



# Complaints and Compliments Policy

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 We are committed to providing a safe, respectful, and inclusive service for our customers and working in an open and accountable way that builds trust and respect. We strive to deliver excellent services but know that sometimes things go wrong.
- 1.2 We will listen to what has happened and aim to respond positively and effectively to complaints. We will acknowledge when things have gone wrong, offer a sincere apology, and work collaboratively to make things right and ensure we learn from these situations to improve our services.
- 1.3 We will have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments.
- 1.4 We will take shared responsibility for learning and improvement, avoiding blame and focusing on solutions.
- 1.5 We will deliver our complaints policy and act within the professional standards for engaging with complaints as set by the Housing Ombudsman.

## 2. Scope

- 2.1 We have adopted the Housing Ombudsman's definition of a complaint:  
***"A complaint shall be defined 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 resident or group of residents." (Code 1.2)***
- 2.2 Customers do not have to use the word 'complaint' for us to treat it as such. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative will still be handled in line with our Complaints Policy.
- 2.3 We will accept complaints referred to us within 12 months of the issue occurring or the customer becoming aware of the issue unless they are excluded on other

grounds (listed in 2.8 below). We will consider applying discretion to accept complaints made outside this time limit where there are good reasons to do so.

- 2.4 We understand that some individuals may feel safer remaining anonymous. While this may limit our ability to respond fully, we will still listen and take learning from the feedback .

## **2.5 Supported Accommodation for Looked after Children and Care Leavers**

- 2.5.1 Where we provide supported accommodation for young people who are 16–17-year-old care leavers, we will ensure that these residents are aware of their rights to access an independent advocate who can help them ensure their voice is heard, and that they are provided with the details of the Children's Commissioner's "Help at Hand" advice and assistance service.
- 2.5.2 We are committed to ensuring that all individuals feel safe to raise concerns about our services without fear of retaliation or negative consequences."

## **2.6 Service Requests**

- 2.6.1 We will adopt the Housing Ombudsman definition of a service request – *"a request from a resident to the landlord requiring action to be taken to put something right."*
- 2.6.2 The complaints process should not be used for, nor will a complaint be escalated through all stages, when the customer is making a first request for a service or making initial contact to report a fault.
- 2.6.3 Service requests will be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly.
- 2.6.4 A complaint will be raised if the customer expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing and we will not stop their efforts to address the service request if the customer complains.

## **2.7 Exclusions to the complaints process**

- 2.7.1 The complaints process will not be used when customers are:
- Requesting information about or a clearer explanation of our services, policies, or procedures.
  - Reporting neighbours or anti-social behaviour. A complaint about the way in which we responded to an ASB issue should be dealt with as a complaint.
  - Making contact about decisions taken or services provided by other organisations, over which we have no control.
  - Non-residents as they are unable to raise a complaint in line with the Housing Ombudsman Code.

2.7.2 If we decide not to accept a complaint, a detailed explanation will be provided to the customer setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman.

2.7.3 Circumstances where a complaint will also not be considered or escalated include:

- The issue giving rise to the complaint occurred over twelve months ago.
- Legal proceedings have started (this is defined as details of the claim, such as the Claim Form and Particulars of Claim, having been filed at court.
- Matters that have previously been considered under the complaints policy.
- The person raising the complaint is not a tenant or resident of Salvation Army Homes. We will listen to feedback from non-residents, but their issue will be responded to outside of this policy.

### **3. Principles**

3.1 We will cooperate and comply with the Housing Ombudsman, the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and any Ombudsman's Orders.

3.2 We will adopt a customer-focused process that makes it easy to make a complaint.

3.3 Our complaints policy is based on the following principles:

- a) We will promote our policy and procedures in leaflets and on our web site.
- b) We will accept a complaint in the format the customer prefers to make it from individual customers or groups of customers where they all have the same complaint.

3.4 We will respond to concerns with empathy, timeliness, fairness, and respect for each person's experience.

- a) Complaints will be recorded and acknowledged and our progress in dealing with them will be monitored.
- b) Customers are encouraged to involve a trusted person or advocate to support them throughout the process who can be present at any interview or meeting if this would give them greater confidence to raise their issue.
- c) We will keep customers informed of progress in resolving their complaint and the outcome of our investigation.
- d) During our investigation of a complaint, we will explain what we have found and the decision we are likely to make before we finally reach that decision. This is to give the customer the opportunity to correct any misinformation,

to provide further information, and explain their point of view before a decision is reached.

- e) Where any complaint is upheld, we will apologise and will seek to put the customer in the position they should have been in if the reason for the complaint had not occurred.
- f) We will ensure any remedy offered reflects the extent of all service failures, and the level of detriment caused to the customer as a result, including, as appropriate:
  - acknowledging where things have gone wrong
  - providing an explanation, assistance or reasons
  - apologising
  - taking action if there has been a delay
  - reconsidering or changing a decision
  - amending a record
  - providing a financial remedy\* (see compensation policy for guidance)
  - changing policies, procedures or practice(Where damage to belongings and personal injury has occurred, the customer should refer the matter to their insurance for support.)
- g) We will use complaints received and the action we take to put things right; to learn from any mistakes and we will set up ways in which to share learning amongst our staff with monthly performance updates to our Senior Management Team to identify ways to improve our systems and services.
- h) We will publish information on our website about performance and in our customer newsletter to customers and the Ombudsman about our performance against standards and targets in handling complaints.
- i) Staff likely to be involved in handling complaints will receive appropriate training in customer service and complaints handling.

### 3.5 Reasonable adjustments:

3.5.1 We will proactively offer reasonable adjustments to ensure everyone can access our complaints process in a way that feels safe and accessible to them.

3.5.2 Examples of the reasonable adjustments we will make are:

- Using the customer's communication preference throughout the duration of the complaint.
- We will not request a complaint to be made in writing where this presents a barrier or disadvantage to the customer due to their disability or additional needs.
- Extension of any time limits (where it is lawful to do so.)
- Provide information in alternative formats e.g. Braille, large print or on coloured paper.

## 4. Policy Statement

- 4.1 This policy statement is an important declaration to our customers that we are open to receive complaints about our service. It sets out how we will investigate complaints and resolve things promptly, fairly and politely, saying sorry when we've got things wrong.

### 4.2 Complaints Stages

4.2.1 We will offer a clear, supportive two-stage process for resolving concerns, ensuring individuals feel heard and respected at every step and clearly signpost the customer to the next stage, including to the Ombudsman, should they not be satisfied with the outcome.

4.2.2 We will endeavour to resolve complaints as quickly as possible, but our maximum timescales for response to complaints are:

- **5 working days** – acknowledge receipt of a complaint.
- **10 working days from complaints acknowledgement** – communicate a stage one decision to the customer.
- **20 working days from complaints acknowledgement** – communicate a stage two decision to the customer.

4.2.3 If unavoidable circumstances mean, we cannot keep to these timescales we will contact the customer as soon as possible within the timescale to agree an extension with the customer. The extension for both stages will be in accordance with the Complaints Handling Code.

4.2.4 Stage One - any extension will be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) will be clearly explained to the customer.

4.2.5 Stage Two - any extension will be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) will be clearly explained to the customer.

4.2.6 If we cannot reach an agreement over an extension period, we will provide the Housing Ombudsman's contact details so the customer can challenge our plan for responding and/or the proposed timeliness of our response.

### 4.3 Complaint Response

4.3.1 A complaint response will be provided to the customer when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions must still be tracked and actioned promptly with appropriate updates provided to the customer.

#### 4.4 Agency Managed Services

- 4.4.1 We will require our AMS to operate a policy in line with the two stage Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.
- 4.4.2 Our Agency Managed Services (AMS) will investigate and respond to complaints about the service they provide.
- 4.4.3 We will monitor complaints responded to by our AMS.
- 4.4.4 We will investigate complaints that fall within our landlord responsibility within our complaints process.

#### 4.5 Third Party Complaints

- 4.5.1 When a complaint response is handled by a third party, e.g. a contractor, it will form part of our complaint process, and we will not expect our customers to go through two complaints processes.

#### 4.6 Habitual complaints

- 4.6.1 We recognise that repeated complaints may reflect unresolved trauma, unmet needs, or a lack of trust. We will approach these situations with compassion and seek to understand the underlying concerns as people may act out of character in times of trouble or distress. There may have been upsetting or distressing circumstances leading up to a complaint. We do not view behaviour as unacceptable just because someone is forceful or determined. In fact, we acknowledge that being persistent can be a positive advantage when pursuing a complaint.
- 4.6.2 We also recognise that some customers might complain on several occasions because of:
  - repeated poor experience (justified).
  - high expectations.
  - belief it's the right approach to resolving dissatisfactionWe will continue to respond to these complaints in line with our policy.
- 4.6.3 Complainants (and/or anyone acting on their behalf) may be deemed to be habitual complainants where they meet two or more of the following criteria:
  - They persist in pursuing a complaint where our complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and exhausted and/or the Ombudsman has not upheld the complaint.
  - They change the substance of a complaint or continually raise new issues or seek to prolong contact by continually raising further concerns or questions upon receipt of a response whilst the complaint is being addressed. (Care will be taken not to discard new issues which are significantly different from the original complaint. These might need to be addressed as separate complaints.)

- They are unwilling to accept documented evidence of action taken as being factual; deny receipt of an adequate response in spite of correspondence specifically answering their questions; do not accept that facts can sometimes be difficult to verify when a long period of time has elapsed; persistent refusal to accept a decision made or accept explanations; and continuing to pursue a case without presenting any new information.
- They do not clearly identify the precise issues which they wish to be investigated, despite every effort of staff to help them specify their concerns, and/or where the concerns identified are not within our remit to investigate.
- They display unreasonable demands or expectations and fail to accept that these may be unreasonable (e.g. insist on responses to complaints or enquiries being provided more urgently than is reasonable).

4.6.4 Any habitual or vexatious complaint will be referred to a senior manager (in line with stage 2 of our process for a final reply.)

#### 4.7 Compliments

- 4.7.1 We aim to provide the best possible service and are happy to receive and record compliments so that we can understand the quality of service our customers want.
- 4.7.2 Knowing about a service that is well-received and has been offered by one team or one member of staff can help us to improve across the whole of our business.
- 4.7.3 We welcome all forms of positive feedback, recognising that expressions of appreciation can be meaningful and healing for both staff and residents.
- 4.7.4 We will record compliments on a central register. The person receiving the compliment at the time it is made will record it and ensure it is passed to the appropriate team manager.
- 4.7.5 Compliments will be discussed as a standard agenda item at team meetings, to identify opportunities for improvement generally.
- 4.7.6 Our Senior Management Team and Board will receive periodic reports on compliments received, the nature of them and their outcomes. This information will be used to improve services and as a learning tool for the organisation.
- 4.7.7 A summary of compliments and changes made as a result will be published each year in our annual report to residents.
- 4.7.8 Compliments may also be featured from time to time on notice boards, at meetings with residents' associations and in newsletters. The name of the customer making the compliment will only be published with their consent.

## 5. Data Protection and Equality Impact

In developing this policy, we have carried out assessments to ensure that we have considered:

- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Privacy and Data Protection

To request a copy of these full assessments, please contact the Business Assurance Team at [business.assurance@salvationarmyhomes.org.uk](mailto:business.assurance@salvationarmyhomes.org.uk).

Complaints related to data protection will be responded to in accordance with the Data Protection Complaints Procedure which is available on the website.

## 6. Further information

If you have any questions regarding this policy, please contact your line manager or the Business Assurance Team at [business.assurance@salvationarmyhomes.org.uk](mailto:business.assurance@salvationarmyhomes.org.uk), who will direct your query to the relevant Policy owner.

## Legislative and Regulatory Framework

The following legislation, regulatory standards and documents can be relied upon to inform this policy.

Legal Framework	Regulatory Standard	Other documents
The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023	Transparency, Influence and Accountability	Housing Ombudsman Service Complaint Handling Code April 2024
		Compensation Policy

## Document History Log

Lead Reviewer	Date			Version	Approval	
	Created:	Revised:	Expiry		By	Date
BAM	CHC 2024 Review		June 2027	2.4	EMT	10/06/24
HoH&CS	Trauma informed language review Minor change to 2.7.3 / 3.4(h)	Dec 2025	June 2027	2.5	HoH&CS	Dec 2025

## Equality Impact Assessment Summary

Protected characteristic	Impact (Positive, negative, neutral)	Protected characteristic	Impact (Positive, negative, neutral)
Age	Neutral	Disability	Neutral
Sex	Neutral	Race	Neutral
Religion of belief	Neutral	Sexual orientation	Neutral
Gender reassignment	Neutral	Pregnancy / maternity	Neutral
Marriage / civil partnership	Neutral		