

Complaints and

Feedback Policy

Policy	Complaints and Feedback Policy
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Responsible board	Group Board
Responsible officer	Jan Lycett

Summary

Complaints, and all other feedback, are an important way for customers to be heard and to drive service improvement.

Our principles of complaints handling are:

- Ensure there are a range of ways to make a complaint
- Listen and learn from the customers' experience
- Respond quickly, clearly and in an open and honest way
- Exceed the requirements set out by the relevant Ombudsman services
- Put things right where we have made a mistake

The Policy (or Self-Assessment or Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report) covers all part of the Group including Wrekin Housing Group, Housing Plus Group, Homes Plus, Care Plus, Severnside Housing and Choices Housing.

Complaint Definition:

Complaint

'A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made. It could be about the standard of service provided, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents' ¹.

Process:

We will operate a two-stage process:

Stage 1

The complaint will be investigated, and responded to, within 10 working days

Stage 2

The investigation at stage 1 will be reviewed by a member of the team not involved at stage 1, and responded to, within 20 working days

Acknowledgement of the complaint will be made within 5 working days.

¹This is the definition set out by the Housing Ombudsman Service Code of Complaint Handling

Learning from complaints

Whilst we know that from time-to-time things might go wrong, learning from complaints is an important way to ensure services are improved from feedback customers provide. We are committed to learning from complaints, both individual complaints and where trends might be seen.

Performance Reporting

Performance will be monitored on a fortnightly basis by the Executive Team, and the Service Performance and Customer Experience Committee (SPaCE) will oversee compliance with the relevant Ombudsman Standards. The Board and Member Responsible for Complaints will have overall responsibility for ensuring the standards are met and exceeded.

Complaints and feedback policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Whilst we aim to deliver excellent services, we recognise that sometimes, things go wrong, and our services fall short of agreed service standards. Complaints, and all other feedback, are an important way for customers to be heard and to drive service improvement.
- 1.2. Our principles for complaints handling are to:
 - Ensure it's easy for customers to make a complaint, with a number of ways to do so, such as email, telephone and online
 - Listen to customers, hearing and learning from their experiences;
 - Respond to customers quickly and clearly in an open and honest way;
 - Work with customers to understand what we can do to put things right;
 - Ensure learning is taken to improve services for all customers;
 - Exceed the requirements set out by the relevant Ombudsman services and regulatory bodies; and
 - Keep customers up to date with current progress and next steps

2. Policy Statement

- 2.1. This Policy outlines our approach to managing complaints, compliments and feedback. We encourage customers to tell us when something has gone wrong, or when they are dissatisfied with a decision, we have made so we can act on this and learn to improve our services.
We will ensure this Policy is easily accessible and published routinely through social media posts, for example.
- 2.2. A customer does not have to use the word complaint for it to be treated as such. It is our responsibility to ensure that when a customer says they are unhappy that we either pass on their complaint on their behalf or direct them to our complaints process.
- 2.3. We will use comments to influence service improvements and as part of our wider customer feedback approaches.
- 2.4. We will use compliments to ensure we are identifying and celebrating behaviours and actions that customers value so they can be replicated and expanded on.
- 2.5. We will ensure our approach is fair and reasonable and complies with equality legislation (Equality Act 2010). We will consider, and make, reasonable adjustments, such as where a customer has a disability. As outlined in 5.7, we recognise this is important to ensure equal access to services and services being provided fairly.

3. Definitions

3.1. We will define a complaint as the following but understand that not all complaints can be described in the same way:

Complaint

‘A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made. It could be about the standard of service provided, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents’².

3.2. Other definitions used in this policy are:

Advocate

An advocate is someone who gives voice to someone else by supporting them and helping them express their views.

Comment

Feedback about the services we provide, for example a suggestion for improvement. This might be about a policy, service or decision.

Complainant

Anyone making a complaint, including customers, their representatives or anyone who may be affected by our service delivery, or decisions.

Compliment

A thank you for a service we have provided.

Customer

Someone who uses - or will use - any of the services provided by us. This includes people on our waiting lists who may not yet be tenants or anyone waiting to receive a service.

Elected member

An office chosen by election. This could be a Ward Councillor from your local council or an elected Member of Parliament (MP).

Service request

A request from a person to the organisation, which asks for action to be taken.

3.3. We recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint. We routinely monitor requests for service such as contact to make an enquiry or a repair request.

3.4. We recognise there may be times where an advocate, such as from Citizens Advice or a friend or relative may act on behalf of a customer. We will ensure that our tenant, resident or service user has given permission for us to discuss their case, or any details relating to it, with their advocate or relative. This ensures that we meet the Equality Act 2010 and supports customers to access the complaints service in the most appropriate way for them. Where a customer lacks capacity in line with the Mental Health Act 2005, we will work with their advocate or representative, in line with data protection requirements.

3.5. The Group will act in accordance with Regulation 20: Duty of Candour (being open and transparent) in respect of complaints about care and treatment that have resulted in a notifiable safety incident.

4. Anonymous complaints

4.1. If a complaint is made anonymously, we will investigate it as long as we have enough information to do so in a fair and reasonable way, however, it may fall outside of timescales due to the anonymity of the complainant. We would prefer those customers leave contact details so we can talk about what has happened and agree what can be done to put things right.

²This is the definition set out by the Housing Ombudsman Service Code of Complaint Handling

5. Policy scope

5.1. The scope of this policy includes complaints relating to:

- The quality of our housing services
- Actions taken by our staff, including conduct, attitude and approach
- Delays or failures in delivering services
- Breaches of agreements or policies relating to housing and care

5.2. This policy covers all complaints received from:

- Tenants, or prospective tenants, of Wrekin Housing Group and Housing Plus Group. This will include leaseholders, service users and their advocates and stakeholders;
- The general public where our service or decisions have an impact upon them;
- Former customers or service users within 12 months of ending their tenancy or service with the Group.

Care Plus and Choices Housing Group customers

Care Plus aims to make sure that all complaints and compliments are managed in line with The Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2024. Customers can also access the Care, Quality Commission (CQC) if needed.

County Town Homes customers

For complaints that relate to outright sales from County Town Homes, we will follow the relevant consumer code.

Homes Plus customers

We will follow the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

Wrekin Housing Group customers

We will follow the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

5.3. The following will not be covered within this policy:

- A complaint made by an employee about a matter relating to their employment;

Complaint already investigated:

- A complaint already under investigation, or already investigated (unless there is new evidence);

Outside of the complaint definition:

- The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over 12 months ago - apart from in exceptional cases if there are concerns regarding safeguarding or health and safety issues. Where the problem is recurring, we should consider any older reports as part of the background to the complaint;
- A complaint that does not relate to our services;

Request for a service:

- A request from a person to the organisation, which asks for action to be taken, for example reporting a repair for the first time or request for information or assistance, i.e. housing applications. Please note that service requests are not complaints. If the complainant is not happy with the response to their request, we will raise a complaint for them. We will do this even if the service request is still being carried out.

Legal proceedings:

- A complaint that is being dealt with through the Leasehold Tribunal in relation to service charges;
- A complaint arising out of the alleged failure to comply with a request for information under the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act 2000;
- A complaint where a legal claim is made against the Group, including disrepair that have been filed at court and insurance claims - these will be dealt with through our legal and insurance processes;

Whistleblowing:

- A complaint raised that is being treated through the Whistleblowing Policy.

Unacceptable behaviour:

- In a small number of instances, we may decide that a complaint is being made on an unreasonably persistent basis. Each case would be considered on its merit and with a clear focus that all customers have a right to raise complaints.

The decision to refuse a complaint on this basis must be approved by an Executive Director and the Member Responsible for Complaints. The customer will be advised of the contact details for the relevant Ombudsman service.

- 5.4. If we do for any reasons refuse to consider a matter as a complaint, we will always explain our decision to the customer and inform them of their rights or take our decision to the relevant Ombudsman.
- 5.5. We will consider this on a case-by-case basis with the aim of being open and responsive to customers.
- 5.6. Where a complaint relates to high-risk safety concerns, for example, there will be a significant impact to the tenant or property, the appropriate team will oversee this, ensuring the appropriate action is taken. Any safety issues that may cause a threat to the customer or have a serious impact will be reported to the Executive Team. Safeguarding concerns will be reported to the relevant Safeguarding Lead.
- 5.7. We are committed to making reasonable adjustments to ensure that all customers can access our complaints process. Adjustments will be made on an individual basis to ensure fairness and accessibility, for example, alternative communication formats, support with a complaint submission, translation services and home visits. This list is not exhaustive and can be flexible.

6. Complaints Process

How to make a complaint

- 6.1. We will accept complaints made by:

- **Email:** feedback@housingplusgroup.co.uk or complaints@wrekin.com
- **Post:** Housing Plus Group, Acton Court, Acton Gate, Stafford, ST18 9AP or The Wrekin Housing Group Ltd, Old Park, Colliers Way, Telford, TF3 4AW
- **Social Media** if the customers confidentiality and privacy can be adequately protected
- **Online customer portals and forms**
- **Telephone:** 0800 048 8955 or 01952 217100
- **In person to any member of staff**

6.2. Following receipt of a complaint, it will be directed to the appropriate landlord for response (Wrekin Housing Group and Housing Plus Group).

For complaints that relate to outright purchase of a home from County Town Homes, please see Appendix A for timescales and process.

6.3. All complaints will be logged, and we will contact the complainant to let them know we have received their complaint within 5 working days.

6.4. The emphasis will always be on considering what has happened, the impact for the customer and looking for a reasonable resolution to put things right, when something has gone wrong. When the complaint is resolved we will investigate how it happened and improve or implement changes to the service if necessary or reasonable to do so. We will report changes made through our website and to our Service Performance and Customer Experience Committee.

6.5. Complaint stages and timeframes:

Stage 1

We will acknowledge within 5 working days and will aim to resolve and respond within 10 working days. If necessary, and in discussion with the complainant, some complaints may require additional time, this will be discussed, and agreed, in advance with the customer.

Stage 2

We will acknowledge within 5 working days and will review and respond within 20 working days. We will discuss with customers what the key outstanding issues are to support us in resolving the complaint promptly. A customer will not have to give a reason for their request to escalate. If necessary, and in discussion with the complainant, some complaints may require additional time, this will be discussed, and agreed, in advance with the customer.

6.6. We will investigate a complaint thoroughly at each stage and identify any failings, seeking an agreeable resolution that is appropriate and reasonable to the situation. The focus will always be on being responsive, considering the customers' experience and what we can do to put things right and learn. If we do not uphold (agree) that the customer complaint is a service failure, we will explain how we have reached that decision.

6.7. Where new issues, unrelated to the original complaint, are raised we will only include in the stage 1 response if this is before the response letter is sent. This is to ensure that customers, staff and contractors have a fair chance for a complaint to be investigated and for the customer to access stage 2, if they remain dissatisfied.

6.8. Where an extension of a complaint is required, we will ensure we communicate the reasons why and the customer will be kept updated throughout the extension.

In all cases where there is an extension, we will share details of the relevant Ombudsman Service with the customer.

6.9. Following the completion of each stage we will write to the customer to confirm:

- The complaint definition (as defined with the customer);
- The investigation of all issues raised in the complaint;
- The decision and reasons for those;
- Any actions or remedies agreed to put things right;
- Details of any outstanding actions;
- Details of how to escalate to the next stage including timeframes or to approach the regulatory body.

6.10. Forms or redress/resolution may include a range of remedies, from an apology, sometimes a financial payment, additional agreed work in the home or vouchers. Remedies will be outlined in the Compensation Policy and be considered against the relevant Ombudsman scheme guidance.

Who handles the complaints?

6.11. Housing Plus Group Customer Complaints

These will be managed by the Customer Advocacy Team, who will work with customers to understand the root cause of the issues being experienced and will advocate on their behalf to find the right resolution.

6.12. Wrekin Housing Group Customer Complaints

Complaints are resolved and responded to by service teams and an independent review at Stage 2.

7. Learning from Complaints

7.1. Wherever possible we will learn from the cause and outcomes of individual complaints and the trends in complaints in order to improve service delivery to the customer.

7.2. The Group will produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report which will be published on our website. This will include:

- self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code including any non-compliance and service improvements made, from the learning from complaints
- Annual report about our performance from the regulatory body.
- The response from the Board.

7.3. A member of the Group Board is appointed to have the lead responsibility for complaints and to support a positive complaint handling culture. The Member will be responsible for ensuring the Board receives regular performance information and insight on complaint handling, including learning.

7.4. The Group encourages all customers to complete a satisfaction survey following a complaint. This will help us improve our complaint handling approach. Each year we will collect and monitor satisfaction with complaints handling through the Tenant Satisfaction Measures.

8. Ombudsman Services

8.1. The relevant Ombudsman service can advise a customer at any stage of a complaint. They will usually only formally take on a case if the stage 2 complaint response has been sent out. Please note that a separate process applies for customers of County Town Homes, which can be found in Appendix A.

8.2. Housing Ombudsman

If the complainant is a Homes Plus or Wrekin Housing Group customer the Housing Ombudsman Service are the independent organisation relating to complaints. Their contact details are as follows:

Write to: Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 1484, Unit D, Preston, PR2 0ET

Call: 0300 111 3000

Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Complete an online form: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/contact-us

8.3. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

This is relevant for Care Plus or Choices customers and relating to complaints about care services, their contact details are:

Write to: Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, PO Box 4771, Coventry, CV4 0EH

Call: 0300 061 0614

9. Roles and Responsibilities

- 9.1. The Group Board and Service Performance and Customer Experience Committee strategically set direction and ensure they have sufficient assurance through performance information. Kevin Morgan, Chair of the Service Performance and Customer Experience Committee, is the Member Responsible for complaints; ensuring performance and insight is given at Board.
- 9.2. The Executive Team set and drive strategic direction and ensure effective assurance and performance is delivered. They are also responsible for setting a culture of learning and transparency. Jan Lycett, is the named person for Consumer Standards and for the design and delivery of policies.
- 9.3. The Customer Advocacy Team (Homes Plus) and Customer Voice and Value Team (Wrekin Housing Group) are responsible for the design and oversight of the process and contact with the Housing Ombudsman Service.
- 9.4. Customer Advocacy Officers and Service Managers/Senior Managers are responsible for resolving complaints at stage 1 and 2 of the process. They also have a central role in learning within their services and for those that may cut across the business.

Associated Policies

- Care Plus duty of candour policy
- Compensation policy
- Reasonable adjustments policy
- Safeguarding policy
- Social Media policy