

Control Information	
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Directorate	Customer Operations
Policy Owner	Sandra Williams – Head of Service Transformation & Complaints
Approval Group	Customer Experience Committee
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VERSION CONTROL

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2	1 April 2022	Sandra Williams	Ad-Hoc Review; following updated guidance from the Housing Ombudsman
3	3 October 2022	Sandra Williams	Ad-Hoc Review; following HOS updated complaint handling code and ARCO (HCS) review
4	5 April 2023	Sandra Williams	Ad-hoc Review- following introduction of Resident Compensation Panel. Democratic filter removal.
5	1 April 2024	Sandra Williams	Complaints Handling Code 2024 updates & Building Safety Act inclusion.

CONTENTS

1. Purpose	2
2. Scope	2
3. Legislation, Regulation, Guidance and Best Practice	3
4. Introduction	3
5. Leadership, Roles and Responsibilities	4
6. Operations	4
7. Risk Management	10
8. Support	10
9. Monitoring	11
10. Breaches	11
11. Continuous Improvement	11
12. Review	12

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 This Policy sets out our approach towards handling customer complaints and is designed to promote a positive complaint handling culture that recognises the value of positive dispute resolution and uses complaints as a way to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery. It should be read in conjunction with other related policies.
- 1.2 Although we will always seek to follow this Policy when dealing with complaints, we reserve the right to use discretion when applying the Policy and may deal with a complaint differently where individual circumstances merit it. In these circumstances any discretion will be applied fairly and appropriately, and the customer will be informed at the earliest opportunity of any departure from this Policy. We acknowledge that any complaint should be progressed as far as possible to maximise the opportunity to resolve a dispute.
- 1.3 Factors such as the complexity of a complaint and whether the complainant is vulnerable or at risk should be considered as early as possible in the complaint process. Complaints should be resolved promptly whenever possible, and an explanation, apology or resolution provided to the complainant.

2 SCOPE

- 2.1 We will accept a complaint from a person who is in a landlord/tenant relationship with us, has a service agreement with us or an applicant for a property that we own or manage. We will only consider complaints from applicants for a property in relation to the way their application was managed. If the complaint is being made by an ex-occupier, then they would need to have had a legal relationship with us at the time that the issue arose.
- 2.2 We accept complaints from a representative of any of the people above who is authorised by them to make a complaint on their behalf. This could be a friend/relative or a representative from an external organisation (such as the Citizens Advice Bureau). We will require written permission from them. However, this does not include a person that has been appointed in a legal capacity unless they have been appointed due to incapacity or disability (for example, they have a Power of Attorney or have been appointed by an authority such as the Court of Protection to act on your behalf).
- 2.3 This Policy applies to all contractors and other parties providing services on our behalf and we expect them to work with us in an effective manner to resolve complaints.
- 2.4 This Policy and related procedures do not normally cover:
 - A matter already fully considered through the complaints process, the courts, or another legal process.
 - Decisions which have been made in accordance with our statutory obligations, or in line with legislation or regulation, for example succession or the right to rent. Issues relating to how we handled the matter may be dealt with as a complaint.
 - A matter directly linked to legal, or enforcement action already started against One Housing.
 - Services for which One Housing are not responsible e.g., local authority decisions about housing benefit or nominations should be raised with the local authority.
 - Complaints about anti-social behaviour/neighbour nuisance as this is covered by One Housing's Community Safety Policy, but a complaint will be accepted if it relates to our handling of a report of anti-social behaviour.
 - Issues which are over 12 months old unless there is good reason, for example, the complaint was not recorded when it should have been by One Housing, if the complainant was incapacitated due to ill health, or in some circumstances where the complaints concern

safeguarding or health and safety issues. We will encourage complainants to raise complaints with us as soon as possible, normally within 12 months of the issues arising, as this makes it easier for complaints to be investigated. We will always act reasonably in considering any complaint, whenever it is raised, taking a 'customer-first' approach. If the problem is a recurring issue, we will consider any older reports as background to the complaint. In exceptional circumstances we may consider other issues which are older than 6 months, this will be at our discretion.

2.5 We have set out below where specific issues will be handled by specialist teams:

- A relevant complaint made under the Building Safety Act, will be assigned to Asset Services and dealt with by the Principal Accountable Person if the complaint is regarding the performance of the accountable person, or the accountable person if related to structural failure and spread of fire.
- A claim for damages which should be handled as an insurance claim such as personal injury or third-party liability – our Insurance team will review any claims made against us. To speed up the process, you can contact the team directly at insurance@riverside.org.uk.
- Complaints about rent increases or the level of service charges or its reasonableness. Please refer to our Rents and Service Charge Policy. We will accept complaints if we fail to follow the processes associated with the management of charges or the standard of services being provided.
- Defects in new build homes – these are handled by our appointed agents or our Aftercare Team. Details can be found in the Home User Guide. Complaints will be accepted if failures are identified in our handling of this process.

3 LEGISLATION, REGULATION, GUIDANCE AND BEST PRACTICE

3.1 The Regulator of Social Housing requires providers to have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible.

3.2 This Policy incorporates the key elements of the following statutory and regulatory requirements.

- The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard (Regulator of Social Housing)
- Localism Act 2011
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018
- Equality Act 2010
- Housing Ombudsman Service – Complaint Handling Code

4 INTRODUCTION

4.1 We are committed to proactively working with our customers to resolve complaints in a consistent, fair, impartial, and transparent way. Both positive and negative feedback can help us to understand what we can do differently and improve our service in the future.

4.2 We aim to deliver excellent customer experience in line with our corporate plan, vision and values which puts our customers at the centre of everything we do. If we fail to do this, we will:

- Apologise
- Acknowledge where things have gone wrong
- Provide an explanation, assistance or reasons
- Take action if there has been a delay
- Re-consider or change a decision
- Amend a record or add a correction or addendum

- Change policies, procedures or practices
- Put things right when they are within our control
- Wherever possible we will provide a resolution at the first point of contact
- Ensure that customers are kept informed, provide reasonable timeframes and properly manage their expectations throughout the process
- Ensure a fair and consistent approach to the resolution of complaints
- Seek to identify customers who are vulnerable and account for their specific needs when handling their complaint by making reasonable adjustments
- Listen to the customers concerns and take effective action to prevent re-occurrence and learn from outcomes
- Provide a financial remedy
- Safeguard the rights of individuals to confidentiality having a duty of care towards customer information and comply with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- Operate within the regulatory and statutory framework

5 LEADERSHIP, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITY

5.1 Leadership and commitment

The Director of Customer Operations is committed to supporting the delivery of this policy through, people, systems, changes in regulation and sufficient allocation of resources.

5.2 Organisational Roles and Responsibilities

5.2.1. The Board and Customer Experience Committee have delegated responsibility to the Director of Customer Operations for monitoring the overall performance of complaint handling.

5.2.2. The responsible lead from the Governing Body is the Chair of the Customer Experience Committee.

5.2.3. Responsibility for the day-to-day operational management of the service lies with the Assistant Director – Customer Experience, supported by the Head of Service Transformation & Complaints.

5.2.4. The Corporate Complaints & Insight Manager and Corporate Complaints Co-ordinators have responsibility for the delivery of the content of the policy, ensuring compliance within the regulatory requirements.

5.2.5. The senior lead from the allocated service area is responsible for ensuring that assigned complaints are responded to within timelines.

5.2.6. Third party contractors are responsible for the provision of information to support investigation within timelines.

6 OPERATION

6.1 Service Requests

6.1.1. There may be instances where a service request can be resolved ‘there and then’ without the need to enter the complaints system. Examples of where this may be possible include, a missed appointment or a delay in providing a response which can often be resolved with an apology and the provision of another appointment or information. If the complainant is unhappy with the outcome of the actions taken, including any offer of compensation, then the complainant can ask for the matter to be considered at stage 1 of our complaints process.

6.1.2.No written response will be provided for cases resolved under the SPR, but we will record and monitor these instances so that we continue to learn from our customers and improve our service delivery. We will log the outcome of any resolution achieved.

6.2 Definition

6.2.1.A complaint is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of actions by us, our staff or those acting on our behalf, affecting an individual resident or group.

6.2.2.The Policy covers instances where complainants:

- Are dissatisfied with any aspect of the service we have provided
- Are dissatisfied with the standard or service provided by our staff or someone acting on our behalf – this includes professionalism and conduct
- We have failed to follow our policies and procedures
- A relevant complaint as defined in the Building Safety Act

6.3 How to make a complaint

6.3.1.A complaint can be made by the following methods:

- Via our [online portal or webchat](#)
- By e-mailing CorporateComplaints@onehousing.co.uk
- Completing the [complaint form](#) online at www.onehousing.co.uk
- Directly to any of our staff
- Via a representative or advocate (written permission is required from the customer)
- Calling our Customer Service Centre on 0300 123 9966
- In writing to our offices
- In person by visiting our office at Arlington, 220 Arlington Road, London, NW1 7HE
- Via social media – One Housing Facebook and Twitter
- Support or assistance in making a complaint can be provided on request or we can provide details of other organisations that can help

6.3.2.A complainant can contact the Housing Ombudsman Service at any point throughout their complaint for advice. Details of the Housing Ombudsman Service can be found on our website and the last page of this document.

6.4 Principles of the Complaints Policy

6.4.1. Complaint handling:

When we receive a complaint, our Corporate Complaints Team will:

- Acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days.
 - Understand the issues and outcome being sought and confirm which aspects of the complaint are the Landlords responsibility and which are not.
 - Identify what actions may be needed to resolve the complaint.
 - Confirm the lead officer assigned to investigate the complaint.
 - Identify any vulnerabilities or needs relevant to resolving the complaint and make any necessary reasonable adjustments in accordance with our Reasonable Adjustments Policy.
 - If we decide not to accept your complaint, we will provide a detailed explanation and set out the reasons why. We will inform you of your right to refer your complaint to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

- Manage customer expectations from the outset, being clear where a desired outcome is unreasonable or unrealistic
- Deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind
- Give the resident a fair chance to set out their position
- Take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest
- Consider all relevant information and evidence carefully
- Always ensure the person handling the complaint provides a single point of contact for the customer and has the knowledge to deal with the complaint effectively
- When a complaint involves more than one service area, the complaint will be allocated to a lead officer from the service area that forms the main basis of the complaint. The lead officer will respond to all matters in the complaint, obtaining information from other teams as necessary
- Maintain clear record keeping and accurately log the complaint capturing all relevant information, ensuring all decisions made including compensation offers are noted.
- Where appropriate, issue compensation fairly and promptly and in line with our Compensation Policy
- Contact the customer before closing the case to ensure all agreed actions have been completed
- All correspondence relating to a formal complaint will come from One Housing
- Record all lessons learnt so we can continually improve our services

6.5 Complaints Process

We operate a two-stage complaints process for formal complaints:

6.5.1. Stage 1 – Investigation and resolution

The lead officer must make contact within three working days of being assigned the complaint to gather any additional information required and to agree a date for resolution. If additional complaints are raised during this investigation, we will aim to incorporate these into the stage 1 response, unless we consider it will unreasonably delay the response, in which case a new complaint will be logged.

We aim to respond to complaints within 10 working days of being acknowledged. In exceptional circumstances where we cannot meet the target because we do not have the answers, we will provide an explanation including a clear timescale of when the response will be received. We will agree suitable intervals for keeping the complainant informed about the progress of their complaint. This will not exceed a further 10 days without good reason.

Where agreement over an extension cannot be reached, complainants can consider contacting the Housing Ombudsman for further advice. Following the response any agreed actions will be monitored through to a conclusion and completed to a satisfactory standard.

The full response will be in writing. The response will state that this is a stage 1 complaint, it will outline the complaint and set out the response in full. We recognise that complaints can be resolved in a number of different ways and as part of our response to complaints we will, where appropriate, offer a remedy that reflects the extent of any service failure(s) and the impact this may have caused, taking into account all of the circumstances.

This may include acknowledging where things have gone wrong, providing an explanation, apologising, taking action to correct the issue, offering compensation, and using the feedback to inform improvements or changes to our services.



If the complainant disagrees with an offer of compensation, they can ask our Compensation Panel to review the amount we offered. They will look at this independently and make a recommendation. They can either agree with the original amount awarded or recommend that it is changed. Their recommendation could be higher or lower than the original amount which we will agree to unless there are exceptional circumstances which we will explain to the Panel.

Where the resolution to the complaint has been agreed by the lead officer and the customer, the complaint will be closed.

A complaint which has had a full response at stage 1 should not remain open beyond 28 calendar days from the date of the response, unless there are agreed actions that will take longer than 28 days to resolve.

We reserve the right to close the complaint if no escalation has been requested and 28 days have elapsed.

6.5.2. Stage 2 – Senior Manager Review

We will only escalate a complaint to stage 2 once stage 1 has been completed and at the request of the complainant. A complainant can ask to escalate their complaint (by any means) to stage 2 if we fail to respond within the specified timescales (including any agreed extensions).

Complainants who remain unhappy with the stage 1 response should let us know and we will escalate the case to stage 2. There may be occasions when it would not be appropriate to escalate the complaint to stage 2, for example if the outcome being sought was not within our power or ability to deliver. In cases such as these we will write to the complainant and explain why the complaint will not be escalated and what options are available.

We will make reasonable efforts to understand why a complainant remains unhappy with the stage 1 response and include this as part of the stage 2 response. An acknowledgment to this request will be sent to the complainant within five working days.

A senior manager, not previously involved with the complaint, will carry out a robust review of the complaint supported by the Corporate Complaints Team. The review will usually be restricted to the matters included in the stage 1 complaint unless we decide otherwise, for example where they relate directly to the original complaint. Any new issues not dealt with as part of stage 2 will need to be dealt with as a new complaint.

The senior manager will make contact within three working days from the date of being assigned the stage 2 review. The senior manager will be responsible for:

- Understanding the issues and the outcome sought.
- Reviewing the stage 1 investigation and actions to assess whether we have met our responsibilities.
- Identify any additional actions that may be required to ensure that the complaint can be resolved.

We aim to complete the stage 2 review within 20 working days from the date of receipt. In exceptional circumstances where we cannot meet the target because we do not have the answers, we will provide an explanation including a clear timescale of when the response will be received.

This will not exceed a further 20 days without good reason. Where agreement over an extension cannot be reached, complainants can consider contacting the Housing Ombudsman for further advice.

The senior manager will send a full written response to the complainant detailing the outcome of the review. Where the decision is that no further action is required, and that all reasonable and

appropriate measures have been taken, the customer will be informed that they have reached the end of the complaints process and advised of the next available steps.

If the complainant disagrees with the offer of compensation, they can ask our Compensation Panel to review the amount we offered. They will look at this independently and make a recommendation. They can either agree with the original amount awarded or recommend that it is changed. Their recommendation could be higher or lower than the original amount which we will agree to unless there are exceptional circumstances which we will explain to the Panel.

The Corporate Complaints Team will ensure that all information is recorded and will monitor actions to completion.

6.6 Next Steps

If you remain dissatisfied following our final response you can refer your complaint directly to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

The Housing Ombudsman can be approached for advice at any point during our internal investigation. They usually formally investigate a complaint once our internal complaints process has been exhausted.

6.6.1. Housing Ombudsman Service

Contact details:
Housing Ombudsman Service
PO Box 152
Liverpool L337WQ
Telephone: 0300 111 3000
Fax: 020 7831 1942
Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk
Web: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

6.6.2. Member of Parliament (MP) / Cllr

Contact details for Ward Councillors can be obtained from the Local Authority, or online at www.gov.uk. Contact details for a Member of Parliament can be found online at www.parliament.uk or by writing to:
House of Commons,
London SW1A 0AA

6.6.3. First-Tier Tribunal (FTT)

Customers can apply to the First Tier Tribunal for complaints relating to liability to pay and the reasonableness of services charges. In these instances, the Housing Ombudsman has no jurisdiction. Contact details:
www.gov.uk/housing-tribunals

6.6.4. Complaints about Care and Support Services

Complaints about our care services should be referred to the **Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGO)** at <https://lgo.org.uk> or by calling 0300 061 0614. Such complaints can also be referred to the **Care Quality Commission (CQC)**. Please note the Commission does not deal with complaints from customers directly; it simply takes these into account in planning its inspection programme. Customers can contact the Care Quality Commission at <https://cqc.org.uk> or by calling 0300 616 162.

Where we are providing services on behalf of a local authority, customers can also complain direct to the authority. This will apply to customers in temporary or supported housing in receipt of services such as floating support. Find your Local Authority at <https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council>

We will co-operate fully with the relevant Ombudsman Service during any investigation and comply fully with the resulting decision, which will be binding on us.

6.6.5 Complaints about Building Safety

Any complaints regarding the safety of a building can be directed to [the Building Safety Regulator - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk) or by calling 0300 790 6787.

6.7 Other Enquiries

6.7.1. Petitions

We recognise the importance of petitions as a medium through which concerns can be highlighted and improvements made to our services.

A complaint made in the form of a petition on behalf of multiple customers will be treated as one complaint and dealt with in line with the process that we have set out above. We will require customers to nominate a lead person who is the main point of contact, and all our correspondence will be with them.

6.7.2. Social Media

Customers contacting us via social media on issues relating to a first request for service will be responded to by the relevant service area.

Where the issues raised require a full investigation, this will either be entered into the formal complaint process or be included as further information on a complaint already being investigated.

6.7.3. Complaints made directly to the Chief Executive/Executive Director

Correspondence sent to the Chief Executive or other members of the Executive Team with a complaint will be investigated as a new complaint by the relevant service area of the organisation or will be included as further information in a complaint already investigated.

6.7.4. MP /Councillor enquiries

We aim to respond to Member's enquiries within 10 working days. Unless the content is in relation to a specific complaint, these will be dealt with outside of the complaints process. Should the enquiry relate to an existing complaint any information will be added to the complaint already logged and the MP/Councillor kept updated.

6.8 Persistent, Abusive or Unreasonable Behaviour

6.8.1. We will not discriminate against anyone who makes a complaint. If a complainant or their representative behaves inappropriately in making a complaint, we will seek to manage that behaviour as necessary and in line with our Unacceptable Customer Behaviour policy, while treating the complaint like any other. All relevant correspondence will be evaluated to consider the circumstances, including:

- Whether there is a likelihood that complaints are being made to intentionally cause harassment, divert resources or to disrupt the proper workings of the organisation,
- Whether there have been persistent or unreasonable demands made in the past.
- Evidence of abusive or threatening behaviour to staff or producing excessive correspondence.

- Whether the complainant or their representative displays unreasonable behaviour

6.8.2. In these cases, while focussing on, and seeking to resolve the substance of any complaint, we will manage the behaviour in line with our Unacceptable Customer Behaviour Policy.

7 RISK MANAGEMENT

7.1 Actions to address risks and opportunities

7.1.1. The issue of complaints is regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing and are managed in line with the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standards and adherence to the Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code.

7.1.2. There is a detailed complaints procedure that should be used alongside this policy to ensure a compliant complaint handling framework.

8 SUPPORT

8.1 Resources

8.1.1. This policy will be delivered through the Corporate Complaints & Insight team, with involvement by the responsible service areas and Business Intelligence team. The Corporate Complaints & Insight team will be responsible for the administration, quality assurance and reporting, while the delegated directorates responsible for investigations, responses, and service improvement.

8.2 Competence and Training

8.2.1. Designated staff responsible for complaint handling must be adequately trained and have knowledge of the complaint handling code and dispute resolution principles.

8.2.2. Staff must complete the Housing Ombudsman Dispute Resolution Training E Learning. Additional training will be delivered based on operational requirement and needs.

8.3 Awareness and Communication

8.3.1. This Policy will be available on our website and SharePoint and communicated to the relevant teams.

8.4 Data Protection

8.4.1. Under the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 and the data Protection Act 2018, all personal data and sensitive information, however, received is treated as confidential.

8.4.2. Officers will ensure that they only involve other agencies and share information with the consent of the complainant concerned or their advocate, unless:

- One Housing are required to do by law
- The information is necessary for the protection of children
- There are other grounds under the GDPR or the PDA 2018 which allow or require One Housing to disclose the information

8.5 Documented Information, Records Management

8.5.1 Housing Ombudsman Service – Complaint Handling Code sets out how, as a social landlord we are expected to handle complaints.

- All documentation relating to complaints will be recorded and stored on our housing management system (CRM). This must include any reasonable adjustments agreed as well as a record of any disabilities that a resident has disclosed and has been considered as part of the investigation.
- Due to the possibility of further complaints being made which could reference a closed complaint the retention period for documents relating to a complaint will exceed 6 months.

9 MONITORING

9.1 One Housing will record data on its housing management system (CRM).

All One Housing's key performance indicators related to complaints are closely monitored and reported against to the Group Board, Customer Experience Committee, Governing Body lead and Executive team.

9.2 Quarterly reports are submitted to the Board, Customer Experience Committee, Governing Body Lead and Resident Panels that will enable them to see compliance with the Group Strategic Complaints Policy and relevant legislation and regulations.

9.3 An annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny and challenge will be produced for the Board and published on the website, that includes:

- Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-assessment
- **A qualitative and quantitative analysis of our complaint handling performance**
- Any finding of non-compliance with the Complaint Handling Code
- The service improvements made as a result of learning from complaints
- Any annual reports about our performance published by the Ombudsman
- The Board's response to the Annual Report

The relevant KPI's are:

- Acknowledgement on time
- Complaint responses on time
- Housing Ombudsman upheld

10 BREACHES OF THIS POLICY

10.1 Deviation from this policy must be authorised by the approved senior manager.

11 CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

11.1 One Housing seeks continuous improvement through analysing the themes and trends and using feedback and lessons learnt from concerns, complaints, and compliments to improve service design and delivery. Continuous improvement focuses on increasing both the effectiveness and efficiency of the organisation to fulfil its corporate plan objectives.

11.2 All feedback is monitored and extensively reported to the Senior Leadership team, Executive team, Customer Services Committee (and through them our Group Board) as well as our Resident Panels on a regular basis.

11.3 Our approach to continuous improvement is underpinned by the adoption of best practice, regular improvement reviews, evaluation and monitoring of the organisation activities to establish areas for development. Feedback from our customers is a key element of continuous



improvement with negative responses from our transactional surveys monitored for potential complaint escalation.

12 REVIEW

- 12.1** The Complaints Policy will be reviewed every 3 years or earlier in response to regulatory or legislative changes.
- 12.2** Any non-mandatory changes to the policy will be consulted with the resident panels and approved by the Customer Experience Committee.