

Complaints

Policy

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Responsible Executive:	Michael Donaldson, Interim Director of Housing		
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Related Policies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Compensation & Reimbursement Policy 2) Dealing with Vexatious Residents 		
Appendices			

1. Introduction

- a. Housing for Women (H4W) is committed to providing excellent services to our residents and to being open and honest when things go wrong so that we can fix them, learn from our mistakes, and improve the way we work.
- b. We can only put things right if we know about them, so we encourage our customers and those directly impacted by our services/businesses (or their advocates) to let us know when things go wrong.

2. Purpose

- a. This policy sets out our approach to handling customer complaints. We aim to make the process simple and clear and to deal with complaints openly, fairly, in a timely fashion and in line with the Housing Ombudsman's guidance, particularly its Complaints Handling Code.

3. Scope

What the Complaint Policy Covers :-

- a. complaints received from our customers, service users, or third parties complaining on their behalf ("advocates").
- b. For the purposes of this policy, a complaint is defined as *an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action by Housing for Women, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.*
- c. We will treat any communication from a relevant party that falls within this definition as a complaint, whether or not the complainant describes their communication as a "complaint".
- d. You may want to complain because you believe that we have:-
 - i. failed to follow our own stated process
 - ii. failed to follow our stated policy
 - iii. significantly or repeatedly failed to provide a service that it is supposed to provide
 - iv. repeated or regularly failed to respond to you; or
 - v. failed to do something that we have said we would do.

The above list is not intended to be exhaustive.

The policy is not designed to cover

- A matter that has already been heard by a Court or tribunal
- Complaints that involve insurance claims against H4W (there may be some aspects that do fall within this policy such as an allegation that H4W delayed in sending information about how to make an insurance claim)
- Serious complaints about a H4W member of staff that would more properly be dealt with through our disciplinary code, staff management or performance procedures).
- Allegations of fraud or corruption that would more properly be dealt with under the Housing for Women's anti-fraud or whistleblowing procedures
- Complaints that are more appropriately dealt with under different policies. For example , complaints about neighbours or data breaches.
- complaints about H4W's approved policies

On occasion we may have to conclude that we are unable to or shall not investigate a complaint. In these circumstances we shall write to you explaining our decision and include alternative options, including approaching the Housing Ombudsman.

4. Making a complaint

How to contact us:

A copy of our complaints policy is available on our website (<https://hfw.org.uk/contact-us/complaints-compliments/>).

You (or your advocate) can register a complaint or a complement

- by emailing us as complaints@hfw.co.uk
- telephoning us on 0207 501 6120 (between 10am – 4pm)
- writing to us at:

Housing for Women Sixth Floor
Blue Star House
234 – 244 Stockwell Road
SW9 9SP

Other channels for lodging complaints are currently being reviewed and the outcome will be communicated to residents.

The use of advocates

Complainants may ask another person, known as an advocate, to act on their behalf in bringing their complaint to Housing for Women's attention. The advocate may be a friend, relative or representative from an external organisation such as the Citizens Advice Bureau.

When contacting Housing for Women, the advocate must substantiate that they have your written permission to raise a complaint on your behalf to meet data protection requirements unless they are an MP or councillor. (With regard to an enquiry from an MP or councillor, there may be some circumstances where it is necessary to contact you to obtain consent to process your sensitive personal data.)

Anonymous complaints

Anonymous complaints will be considered on a case-by-case basis depending upon the information provided and consequently may not be investigated under Housing for Women's Complaints policy. Such complaints will be passed to the relevant manager responsible for the day-to-day service for investigation or dealt with under Housing for Women's Whistleblowing procedure as appropriate.

5. Our complaints process

- a. We shall consider your complaint carefully, take account of your expectations and desired outcomes and deal with it on its merits.
- b. We shall keep you informed while we are considering your complaint throughout and seek a suitable resolution.
- c. We shall respond to your complaint in writing and/or, use your preferred method of contact where possible.
- d. We can provide written responses in a preferred form or language upon request, but this could lead to delays in you receiving the response.
- e. Our process has two stages. However, before or at any stage of your complaint you can approach the Housing Ombudsman for independent advice. You can also contact the Housing Ombudsman for a further investigation if, after you have exhausted our process, you remain dissatisfied.

Stages of complaint

Stage 1

- We shall acknowledge your complaint within two working days and provide a formal response within 10 working days. This timescale will apply if the complaint is considered to be outside the scope of the policy.
- If necessary, we shall contact you to obtain further details and clarify your expectations and desired outcomes. Contact might also be necessary if aspects of the complaint are likely to take longer than 10 days to complete satisfactorily. If this occurs, we shall contact you to explain the delay and mutually agree a realistic timetable, which should not exceed a further 10 days. Only in exceptional circumstances would a further extension of this limit of 20 days (10 + 10) be permitted.
- We shall respond to your complaint as soon as we have an answer and will include any outstanding actions in our response. We shall monitor the completion of these actions and provide you with updates.

Stage 2

- If, having received our response you believe that we have not dealt with your complaint satisfactorily, then you may ask us to escalate your complaint to Stage 2. Requests for escalation to stage 2 should ideally be made within 20 working days of the Stage 1 decision having been received. The case will be acknowledged in two working days of receipt and allocated to the initial responder's manager for separate review
- It may be necessary to contact you to discuss your dissatisfaction with the Stage 1 outcome and we may possibly request additional information to help us in our assessment.
- We will reply to you substantively within 20 working days. If we do need to agree a new timescale with you, this will not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason.
- While we place an emphasis on trying to reach a resolution if a mutually agreed resolution cannot be reached you have the right to approach the Housing Ombudsman. We will make this and other information clear to you when the Stage 2 decision is sent to you.
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Throughout our complaints process, we shall aim to:

- Listen to your concerns and understand the impact that a service failure has had upon you
- Take account of any known vulnerabilities that may have a bearing on our decisions.
- If you are dissatisfied with the outcome at either stage of the process, where possible we will make contact to ensure that we have fully understood your dissatisfaction and that you have likewise understood our response.
- Let you know when we have a responsibility to other residents' right to privacy and cannot disclose information.
- If appropriate, explain in detail why this matter is not suitable for the complaints process, or any stage of the complaints process or why we cannot or shall not accept a complaint
- Tell you the name of the staff member or team dealing with the complaint
- Advise that the complaint is closed, where this is the case.
- We will also ensure that residents have fair and effective ways of providing feedback about our services
- Acknowledge when things go wrong, apologise, and do our best to fix them in a timely way
- Pay a financial remedy, if applicable.

6. Learning From our Mistakes

- We are committed to learning from complaints and using case histories to improve services on an ongoing basis
- We shall seek resident feedback on our complaints handling and highlight to staff and residents' practical improvements resulting from what we have learned from residents' experiences
- We shall provide complaint performance information to Board and residents

7. The Housing Ombudsman Service

The Housing Ombudsman Service resolves disputes involving the tenants and leaseholders of social landlords and its voluntary members (private landlords and letting agents). The Housing Ombudsman Service is free of charge and encourages the early resolution of complaints through its dispute resolution principles and helps individuals and organisations to learn from best practice across the housing sector. Again, the Housing Ombudsman Service will refer you back to Housing for Women if your complaint has not completed the internal complaints process, although there may be exceptions to this.

The Housing Ombudsman Service can be contacted:

- In writing to: Housing Ombudsman Service
Exchange Tower
Harbour Exchange Square
London
E14 9GE

- By telephone on 0300 111 3000 - lines are open Monday to Friday from 9.15am to 5.15pm (except public holidays)
- Fax: 020 7831 1942
- Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

You can find more information about the Housing Ombudsman by visiting its website at www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk