resolution, it may be necessary to make either a payment to cover your out-of-pocket expense or a discretionary payment or goodwill gesture in order to put things right.

We'll normally try to resolve your complaint informally in the first instance, with your agreement, although we can handle this through our formal process if you prefer. Accountability and transparency are integral to a positive complaint-handling culture. Our Group Board and Local Housing Boards (which have tenant representatives) receive trend data on complaints, teams review complaint trends to improve the services we deliver, and we report on learning and improvements from complaints in annual reports to staff and tenants.

Definition

We define 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, affecting an individual tenant or group of tenants.'

There are some things that we do not consider to be a complaint. These are:

- Complaints where the issue occurred over six months ago
- Something we have no control over, such as Local Authority property allocations
- Complaints that have already been considered under our complaints process
- Insurance claims for damages and/or legal proceedings (associated complaints regarding service failures are not excluded in these cases)
- Matters already being dealt with by the Ombudsman service

If we do not accept your complaint, we'll give you an explanation setting out the reasons why and outline your right to access the Ombudsman about your complaint.

Making a complaint

You can raise a complaint in person, over the telephone, in writing, by email and on our websites. If you make a complaint, we aim to resolve things quickly and in no more than two steps. You can have a representative deal with your complaint on your behalf and to be represented or accompanied at any meeting with us where this is reasonable – just let us know in writing if this is the case.

This is how it works:

Stage one

- We will acknowledge and log your complaint within five working days of receipt. We will make you aware of your right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service at this point and throughout your complaint.
- Your complaint will be assigned to a member of our Tenant Voice Team, who will investigate your complaint in an impartial manner, seeking sufficient, reliable information from all parties so that fair and appropriate action can be taken. The Tenant Voice Officer will keep you updated on the progress of your complaint.
- We will respond to your complaint within **10 working days** of the complaint being acknowledged.
- On the rare occasion that we'll need more time to respond to your complaint, we will provide a clear explanation; this won't be longer than **a further 10 working days**.
- If we need an extension beyond **20 working days** to respond to the complaint fully, this will be agreed with you.
- A response will be sent to you when we are able to provide what we feel is a fair resolution to your complaint, not when the outstanding actions to remedy things are completed. Of course, we'll still track the actions and provide regular updates to you until we have fully resolved your complaint.

Our response to your complaint will include:

- the complaint stage
- the complaint definition
- the decision on the complaint
- the reasons for any decisions made
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right, and any outstanding actions
- details of any learning from the complaint
- details of how to escalate the matter to stage two if you are not satisfied with our response.

Stage two

- If all or part of your complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction at stage one, you can ask us to progress your complaint to stage two – what we call complaint review.
- You can progress your complaint to stage two **up to three months** from the date you received our resolution to your complaint at stage one.
- Your complaint will be reviewed by a manager who will seek to understand the issues outstanding and the outcomes you are after.
- The review will look at the handling of the complaint to date, decisions made, the resolution offered and/or will draw upon the views of subject matter experts and involved tenants where necessary to reach a fair resolution wherever possible.
- We will review your complaint and respond within **20 working days** of the complaint appeal being escalated to stage two.
- In the rare occasion that we'll need more time to respond, we will provide a clear explanation; this won't be longer than a further **10 working days**.

- If we need an extension beyond **30 working days** to respond fully, this will be agreed with you.
- Our complaint response will be sent to you when we have the answer to the complaint, not when the outstanding actions to remedy things are completed. Of course, we'll still track the actions and provide regular updates to you until we have fully resolved your complaint.

Our response to your complaint will include:

- the complaint stage
- the complaint definition
- the decision on the complaint
- the reasons for any decisions made
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right, and any outstanding actions
- details of any learning from the complaint
- details of how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman if you remain dissatisfied.

Further options

If your complaint is still not resolved to your satisfaction at stage two, you can refer your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

They are contactable at:

- Online complaint form: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/residents/make-a-complaint/
- Phone: 0300 111 3000
- Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Our discretion

We reserve the right to use discretion when applying this policy and may deal with a complaint differently where individual circumstances merit it. Any discretion will be applied fairly and appropriately to maximise the opportunity to resolve a dispute.

Further information about this policy

Supporting documents

This policy can be read in conjunction with the following documents (all available on local housing association websites):

- Reasonable adjustment Policy – our commitment to equality of opportunity to ensure all tenants are treated fairly under the Equality Act 2010
- Unacceptable Behaviour Policy – how we manage unreasonable behaviour from complainants

Privacy notice - how Flagship Group will collect and use your personal information. We'll carry out an annual self-assessment to ensure our complaint handling remains in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and will publish this on our website.

EIA statement

An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken for this policy on 2 June 2023, and all identified negative impacts have been mitigated.

Training statement

This policy will be trained to all members of our Tenant Voice Teams and across the group.

Measuring Effectiveness

A policy effectiveness review will be completed by Heads of Housing every 2 years or as necessary.

Review Period

It will be reviewed as necessary, and at least every 2 years, by the Heads of Housing and approved by Local Housing Boards.

Version Control

Version	Detail	Approved by	Date
1.0	First Issue	LHBs	July 2022
1.1	Minor amends / removal of democratic filter	LHBs	September 2022
1.2	Minor amends and inclusion of our approach to discretionary payments (removing the need for a separate policy)	LHBs	July 2023