

Complaints Policy

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UNCONTROLLED IF PRINTED

Aim of policy

This policy outlines how we will put things right should a customer complain to us.

We welcome complaints and actively encourage customers to express their dissatisfaction to us. All expressions of dissatisfaction are a positive opportunity to gather intelligence and insight that will help us improve.

Our approach follows The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, April 2022, which sets out requirements to respond to complaints effectively and fairly. We acknowledge that this enables us to resolve complaints quickly and provides data and learning to drive service improvements. We publicise this code and the Housing Ombudsman Service to customers.

This policy applies to all properties owned by ForHousing and organisations providing services on behalf of ForHousing will be expected to follow this Policy.

For the purposes of this policy the term **complainant** refers to any tenant or customer including leaseholders, shared owners or housing waiting list applicants, or any person acting on their behalf, who communicate an expression of dissatisfaction to us.

Exclusions

Complaints will not be accepted where the issues have already been handled and considered through the complaints policy.

Complaints are encouraged as an opportunity to resolve issues, including where the tenant is taking legal action. Complaints will not be accepted if legal action is completed, and the legal action is aligned to the issues raised in the complaint.

Issues covered by HR policies will be handled through these policies and outside of this complaints policy. Staff members or third parties should not, where possible, be named in correspondence. Any staff member who is the subject of the complaint is given a fair chance to set out their position before a final decision is made.

Complainants will be informed of the reasons for the exclusion and informed of their referral rights to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

Related Legislation and Regulation

[The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, April 2022.](#)

Policy

Complaints can be made by phone, email, in person through appointments, through an electronic form on our website and on social media.

A **complaint** is "an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service,

actions or lack of action by ForHousing, including staff and those acting on our behalf, affecting customers or group of customers”.

The customer does not have to use the word ‘complaint’ for it to be treated as such. We accept complaints within six months of the event but will use discretion to consider cases outside this timescale. When a tenant expresses dissatisfaction, the tenant is informed of the process to log their dissatisfaction as a complaint, and they are asked if they want this to proceed. If the customer confirms they do not want to make a complaint, their enquiry will be handled as a service request. Details will remain on the contact management system for monitoring purposes, to identify service improvement trends and opportunities.

How complaints are handled

The complaints process comprises of two stages.

Stage 1 Expression of dissatisfaction - Establishes the details of the complaint, including its cause, and attempts to offer a suitable remedy that meets the complainant’s expectations.

This initial response stage triages and logs the complaint to identify and agree an appropriate remedy with the complainant. An expression of dissatisfaction is:

- acknowledged and logged within 5 working days from the date received
- responded to after evidence is assessed, within 10 working days of the complaint being logged

Acknowledgements set out our understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the complainant is seeking. Acknowledgements can be made by email, webchat, or other online systems, except social media acknowledgements which will be handled through our service centre. They can also be made verbally, in person or over the phone, or by letter. Acknowledgements will be logged on the system to record these important details, which need to be investigated as part of the complaint handling.

The person who receives the complaint identifies the appropriate ‘complaint handler’. An appropriate complaint handler is located in the team responsible for the service but has not been involved in the source of the complaint sufficiently to have a conflict of interest.

The complaint handler takes ownership and responsibility for handling the complaint and is the complainant’s single point of contact until an agreed remedy has been delivered and/or the expression of dissatisfaction has been escalated to the next stage.

Complaint handlers are trained to handle complaints and are also able to support distressed and upset customers. The complaint handler:

- agrees with the complainant the frequency and method of communication
- manages expectations from the outset, being clear where a desired outcome is unreasonable or unrealistic
- deals with complaints sensitively and fairly, carefully considering all information and evidence
- acts independently and with an open mind, taking measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest
- has access to staff at all levels to facilitate the quick resolution of complaints
- has the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes quickly and fairly
- keeps the complaint confidential, as far as possible, with information only disclosed if

- necessary to properly investigate the matter
- sets out any legal obligations for both parties relating to the complaint

We will agree with the customer any reasonable adjustments required to ensure all customers can complain and receive a fair and equitable complaint handling service. Examples include face to face meetings, including out of office hours, and providing complaint responses in large print and/or translated into preferred languages. Reasonable adjustments will also be considered in the complaint resolution, such as considering health conditions when agreeing repair work or arranging works around carer responsibilities.

Additional complaints are logged with existing complaints if they are relevant, and if it would not unreasonably delay the management of the existing issue. In these circumstances, following discussion with the tenant, a new complaint will be logged.

Response times will not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason, shared with the complainant. An extension beyond 20 working days will be agreed by both parties, and applied only where needed to fully respond to the complaint. If we cannot agree this extension with the complainant, we will provide the complainant with The Housing Ombudsman's contact details to raise awareness of the option to challenge our response time.

If the complaint is resolved to the complainant's satisfaction within the acknowledgement period, the complaint handler will ask the complainant if they want to proceed with the complaint to investigation and formal response. If the complainant decides to withdraw the complaint, the complaint is cancelled as withdrawn by the complainant. Details will remain on the contact management system for monitoring purposes, to identify service improvement trends and opportunities.

Where the tenant proceeds with a complaint, the response is confirmed in writing and addresses all points raised in the complaint in clear, plain language. It is sent when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. It includes:

- the complaint stage
- the decision on the complaint
- the reasons for any decisions made
- the details of any remedy offered to put things right
- details of any outstanding actions
- details of how to escalate the matter to stage two if the complainant is not satisfied with the answer

Stage 2 escalation- Involves a 'consideration' of the complaint

Escalation to Stage 2 can only occur once Stage 1 has been completed **and** the complainant has requested it. Escalations can be made within two months of the Stage 1 complaint being closed, but we will use discretion to consider cases outside this timescale.

A Stage 2 complaint is acknowledged within 5 working days and responded to within 20 working days of the escalation request. The central Customer Feedback and Improvement function will consider the complaint, as the complaint handler, as they will not have been involved in handling the complaint previously, such as at Stage 1.

Response times will not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason, shared with the complainant. Any additional extension will be agreed by both parties and applied only where needed to fully respond to the complaint.

The response is confirmed in writing and addresses all points raised in the complaint in clear, plain language. It is sent when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. It includes:

- 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
- details of any outstanding actions
- details of how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service

Discretionary compensation is considered on a case-by-case basis and we adopt an evidence based approach. Further guidance can be found in the Compensation Procedure.

Closure of complaints

A complaint is closed once the remedy and timescale for delivery have been agreed with the complainant. Agreed actions are tracked and completed as soon as possible, with regular updates provided to the complainant.

Learning from complaints

We analyse complaints to understand where things have gone wrong and to identify what we can do to stop this happening again.

We publicise the improvements we have made as a direct result of this feedback, so tenants and customers can see how their feedback has improved standards of service. We also recognise the jurisdiction of The Housing Ombudsman Service and will implement recommendations resulting from their investigations.

We will also record the reasons for complaints being escalated as customer feedback on how their initial complaint was handled. This will provide opportunity for learning on future complaints handling.

Governance

Our central Customer Feedback and Improvement function coordinating complaint handling across ForHousing ensures complaints are handled appropriately in line with this policy, with performance reported to the governing body, the Customer Committee.

Confidentiality

All complaints are treated in confidence. Personal information about the complainant is only shared internally when strictly necessary to deliver the agreed remedy. Details of the complaint will only be shared externally with the complainant's consent. Where complaints have been received via a Councillor, MP, or recognised advice agency, we assume consent has been given.

Unreasonable behaviour

Where a complainant pursues their complaint in an aggressive, abusive, or threatening manner, or repeatedly pursues complaints which have already been through and exhausted our complaints handling process consideration will be given to applying the Unreasonable Behaviour

Procedure.

How the policy will be delivered

Involved tenants will be involved in our self-assessment to provide scrutiny that all areas are compliant with The Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

This policy will be delivered by all teams within ForHousing and is monitored through the Customer Feedback and Improvement function.

It is part of all manager roles to understand and cascade the policy and guidance to their teams and designated complaints handler, and complaints are part of departmental meetings.

Learning and service improvement will be identified and captured by department leads as part of complaints review.

Staff involved in the complaints process will be trained in this policy and related procedures.

Complaints will be recorded through the customer information management system and reported via a complaints Power BI dashboard which is available to teams and managers across ForHousing.

Complaints are contained within the suite of key performance indicators which are routinely reported through the governance arrangement at ForHousing.

Satisfaction with complaints handling is part of the tenant satisfaction measures that are collected and reported in line with the regulatory guidance.

Regular audit will be carried out to ensure compliance with policy and guidance.

We will publish information about the complaints we receive every year on our website in the Annual Report. This will include the number, nature, and outcome of complaints and how we learned from complaints and applied that learning to improve our services.

Consultation and business intelligence

As a member of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme we are required to comply with the requirements of the [Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code](#) which was updated in April 2022.

The Policy has been developed through a working group comprising of customer, asset management and performance teams. Service centre and building safety teams have also been consulted.