

Housing Resolutions Complaint Handling - Best Practice Guide

Introduction

The Housing Resolutions Team was created in February 2024 to investigate and respond to housing complaints and member enquiries.

We aim to:

- Provide excellent customer service
- Provide quality communication with residents
- Advocate for all residents who are dissatisfied with the service they have received
- Provide comprehensive responses to complaints
- Promote honest, open, communication
- Investigate and respond to complaints on a case-by-case basis, putting the individual at the forefront
- Provide a named, dedicated investigator and single point of contact for all complainants
- Find resolutions to resident concerns
- Hold our hands up where things have gone wrong
- Learn from every expression of dissatisfaction, promote change and best practice with the customer journey as our focus
- Be guided by the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code, learn from their determinations and ensure accountability when things have gone wrong
- Approach complaints in a non-judgemental, empathetic and fair manner
- Focus on putting things right when they have gone wrong

What is Good Complaint Handling?

Good complaint handling follows the Housing Ombudsman's Dispute Resolution Principles. They are:

- be fair – treat people fairly and follow fair processes
- put things right
- learn from outcomes



These principles offer high level good practice guidance that should be followed by everyone in the complaints process.

A gold standard in complaint handling can only be achieved when a landlord follows the principles of the Complaint Handling Code, which you can read [here](#).

Making a Complaint

Customers should be able to easily make a complaint in a method that is most accessible for them. It is important that every expression of dissatisfaction, even if it is not treated as a formal complaint, is recorded and brought to the attention of the relevant service. This promotes continual improvement and change.

Receiving an Expression of Dissatisfaction

We aim to support the earliest resolution of complaints, avoiding issues escalating with further detriment to the resident, which requires more time and resource to put right.

All officers receiving any expression of dissatisfaction from a resident should look to resolve the issue at the earliest opportunity. This may be through:

- Providing or initiating the service that can put the issue right (ie booking a repair, chasing an appointment date, providing a form, requesting communication from an officer or service etc)
- Sincerely apologising where things have gone wrong
- Providing a service that has been promised

All officers are expected to:

- Take ownership and responsibility for customer concerns
- Take any expression of dissatisfaction seriously and treat residents with empathy
- Take note of any vulnerabilities customers may have which may impact how the issue is affecting them, or put any reasonable adjustments required in place
- Record all expressions of dissatisfaction, whether or not the concern has been addressed and resolved in the first instance.
- Communicate honestly and openly with the resident about policies and procedures and manage expectations.



Logging a Complaint

Every effort should be made to ensure that the complaint is logged to the correct team to prevent unnecessary delays. Any actions already taken to resolve the issue should be recorded.

The customer should be asked what their preferred resolution would be, and expectations should be managed immediately. If the officer is aware that the customer's preferred resolution is not possible, this should be communicated with them in an honest and open manner.

Investigating Complaints

Communication with the resident should be given priority during a complaint investigation. The manner and method of this communication should be agreed with the resident and any reasonable adjustments taken into account and recorded.

At each stage of the investigation the resident should be kept informed and updated. If there are any delays which may impact the resolution the resident should be notified of these immediately and agreements made for timescales.

Residents should be given the opportunity to discuss their concerns, and investigators should ensure that the complaint is fully understood.

If any parts of the complaint will not be addressed in the response, this should be communicated directly with them and confirmed in the response letter.

All available systems, records and communications should be accessed as part of the investigation.

All officers have an involvement in investigating complaints:

- should assist with information gathering as appropriate
- should ensure record keeping is accurate, up to date and comprehensive
- be honest where things have gone wrong, and be transparent about any failings that have occurred
- be accountable for their actions and decisions
- assist in putting things right



Complaint Responses

All complaint responses should:

- be a confirmation of information that has already been communicated with the resident directly.
- be thorough and accurate
- address every aspect of the resident's complaint
- be accessible to the reader
- be empathetic to the experience of the resident
- include a sincere and honest apology where failings have been identified
- identify how we are going to put things right
- be in a format agreed with the resident (email, post, translated, large-print etc)
- detail any further actions required, and offer a timescale for these. Officers must take personal responsibility for ensuring these actions are completed as agreed
- include contact details
- detail how customers can escalate their concerns if they remain dissatisfied
- signpost to any further support that may be available
- be personal and sincere
- acknowledge any distress or frustration that the customer has experienced
- acknowledge and explain any delays that may have occurred
- detail the learning taken from the resident's complaint, and how their complaint will be used to improve services

Resolutions

A proposed resolution should be discussed with the resident before the response letter is issued.

Where failings have been identified, the customer should be restored to the position they were in before the failing occurred.

Resolutions should be considered on an individual and case-by-case basis. When considering a resolution, the complainant's personal circumstances should be considered when assessing impact, as well as time, delay and trouble.



Where the customer's issue cannot be rectified, an alternative solution should be offered.

Compensation should be considered where appropriate, in line with the [Compensation Policy](#).

Learning

All complaints, even those where the outcome is not upheld, can be used for learning. Consider:

- what caused the customer to raise the complaint?
- were their expectations properly managed?
- were the processes they needed to access fully available to them as an individual?
- is information provided to the resident complete and accurate?
- has the complaint highlighted any issues with policies and procedures?
- has the complaint exposed a gap in service provision?

Any learning should be documented and shared with the Housing Resolutions Team.

An officer responsible for actioning a change, or rectifying an issue, should be identified and a timescale agreed.

Learning from complaints should be an engaged and productive process. Changes made as a result of customer dissatisfaction should be recorded, shared and implemented through team briefs, discussions or communications with all relevant officers.

Where improvements have been made as an outcome of complaints these should be communicated with the complainant and with all residents where appropriate.

All officers are responsible for engaging with changes and service improvements identified.

Key Points for Handling Complaints

- treat all residents as individuals, with individual needs and wants



- be open, honest and transparent about failings
- apologise where an apology is required
- acknowledge the impact on the individual
- ensure decisions are communicated fully and accurately
- show empathy
- proactively learn from every complaint and share this learning as required

